

07.04.2015

THE HINDU

Ginger cultivation is spreading from fields to residential areas



Confident of good returns, many people in Chikkamagaluru prefer cultivation of ginger to other crops. Its attraction has been such that a few in Chikkamagaluru town have converted residential plots into ginger fields, much to the agony of neighbours. As the crop demands elaborate chemical treatment, residents are worried about groundwater contamination.

In Jayanagar extension at Chikkamagaluru, one person is cultivating ginger on his 60 x 80 ft. residential site. In rural areas, people are converting paddy fields into ginger cultivation.

In many cases, land owners have given their land on lease for ginger cultivation.

“In recent years, paddy cultivation in Chikkamagaluru district has come down by 10,000 hectares of land. During interaction with farmers, I have found that many are opting to earn by leasing out their land to those who take up ginger cultivation. Many farmers have given their land on lease in the district,” said M.C. Seetha, Joint Director of Agriculture Department. This has driven the Horticulture Department to bring down the area under ginger cultivation.

T.R. Vedamurthy, Deputy Director of Horticulture Department, told *The Hindu* on Monday that his department had been spreading awareness against extensive cultivation of ginger. “We have noticed people going into ginger cultivation. But, I hope, farmers will give up this crop once they understand that it harms the land in the long term,” he said.

Farmers favour ginger because they are assured of reasonable returns. By sowing over 20 bags of ginger on an acre of land, they get approximately 200 bags within about seven to eight months.

Good revenue

Going by the present price in the market, farmers expect about Rs. 3 lakh from an acre under ginger cultivation as the price is about Rs. 1,500 a bag.

Residents of Jayanagar have complained to Chikkamagaluru City Municipal Corporation against ginger cultivation on residential sites. Madhusudan, environment engineer of CMC, told *The Hindu* that he had visited the area and instructed the land owners not to use chemicals.

“Many residents have filed petitions opposing ginger cultivation on residential sites,” he said.

Hortcorp leaves Idukki farmers in the lurch



Farmers of Kanthallur and Vattavada have been left in the lurch with Hortcorp failing to procure vegetables for the past four weeks at a time when prices have dipped considerably.

P.T. Mohandas, president of the Kanthallur Cool-season Vegetable Marketing Farmers’ Society, the agency that procures vegetables from the farmers for the Hortcorp, told *The Hindu* on Monday that most of the farmers had left the vegetables to rot in the farms as there was virtually no agency to procure them. The main crops decaying in the farms were cabbage, carrot, beans varieties, and garlic. He said it was not the low price that was worrying the farmers but the absence of an agency to

procure the vegetables, as businessmen from Tamil Nadu too had developed cold feet.

There are 1,414 farmers under the society.

Krishnan of Perumala who grows vegetables on four acres said they could not harvest the vegetables unless there was an agency to procure them. There were many farmers going for menial work, leaving the crops to decay in the farms.

Bhagavathiappen, a garlic farmer, said there was a huge fall in the price of garlic and it was not being bought by businessmen. As the cost of labour was high, the garlic crop was not being harvested, faced as they were with a fall in quality and quantity owing to unexpected rain in the initial period of sowing.

Kanthallur has 350 hectares of land under cultivation this season. The farmers have to clear the farms for the coming season which is the main one. As much as 710 hectares of land will be under cultivation in the main season.

Things are not any different at Vattavada, though the area under cultivation this season is lower than that at Kanthallur. Murugesan, a farmer at Koviloor, said HortiCorp procured vegetables only during the festival season, and this time the agency did not turn up at all.

The prices of vegetables sold at Kanthallur (per kg) are carrot – Rs.16 to Rs.17; cabbage – Rs.8 to Rs.9; green peas - Rs. 23; and garlic – Rs.40 to Rs.50.

Spices Park to boost chilli exports from AP



Export of high quality chilli varieties from Guntur would be given a big boost and a task force would be set up with Central assistance to grade, process and pack chillies, Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu said at Yedlapadu in Guntur district on Monday.

The Chief Minister along with Union Minister of State for Commerce and Industry Nirmala Sitharaman inaugurated a Spices Park and a chilli processing unit set up on PPP mode at Mydavolu and Vankayalpadu villages.

“Guntur is famous for its famed varieties of red hot Chilli and the district has tremendous potential in exports of spices. Apart from high quality chilli, farmers produce turmeric, coriander and cotton. I know that these crops are vulnerable to volatile market conditions and our endeavour is to insulate farmers from the shocks of sliding prices,” Mr. Naidu said.

