Bharat-VISTAAR vs Kisan Sarathi - Reaching the Unreached: Digital advisory platforms for Indian Farmers

Kamni P. Biam[1]*, Pampi Paul[1], Chikkathimme Gowda H R[1], N Uttam Singh`[1], Anjoo Yumnam[1], Aniruddha Roy[1], Arindam Nag[1] and Braj Pal Singh[1]

[1]*ICAR-Research Complex for North Eastern Hill Region, Umiam, Meghalaya, India*

Corresponding Author
Kamni P. Biam
Email: kamnipaia@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Digital advisory platforms are reshaping agricultural extension in India by bringing timely, location-specific information to farmers. This article compares two such government platforms. Kisan Sarathi, launched in 2021 by ICAR and the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, connects farmers with Krishi Vigyan Kendra scientists through calls, text and video for personalised expert advice in local languages. Bharat-VISTAAR, launched in February 2026 by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, uses artificial intelligence to combine AgriStack, ICAR Packages of Practices, IMD weather forecasts and pest surveillance alerts into hyperlocal advisories. Its voice-first design, toll-free helpline 155261 and voice assistant 'Bharati' extend access to feature-phone users and offer single-window information on markets and government schemes. The two platforms are complementary: Bharat-VISTAAR adds scale and automation, while Kisan Sarathi sustains the human expert support essential for reaching the unreached.

INTRODUCTION:

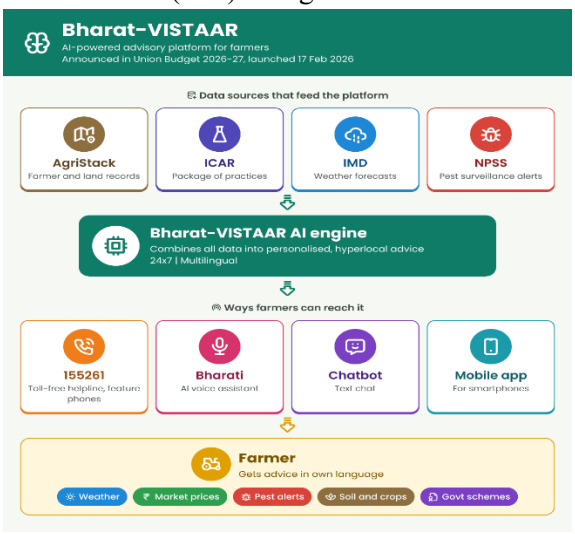
Bharat-VISTAAR (Virtually Integrated System to Access Agricultural Resources) and Kisan Sarathi are government digital platforms that give advice to farmers. However, they differ in when they were launched, which bodies run them and most importantly and how the advice is produced and delivered.

Bharat-VISTAAR

Bharat-VISTAAR is the newer and larger system. It was announced in the Union Budget 2026-27 and launched by Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on 17th February 2026 at the State Institute of Agricultural Management in Jaipur, Rajasthan (All India Radio News, 2026). Its nodal ministry is the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare.

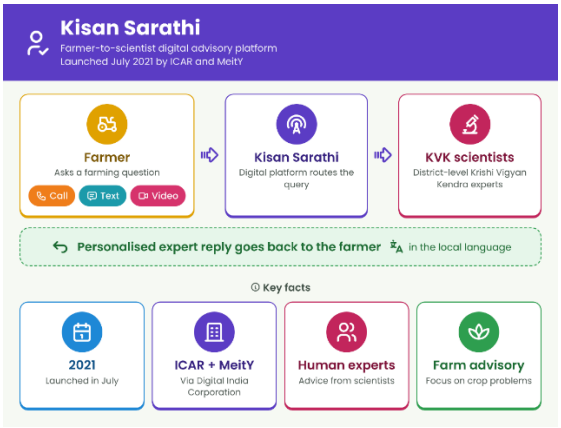
The platform's advice is generated mainly by artificial intelligence (AI). It integrates AgriStack, a federated database of farmer registries, geo-referenced land records and crop data with the Package of Practices prepared by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR). Its AI engine combines this information with real-time inputs such as weather data from the India Meteorological Department (IMD) and pest alerts from the National Pest Surveillance System (NPSS) to generate hyperlocal, personalised advice in local languages.

