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**EXTENSION MODELS WITH AN INNOVATION NETWORK APPROACH:
LESSONS LEARNED**

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Objective.

This paper aims to synthesize key lessons learned from the implementation of agricultural extension and agro-food innovation management models developed by CIESTAAM at the Universidad Autónoma Chapingo in Mexico. It focuses on understanding how innovation networks contribute to improved productivity, market articulation, and efficient use of public resources.

Method.

The analysis is based on accumulated empirical evidence from the design, implementation, and evaluation of the Innovation Management Agencies for Supplier Development (AGI-DP) model and complementary community-based approaches. These experiences combine strategic knowledge management, differentiated intervention strategies, and social network analysis to examine

learning processes, innovation adoption, and actor articulation across agricultural value chains.

Conclusions.

Results show that successful extension processes are grounded in results-oriented, network-based knowledge management. Innovation should be understood not as an isolated event but as an organized process that articulates actors, knowledge, and markets, generating measurable impacts on productivity, profitability, and public investment efficiency. Key lessons include the importance of clearly defining target populations, differentiating strategies according to farmer typologies and marketing channels, and promoting low-cost, high-impact innovations or good agricultural practices. Social network analysis demonstrates that learning and innovation adoption accelerate when “heterophilic” relationships are strengthened, connecting farmers to diverse and complementary sources of knowledge beyond their immediate circles.

Persistent challenges include institutional fragmentation, weak articulation between research, extension, and markets, excessive administrative burdens on extension agents, and limited measurement of network-level impacts. To address these challenges, it is recommended to strengthen specialized technical units, professionalize extension agents in innovation management, and promote communities of practice that foster trust, co-creation of knowledge, and collective learning. Ultimately, better integration of farmers and rural communities requires recognizing their agency, incorporating emerging digital tools, and conceiving extension as a network-based learning process, where outcomes depend fundamentally on the quality of relationships.

Palavras-chave: agricultural extension; innovation networks; knowledge management; social network analysis; communities of practice.