Promotion of SRI Method through CNR Trainees

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The System of Rice Intensification (SRI)[1] method is becoming a popular technique in growing rice under irrigated and rain-fed conditions in many countries. Reduced use of seedlings, remarkable plant and root growth, profuse tillering from a single seedling, and finally a bumper harvest for the farmers are the important features of this method. In Bhutan, following a successful SRI testing in the last few years, both at farmer's field and research centres, the method seems to be making steady progress. Further trials on SRI are being tried by researchers involving farmers, extension agents and agriculture trainees. As more farmers, trainees and extension agents are being trained on this method, it is expected that the marginal farmers in Bhutan may further benefit from this method by substantially increasing their crop yield as well as saving seeds, water and other resources.

Figure 1: Trainees transplanting young single seedlings wide spaced

In the last two years, agricultural trainees of the College of Natural Resources (CNR), (erstwhile Natural Resources Training Institute), were trained on growing rice using the SRI method[2] in the CNR agricultural field, consisting of 18 terraces (Figure 1-6). About two third of these terraces were left fallow for the last few years due to the shortage of irrigation water. Without enough water to irrigate the field, paddy cultivation using traditional methods is not practical. Therefore, the SRI method was seen as a solution to this problem.

The trainees were provided with theoretical knowledge prior to putting SRI into practice. These trainees, after graduation, will be working as extension agents under the Ministry of Agriculture. They would be instrumental in creating awareness and disseminating knowledge and proven technologies to the farmers. Given the prevalence of small-scale marginal farms in the country, awareness and promotion of SRI methods has a high relevance with

Figure 2: Trainees transplanting young seedlings (one seedling per hill)

Figure 3: Early weeding using a rotary weeder

Figure 4: FYM application promotes microbial activity as indicated by the bubbles

regards to domestic food security due to an increase in production per unit area. Promotion of SRI technique by extension agents in the country could contribute significantly to rice production thereby ensuring the household food security and providing the farmers with the opportunity to supplement their income through the sale of excess product.

Figure 5: High tiller count per hill/seedling

Figure6: Trainees undertaking a crop cut, method for random data collection