

Agriculture goes high tech with digital video



videotape, and can be converted to any television format. In both countries, the focus was to initially train a core group in editing and shooting techniques.

The project began in Jamaica in collaboration with the government-supervised Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA), in June 1999, as a strategy for small farmers to increase competitiveness. Jamaica's hilly terrain tends to block radio signals; video was the option of choice because of the high availability of television sets and video players. Video production is at existing national broadcast facilities in Kingston, where one person was initially trained. Another facility is slated for Montego Bay. Despite the need to accommodate to the requirements of Jamaica's extension system, videos are produced fairly regularly and another four officers are in training.

Begun in November 1999 with five women, Ghana's video project is run through the Women in Food and Agricultural Development (WIFAD) unit, the Ministry of Food and Agriculture's (MOFA) extension service. High farmer illiteracy and the lack of broadcasts catering to women farmers, in spite of the traditional predominance of women in food production, prompted the COL initiative. Video production is in an area just north of Accra in the town of Koforidua. Several timely local-content videos have been produced, although some technical aspects of video production continue to pose challenges.

Project feedback is planned from farmers as well as from the extension officers. The project was highlighted at the Caribbean



TEL-isphere 99 conference on technology-based education in November 1999, and Grenada, Tobago and the Commonwealth of Dominica have expressed interest. Soon, the video camera-wielding extension officer may become a regular feature of the Caribbean farming landscape.

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IT ISN'T JUST ANOTHER DAY in the cacao plantations of the Ashanti region in Ghana. The women – and many of the small-crop farmers in this African country are women – are out in the fields, but one of them has a video camera. Absorbed, her eye to the lens, her task is just as vital to farming as the other women's.

She's an extension officer, a field operative of the country's agricultural regional offices. She gives timely, region-specific support to farmers through in-person seminars, and to a limited extent through other media like print or radio. Chronic understaffing of extension offices doesn't make the job easy. Enter The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and its Commonwealth of Learning Media Empowerment (COLME) programme, with a pilot project that uses digital technology to produce farm instructional videos.

COLME finds technology-based solutions to needs in the Commonwealth community, in collaboration with in-country agencies. Based on a COLME model, the project trains agricultural extension officers in Ghana and Jamaica to shoot and edit videos that address regional concerns. The tapes then make the rounds with the extension officers, or are broadcast nationally.

The non-linear "DV" editing suite in use is a computer about the size of an average video player. The digital camera footage is shot and then brought into the editing programme using video and audio capturing technology. The unit plugs into a television set; all editing is done on-screen. The broadcast-quality product is transferred to

