**Indiagriline - The AgriPortal Case Study**

**Background and Context**
The bane of Indian Agriculture is not lack of technology, R&D efforts or credit availability. It is inadequacy and inefficiencies in the dissemination of relevant information to the farming community - including but not limited to the right cultivation practices, correct post-harvesting techniques, and up-to-date information on market prices of commodities. The farmer is thus caught in the vicious cycle of sub-optimal use of farm inputs, higher cost of credit and lower price realizations on his produce leading to insignificant disposable incomes for him and his family.

The rural community today needs:

- Instant dissemination of market and commercial information.
- Constant education on the latest developments in agri-science and post-harvest technology.
- Access to the right markets (for both the farm and the non-farm produce) through affordable credit and transportation solutions.

While the agriculture universities, research stations, Department of Agriculture and other agencies have developed several solutions and technologies for the farming community, the dissemination of the same has not been possible on a large scale because of the country's size. The Internet, however, is a tool that can be leveraged to reach out to a much wider base literally at the click of a mouse.

EID Parry (I) Ltd. is closely linked to the farming community through its Sugar Division (100,000 registered sugarcane growers) and its Farm Inputs Division (about 3,000,000 end-users). The Company operates in 3 industry segment: 1) Producing and selling farm inputs such as fertilizers, pesticides, and seeds, which are sold primarily in the interior of south and east India; 2) Producing and selling sugar from four factories in Tamil Nadu; and 3) Producing and selling Sanitaryware across the country. The company is now more than 212 years old and has been serving rural areas for over 160 years.

**Project Description**
The Agri Portal, [www.indiagriline.com](http://www.indiagriline.com), has been designed to address the specific needs of the rural farming community and is an attempt to catalyse e-commerce in agricultural and non-farm products by offering a network of partnerships in the areas of Content, Connectivity and Commerce. This content has been developed by using in-house expertise (EID Parry's Sugar and Farm Inputs Division and Corporate R&D Lab) and working with the TN Agriculture University and its Research Stations, TN University for Veterinary and Animal Sciences, National Horticulture Board, AMM Foundation, Murugappa Chettiar Research Center, other players in agriculture related media and publishing houses. The content is in the local language (Tamil) for ease of use. There is also a Web-based application for the registered sugarcane growers of EID Parry to access and maintain their transaction records with the Company. An application for the dealer channel and the sales force of the Company is also under development.

To make the experience richer and navigation easier, the site is equipped with mouse-overs and voice-overs and has been designed with touchscreen panels in conjunction with an offline web-rom to make downloads faster.

Several other utilities such as a farming calculator and farming calendar, as well as farm advisory services, are also under various stages of development and will soon be launched on the portal. Discussions with commerce and logistics players are also taking place to help the farmers and users reach the right markets with their produce.

**Connectivity**
Several Internet Access technologies and on-going projects were examined with respect to cost, reliability and presence in rural India. It was found that an indigenously developed technology by Prof Ashok Jhunjhunwala of IIT-Madras was ideally suited to serve our need to provide reliable and low-cost connectivity. This CorDECT Wireless in Local Loop technology,
patented by IIT Madras, can provide 35/70 kbps simultaneous Internet and telephony within areas of about 25-30 km radius.

**Access Points**

Rural India's small entrepreneurs, who have driven the rapid growth of Telephony and Cable TV industry since the '80s, the growing presence of Self Help Groups empowering rural women, and the increasing awareness of the employment potential of the software industry have resulted in a new cadre of Internet Kiosk owner-operators otherwise known as cybercafes. These cybercafes have the potential of becoming the business hub of villages (as the Parrys Corner in Madras did over the past 200 years). The first 16 Internet Kiosks ("Parrys Corners") have been set up using the franchisee scheme. These owner/operators have been trained to use PCs and surf the Portal and the Net and assist users coming to the kiosks. About 150 farmers have been trained on the use of the Net and the portal and especially the special application built for them to view their transaction record with the Company.

**Scaling Up**

Following the pilot at Nellikuppam, Parry plans to roll out another similar initiative in Tiruvallur district in Tamil Nadu. The Nellikuppam model will be replicated in 3 other Sugar factory areas (of EID Parry) in Tamil Nadu soon. These would help to establish a scalable model that would allow the expansion across southern India.

**Obstacles**

The biggest obstacle confronting EID Parry is dealing with the challenge of teaching a group of farmers unaccustomed to using technology to do so. However, the website has been designed and developed with both the literacy and comfort levels of the user community in mind. Continuous efforts are being made to test every aspect of the site with the users and the feedback is being incorporated into the site periodically.

**For more Information Contact:**

K. Raghunandan  
Murugappa Group  
DARE House  
Chennai  
Email: raghunandank@murugappa.co.in