

## THE PAIN AND THE OLD LADY WHO ONCE HAD A PAIN

A STORY ON THE NEED FOR SYSTEMATIC EXPERIMENTATION

### INTENDED LEARNING EFFECT

*Trainees realise that you learn most from an experiment if you study only one innovation at a time. Various new ideas have to be tried out separately.*

### CONTEXT OF THIS MODULE

In Central America the Farmer-to-Farmer Movement, or Campesino a Campesino (CaC), has been promoting sustainable agricultural practices for over 20 years. With help from NGOs and farmer organisations, a growing body of farmer "promotores" have used their fields and community "classrooms" to develop and spread technologies and methodologies to other farmers. Over the years these promotores and their supporters have developed a rich collection of practical training techniques to be used by other farmer promotores in training farmers in sustainable agriculture and farmer-led experimentation and extension. The information centre SIMAS in Nicaragua

has recently compiled many of these into a "basket" of very accessible training materials. These include a textbook, a video and various tools for use in trainings.

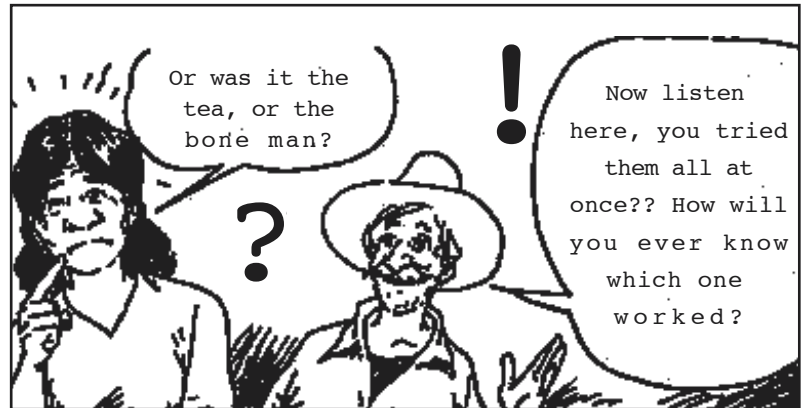
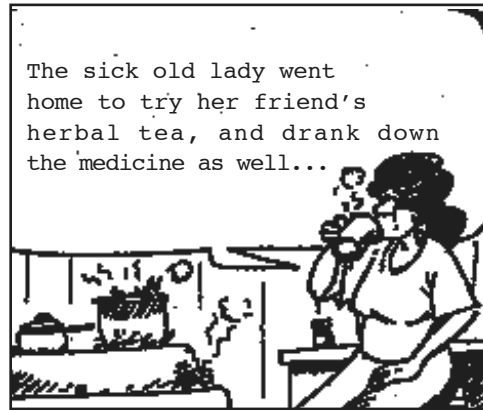
In the CaC experience it is not uncommon to find several treatments tested on the same plot without a control plot. This is partly because new technology is often "packaged", several variables are combined which does not allow farmers to assess which innovation in the package is the most significant, nor which is the limiting factor. The module below was developed to address this issue. It can be used for training of farmer-trainers as well as field staff of extension agencies and NGOs.

### LEARNING ARRANGEMENTS

The story of "The lady who once had a pain" from the comic strip is presented in a creative way.

What happens when we try several cures at the same time?  
If we do get better, can we tell which one worked?





Trainees are challenged to reflect on the story in two steps. First they look at the actual case. The second step is to "translate" the results of this reflection to their work in experimenting with agricultural innovations. Possible lead questions are given in the box. This reflection usually takes place in a plenary discussion but can be prepared in some form of small group work.

A researcher who tries out a new fertiliser along with some new seed planted using a new spacing in his plot will not be able to compare the results with the normal plot. One must always compare one innovation at a time. By preparing several small plots, one can compare the outcome of each innovation relative to the normal plot separately.

### SUGGESTED VARIATIONS FOR THIS MODULE

This story can easily be turned into a play. It is advisable to do so after becoming familiarised with the area and once options and innovations worth testing have been determined, just prior to beginning the design of experiments. Of course details of the story can be adapted to fit local practices.

This module was developed by farmer promoters working within the context of the Campesino a Campesino movement in Central America. Together with a great number of other very practical field-tested training ideas it has

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

*Why was the old lady unable to respond to the old man's question?  
Which of the cures worked?  
How can we know? why?*

*By following several cures jointly, we cannot tell whether the old lady was cured by one, by a combination of more than one, or by all of them. One would have to try the cures separately on three people with the same pain, or at three different times on the same person with the same pain.*

*What happens when we try out several experiments on the same plot at the same time?  
If we do well, or even if we do not, how can we determine what caused it?*

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