1. Indian farmers need reliable agri information and alternate marketing channels:
   a) 94% of farmers in India depend upon ‘fellow farmers’ as the preferred source of information, followed by 10% on agri retailers, 4% of TV/Radio and only 3% on agri-extension officers.[1]
   - Information provided by extension services are perceived to be either biased (e.g. agri marketing companies) or less actionable due to lack of consistency, accuracy and personalization (e.g. some public sector programs).
   - This is a bottleneck for adoption of modern agri-practices; hence crop yields in India are still just 30% to 60% of the best sustainable crop yields achievable in the farms of developed as well as other developing countries.[2]
   b) Small and marginal farmers suffer due to small tradable quantities and socio-economic conditions, which force them to deal with multiple layers of middlemen.
   - Example- 85% of wheat and 75% of oil seeds in UP, 70% of oil seeds and 35% of cotton in Punjab, and 90% of jute in WB is sold by farmers in village itself. These middlemen take away about 47% of the price of rice, 52% of the price of groundnut and 60% of the price of potatoes.[3]. On average Indian farmers realize only 20% to 25% of the value paid for by end consumers, while farmers in developed countries get 40% to 45% of the final value.
   - India’s post-harvest losses exceed 25% every year, impacting India’s food security and food inflation.[4]

While physical infrastructure (e.g. storage, logistics), regulatory (e.g. APMC act, agri input/marketing licenses) and socio-economic (e.g. financial inclusion, aggregation) issues need to be addressed, a professionally managed ICT platform can bring the various pieces of agri value chain together and act as the catalysts for agri growth. These solutions must be designed with ‘mobile-first’ approach to maximize on-ground adoption and impact.

2. Digital India envisions empowering citizens with e-access to government and related livelihood services:
   a) The project has 3 core components - digital infrastructure, digital services and digital literacy
   b) Mobile phone is the preferred delivery medium under Digital India with focus on mGovernance and mServices
   c) Out of the 7 components covered under mServices, mAgriculture and mGramBazar directly impact agri extension

3. Comprehensive mobile based agri value chain solutions enhance farmer prosperity:
   Since 2007, RML’s UNDP and NABARD Rural Innovations award winning agri information service (market prices, weather forecasts, crop advisory and agri news) in 9 Indian languages has reached 1.4 million registered farmers in 50,000+ villages across 17 states of India. RML covers 450+ crop varieties and 1300+ agri market in India. More than 7 million farmers have benefited from RML service through sharing of information.[5]

   In 2014, RML launched agri e-commerce services - Krishidoot, in partnership with Small Farmers Agri Business Consortium (Ministry of Agri, Govt of India) connecting 10,000+ Farmer Interest Groups associated with 300+ Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) and 8,000+ agri market players (traders, processors, exporters, banks etc).

   While doing the above, an end-to-end ICT led agri platform has been created:
   a) Pan-India, telco and handset neutral agri information service delivered through sms, voice and mobile app
   b) 10,000+ information sources managed by team of 300+ on-ground agri market reporters and state / national level agri experts with PhDs and public/private sector agri industry experience
   c) Dedicated agri call center with 90+ team members speaking 9 languages
   d) Custom designed CRM and ERP solutions for Indian farmers
   e) Agri e-commerce platform with agri produce aggregation and demand/supply matching capability; supported by technologically enabled on-ground agri marketing team.

   RML has also partnered with government agencies like - SFAC (Ministry of Agri, Govt of India), Gujarat State Watershed Management Agency, various state agri departments, Dept. of Telecom, leading banks (SBI, ICICI, PNB, Axis, various RRBs etc), and private sector agri input/marketing companies to scale on-ground impact.

4. This comprehensive, mobile led farmer centric approach has resulted in quantifiable benefits to farmers:
   a) 5% to 25% increase in income of farmers, 9% higher price benefit observed among younger farmers[6]
   b) 12% reduction in price dispersion across markets due to availability of RML service[7]
   c) 80% farmers changed their information sourcing behaviour after using RML[1]
   d) Enabled Rs130 Crore of transactions across 12 states and 54 crops till December 2014 through Krishidoot, adding nearly Rs15 Crore per week in 2014 Kharif harvest season; Conducted transactions with 64 FPOs out of which 60 transacted more than once to sell 10% to 20% of their total produce via RML – Krishidoot (www.krishidoot.in).

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### 5. Public – Private partnerships involving proven ICT led agri initiatives will benefit Indian farmers at scale:

a) The uptake of these solutions in the farm sector is significantly dependent on behavioral change at scale, which in turn requires a) end-to-end agri value chain solutions that address the pain points of farmers (instead of just pieces of the solution), and b) long-term effort for the new solutions to be adopted. For such solutions to be economically sustainable, specialized private sector organizations have a key role to play.

b) Delivery of agri extension services through such public private partnerships will ensure that even small and medium sized farmers will benefit from high quality agri information. E.g. agri commodity market prices provided through public sector initiative, are often either inaccurate or not updated, which negatively impacts farmers’ faith in ICT based agri extension services. However, at the same time, private sector players like RML have established an accurate and reliable market price capturing solution using pan-India ICT based on-ground infrastructure and stringent quality controls.

c) The opportunity to create value for the farmers is disproportionately bigger if the government focuses on creating a framework for private players to compete and offer best-in-class services to the farmers. However, if the government competes directly despite significant interest and investment by the private players already, unfortunately, it becomes a huge impediment to both the growth as well as the scale of impact.

Government should therefore use the expertise and consumer centric innovation of private players to deliver these solutions as there is already an interest from the private sector and there are proven private solutions already in the market.

### 6. This public-private partnership can lead us to significantly large and measurable results:

a) Efficient mobile based agri extension services for all the 120 million farming households by 2018
b) Price realization for farmers above current alternatives increased by 10%
c) Cost reduction for farming inputs versus current alternatives by 10%
d) Productivity increase of the Indian farming sector by another 10%.

By creating these solutions at scale will not only address the pain points of the farming community by leveraging technology, these will also help address national challenges of food inflation, resource optimization and ultimately inclusive growth.

### 7. Suggestions: Eligibility Criteria for private players

a) Business & Financial

- Turnover in access of Rs. 10 crore for the current financial year
- In business for over 5 years
- Paid up equity capital in access of Rs. 3 crore
- At least worked for one state / central government department and body on a commercial basis for a project

b) Technical and others:

- Created and managed agri information products across multiple platforms - Apps (across OS – Android, Java), SMS, Operator & handset
- Has in-house team of agri content professionals with proven experience in sourcing, processing and managing large quantities of agri information and data across multiple states
- Multi-lingual call centre support for farmers / rural consumers
- Agri / rural project management team for multi state execution and monitoring, evaluation of implementation
- Presence in over 10 states

### 7. Suggestions: Review and Audit for minimum quality standards

a) All the billing and invoices to be backed and supported by a CA Certificate
b) Independent certification by technical agency for all the resources deployed and infrastructure built for the project
c) Independent Impact assessment study can be carried out by institutions duly authorized by the government

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