

Fellowship sows the seeds of opportunity

Warren Page on shared experiences, expertise and respect

One reason why many ACIAR projects exceed people's expectations is the dedication of researchers, and this has been particularly noticeable in ACIAR projects involving conservation tillage and raised beds in India and Pakistan. Dr Harinder Singh Sidhu, a research engineer at India's Punjab Agricultural University (PAU), is a passionate developer of the Happy Seeder – a tractor that allows wheat to be sown directly into rice stubble.

Developed by Dr Sidhu and his PAU team during an earlier project examining stubble management machinery for direct-drill farming systems, the seeder is now being manufactured by an Indian machinery company.

Before the seeder was developed, straw left over from paddy rice farming had to be removed. This was done either by hand, by ploughing or by burning.

The seeder combines the attributes of a forage harvester, cutting and lifting the straw while a drill 'plants' the seed. Straw is then sprayed out the back to cover the seedbed.

Not content with this successful innovation, Dr Sidhu and his team have now developed a Combo Happy Seeder. This new model improves the establishment of wheat in the soil and produces a more even spread of straw mulch.

The Combo Happy Seeder is now being tested throughout India. The seeder tractor is also beginning to gain acceptance in Pakistan.

In 2003, Dr Sidhu and Dr S.S. Dhillon, also from PAU, travelled to Pakistan to share their experiences of stubble management and also bed planting technology. The Pakistan Agricultural Research Council hosted the visit.

Dr Sidhu also travelled to Australia in 2005 under an ACIAR John Dillon Fellowship. Fellows are selected on a range of criteria – involvement in a recent or current ACIAR project, coming from a developing country, and having demonstrated potential as a future research manager and leader.

By supporting a six-week visit to Australia, the Fellowship provides an opportunity for international researchers to see how agricultural research organisations operate in Australia; their management techniques and processes that can be applied in home organisations.



Dr Sidhu with a Happy Seeder, to be towed by a tractor.

Dr Sidhu says his visit to Australia provided a unique career-development opportunity: "I got the chance to see and understand the workings of various Australian institutions.

"It was great training, and I can now see my technical scientific inner-self in a managerial role very clearly. The Fellowship was a very effective tool to enhance my capabilities in the area of research and management."

For Dr Sidhu, the Fellowship also provided the opportunity to meet colleagues from other developing countries and discuss common problems and opportunities.

"This Fellowship gave me an opportunity to meet, know and live with people of different countries, cultures and different language, which enabled me to see globalisation in a different context."

Dr Sidhu says another highlight was meeting Australia's Foreign Minister, Mr Alexander Downer. The Minister presented Dr Sidhu, and the other John Dillon Fellows, with a plaque recognising the Fellowship, at Parliament House in Canberra.

Dr Sidhu receives the John Dillon Fellowship plaque from Mr Alexander Downer.