Stating that the State accounted for 60 per cent of chilli production of the country, Mr. Naidu said farmers should be educated on the need to reduce chemical pesticides and control pesticide residues in chilli.

Union Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said chilli farmers were free to use the services in Spices Park. Farmers could bring the raw chilli to the park with an installed capacity of one million tonnes per hour where it would be cleaned, graded, powdered and packed.

She also appealed to entrepreneurs to make the fullest use of facilities provided at the park including uninterrupted supply of power, common storage for raw material and finished products, network of internal roads and other common facilities.

So far, 18 entrepreneurs have been allotted units in the park and 22 units were expected to be grounded soon. The park would generate direct employment to 200 persons and indirect employment to 1,000 persons. Tamil Nadu based Aachi Masala has been one of the promoters of Spices Park but farmers would come here and use the facility, she said.

Chairman of Spices Board Jayathilak said by adding value to chilli, farmers could expect an average increase of price of Rs. 30 per kg. Minister for Agriculture Prathipati Pulla Rao urged the Union Minister to grant funds for laying a road from Mydavolu to the Spices Park. He also appealed to upgrade the existing Spices Board office in Guntur. Speaker Kodela Siva Prasada Rao said mechanisation of agriculture should be given a priority.

Minister Ravela Kishore Babu, MLAs Alapati Rajendra Prasad, Nakka Anand Babu, Tenali Sravan Kumar, K. Sridhar, YV Anjaneyulu, IGP N. Sanjay and Collector Kantilal Dande were present.

Organic farming in mulberry for sustainable silk production



Mulberry, the food plant of silkworm is a perennial crop and once planted can be maintained for years together without much effort.

Indiscriminate use of chemical inputs is an indeterminable setback to many industries associated with agriculture.

Similarly is the case in sericulture. Mulberry, the food plant of silkworm is a perennial crop and once planted can be maintained for years together without much effort.

Production of quality mulberry leaves is mandatory for the sericulture farmers to ensure healthy growth of silkworms and better silk thread harvest.

Therefore the agronomical practices such as application of fertilizers, weeding, irrigation, plant protection measures at bimonthly intervals after each leaf harvest are important for good and healthy leaf production.

Indiscriminate use

Like in many crops, here too chemical inputs are indiscriminately applied to gain short term results.

“In general one acre of mulberry garden receives 1.5 metric tonne of fertilizers and 12-15 sprays of toxic insecticides annually which causes deleterious effects on the beneficial organisms and on silkworms,” says Dr. V. Sivaprasad, Director, Central Sericulture Research and Training Institute, Central Silk Board, Mysore.

Though chemical farming initially yields good results, its negative impact on leaf yield, quality and cocoon productivity is pronounced in a few years.

Therefore, promotion of organic farming in sericulture is imperative to sustain the industry and intensive research on production of organic silk is in the pipeline, he adds.

The institute has already standardised application of a number of organic inputs like farmyard manure, compost, vermicompost, and green manures, and developed special formulations of bio-fertilizers and foliar sprays to minimise the use of chemical fertilizers and to organically promote soil health in mulberry gardens.

Other methods

Other eco-friendly formulations like bionema and nemahari to control root knot nematodes, chetak and navinya for management of root rot disease and spraying strong jets of water on mulberry garden are found effective to manage sucking pests and are advised for farmers.

Similarly, thermal weeding and black polythene mulching are also introduced to avoid application of weedicides as well as to overcome the labour scarcity problem for manual weeding.

According to Dr. Sivaprasad, about 12-15 metric tonnes of sericulture waste, comprising silkworm litter, unfed leftover mulberry leaves, soft twigs, farm weeds etc are obtained from a hectare of mulberry garden annually, from which the plant nutrients such as nitrogen (280-300kg), phosphorous (90-100kg) and potash (150-200kg) as well as all essential micro nutrients can be generated when properly composted.

Better than manure

This is nutritionally much superior than farmyard manure. The technology for composting sericulture waste is widely popularised by the institute among growers.

Most of the farmers in different parts of the state supplement the nutrient requirement of their mulberry garden with the locally available organic inputs like farmyard manures, composts, pressmud, poultry manures, sheep and goat manures.

Sheep penning

Sheep penning is also a tradition practised commonly in Tamil Nadu for enhancing soil fertility naturally.