Bharat-VISTAAR is designed to be voice-first so that even farmers using basic feature phones can benefit simply by placing a call to the toll-free helpline **"155261".** It also offers a chatbot, a mobile application and an AI voice assistant named 'Bharati'. Beyond crop advice, it works as a single window for farmers providing information on weather forecasts, market prices, pest and disease alerts, soil health, crop management and at least ten major central government schemes. It is positioned as a core part of India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) for agriculture.



Kisan Sarathi

Kisan Sarathi is an older platform, launched in July 2021 jointly by ICAR and the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology through the Digital India Corporation (PIB, 2021). The word 'Sarathi' means guide or charioteer, reflecting its role in guiding farmers. Its central idea is to connect farmers directly with human experts. Farmers can raise questions through phone calls, text, audio or video, and receive personalised answers from scientists at the Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) in their district, in their local language (PIB, 2026). It functions mainly as an agricultural extension and expert-contact tool rather than a large data-integration system.



Difference between Kisan Sarathi and Bharat Vistaar

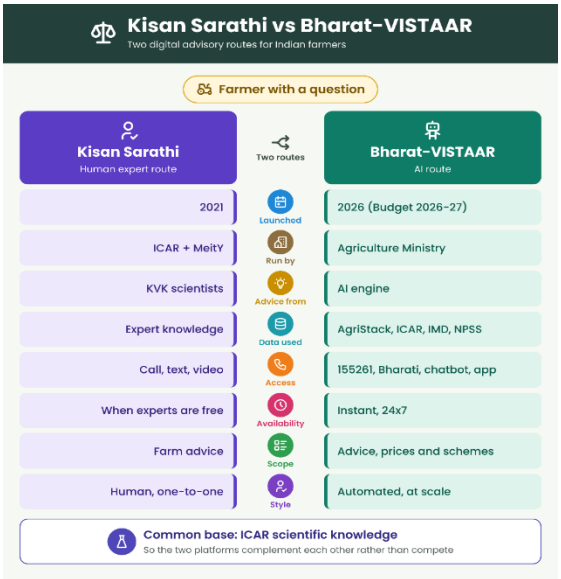


Table of differences

Basis	Bharat-VISTAAR	Kisan Sarathi
Full form	Virtually Integrated System to Access Agricultural Resources	Not an acronym; 'Sarathi' means guide or charioteer
Year of launch	2026 (announced in Union Budget 2026-27; launched 17 February 2026 in Jaipur)	2021 (launched July 2021)
Nodal / implementing body	Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare	ICAR with the Ministry of Electronics and IT (via Digital India Corporation)
Source of advice	AI engine that generates advisories from integrated data	Human experts, mainly scientists at Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs)
Data integration	AgriStack (farmer registry, land records, crop data), ICAR Package of Practices, IMD weather, National Pest Surveillance System, soil health cards	Relies on the knowledge of KVK and ICAR scientists; no large national data integration
Nature of platform	National Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) for agriculture	Farmer-scientist extension and query platform
Scope of services	Weather, market prices, pest and disease alerts, soil health, crop practices, and information on at least 10 major central schemes (single window)	Mainly crop and farm advisory, answers to farmers' specific problems
Mode of access	Voice-first; toll-free helpline 155261, chatbot, mobile app; works on feature phones; AI voice assistant 'Bharati'	Phone calls, text, audio and video queries to experts through the platform
Personalisation	Automated and hyperlocal, based on farmer and land data	Personal, based on the expert's assessment of the farmer's query
Availability	24x7 (AI-based)	Depends on availability of experts to respond
Languages	Multilingual; rolled out in Hindi and English first, planned expansion to many regional languages	Local languages, through district KVK experts

CONCLUSION

In simple terms, Kisan Sarathi can be seen as a 'call the expert' service, while Bharat-VISTAAR is an 'AI assistant with access to national farm data'. The two are complementary rather than competing: Bharat-

VISTAAR builds on the same ICAR scientific knowledge that KVK experts use, while adding scale, automation and single-window access to schemes and markets. The real impact of Bharat-VISTAAR will depend on bridging the rural digital divide, protecting farmers' data privacy and keeping strong last-mile human extension support, areas where platforms like Kisan Sarathi continue to play a role.

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