“Organic farmers successfully harvest cocoons all through the season and their average cocoon production is greater than 80 kg per 100 disease free laying while the farmers who practice chemical based farming frequently met with crop failures and their productivity remains below 60kg.

Tamil Nadu is leading in silk production mainly because of more adoption of organic farming practices, explains N.Sakthivel, extension scientist, Central silk board, Srivilliputtur.

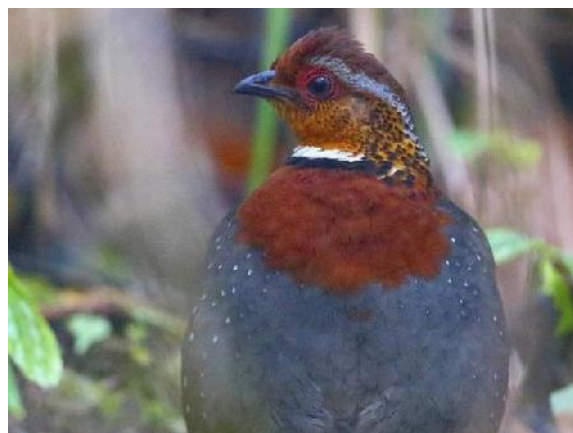
A technical bulletin titled “Organic farming in mulberry: Recent break through,” for the benefit of sericulture farmers, field functionaries and researchers has been published by the board.

Website

The details of eco-friendly inputs of sericulture and the packages of organic farming are available on the website csrtimys.res.in

For more information interested farmers can contact office of the Director, Central sericulture research and training institute, Central silk board, Manandavadi road, Srirampura, Mysore -570 008. Phone: 08212362757, email: siva.nso@gmail.com, and csrtimys@gmail.com and Dr. N.Sakthivel, extension scientist, CSRTI, Srivilliputtur, Tamil Nadu on email: sakthivelcsb@hotmail.com, mobile:9842761789.

Bengaluru shutterbug captures rare Partridge



The photographer had gone to Arunachal at the end of March to West Kamang district, where more than 800 bird species have been spotted.

The Wikipedia page shows only a sketch for an image. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which categorises the bird as vulnerable, has only a colourful painting — at least two decades old — as reference.

The Chestnut-breasted Partridge (*Arborophila mandellii*), endemic to the Eastern Himalayas, had eluded shutterbugs, until immense patience and a stroke of luck granted Bengaluru-based wildlife photographer Gururaj Moorching a two-minute encounter with the rare bird.

There are nearly 45 different species of partridges, of which the Chestnut-breasted Partridge — which gets its scientific name from an Italian naturalist — is classified as a ‘hill partridge’. IUCN estimates that about 2,500 Chestnut-breasted Partridges live in Arunachal Pradesh, Bhutan and Lower Tibet along the Himalayas.

The photographer had gone to Arunachal at the end of March to West Kamang district, where more than 800 bird species have been spotted.

“The partridge had been heard and seen before, but somehow not photographed. I heard their calls for three days, and I figured that they tend to cross the road late in the evening,” said Mr. Moorching, who took to wildlife photography four years ago.

After squatting in silence on a lonely stretch for over three hours, he spotted a female bird crossing the road nearly 25 feet away. Before the shy avian could scurry away into the thicket, Mr. Moorching clicked the first-ever photograph of the bird.

Make use of subsidies, Yanamala tells farmers

Stating that the State government was committed to making agriculture a profitable venture for farmers and it was encouraging farm mechanisation on a large scale to reduce the expenses, Finance Minister Yanamala Ramakrishnudu on Monday called upon the farmers to make better use of subsidies being provided to them by the government.

Along with Home Minister N. Chinna Rajappa, he inaugurated the Rythu Bazaar-cum-shopping complex constructed at Pithapuram with an exoenditure of Rs. 35 lakh. He attended the swearing-in ceremony of the local agricultural market committee.

“Under the farm mechanisation, subsidies ranging from 50 per cent to 75 per cent on the machinery are being offered. The farmers can avail the facility and make cultivation more profitable,” he said.

Later, he inaugurated a warehouse constructed on the premises of the agriculture market committee.

Official told to prepare roadmap for growth

Collector Ch. Vijayamohan reviewed the growth prospects of the district at a meeting with the officials here on Monday.

He suggested that the growth should be doubled by next year, especially in the areas of agriculture, horticulture, industrial output, tourism and service sector. He wanted the officials to prepare department-wise roadmaps pertaining to the growth potential of the respective sectors. He said that farmers under the Hundri-Neeva canal would receive water for 65,000 acres from the next cropping season and the move would improve the groundwater table too.

Referring to the works undertaken by NREGS, the Collector said as many as 20,000 farm ponds were being constructed. He also asked the officials to pay immediate attention to the drinking water problems during summer and draw the attention of the administration wherever support was required.

Ramanathapuram chilli farmers urged to use storage facilities

The district administration has asked chilli farmers not to resort to distress selling but make use of the storage facilities to sell their produce at a better price when there is a demand.

After *The Hindu* carried a report that traders and commission agents take the chilli farmers for a ride and they ended up paying an all time high of eight per cent commission, Collector K. Nanthakumar advised the farmers not to flood the market with the produce and end up getting a low price.

In a press release, he said that as the farmers had apprehensions that they would not get a good price for their produce if they stored them for long as the chillies would lose the colour and pungency, the government had built two cold storage facilities in Paramakudi (100 tonne capacity) and Kamuthi (25 tonne).

The farmers could store their produce in the facilities for up to six months, thus preserving the colour and pungency. The farmers should pay only Rs. 3.30 per kg for six months and could sell their produce after six months when it commanded a good price in the market, he said and advised the farmers to make use of the facilities.

Enquiries, however, revealed that the farmers could not afford to store their produce for six months as most of them wanted money immediately after harvest. A section of them have obtained loans from the commission agents and were forced to sell their produce to them while others sell their produce to repay their loans and jewel loans.

Farmers said that instead of advising them to use the cold storage facilities, the district administration could regulate the trade through market intervention by making the Tamil Nadu Cooperative Marketing Federation (TANFED) to procure their produce, a system which was in vogue in the district in 2002-03.

Once TANFED intervened, traders would be forced to come out with higher price to 'lure' the farmers, they said. This system would help the farmers, who were desperate to sell their produce to get better price and benefit, they said.



THE TIMES OF INDIA

'Plough the field, enjoy its yield'

Catch them young and make them grow. This seems to be the new mantra of the Goa agricultural department which has drawn up a new programme to attract young students to agriculture.

Agriculture director Orlando Rodrigues told TOI that the department realized that quite a lot of farmers were giving up agriculture because their young children were reluctant to join them in field work after passing out of school.

Rodrigues said, "Earlier in Goa, the entire family used to work in the field. Even the rise in wages of labourers did not affect them much, because most family members did the field work themselves. Now, the children are reluctant. To inculcate an interest in agriculture among students, the government has thought of this new programme," Rodrigues said.

Under the programme, the agriculture department will make available 4,000 sqm of land in every farm of the agriculture department for school students to come and cultivate whatever they want. The agriculture department will provide whatever inputs are required like seeds, fertilizers and even tools. The students will be allowed to take home whatever yield comes out of their efforts.

The agriculture department has several farms all over Goa including at places like Ela (Old Goa), Mapusa, Valpoi, Pernem, Margao, Ponda, Sanguem and Canacona.

Said Rodrigues, "We will encourage students to grow vegetables like bhendi, cluster beans, chillies, brinjals, watermelon, various gourds, pulses or even paddy if they want."

The department will earmark 4,000 sqm at each farm to school students. Considering one school gets 500 sqm, as many as eight schools can participate in the programme.

The students may also participate in other activities on the farm. For example, if transplanting of paddy is going on, they can participate in the activity. The students can participate in making grafts. They will be shown how to raise ornamental plants and so on.

Officers of the agriculture department will train not only the students, but also their teachers. The idea was mentioned in the recent budget of chief minister Laxmikant Parsekar and this programme has just been approved by the government.

"We will send circulars to schools. We will also go to schools and motivate them to join the programme. They can use the 'Bal Rath' buses given by the government," Rodrigues said.

Farmers' society to start general utility services

The Adarsh krishi cooperative society, having its headquarters at Balli, Quepem, which has carved a niche for itself in the co-operative sector, has now extended its community outreach services to the field of remedial education and general utility services.

Addressing mediapersons on Monday, the chairman of the society, Prakash Velip, said that the society plans to start remedial coaching classes in at least 10 centres in villages of South Goa in the initial phase.

"We are already running coaching classes in four villages; Cajur, Gokuldem and Cajugotto in Quepem taluka, and Loliem in Canacona taluka. We have plans to set up several more of such classes soon," Velip said.

He further informed that the society will soon open a call centre at Quepem for providing various domestic utility services to people from South Goa. "People desirous of availing the services of say, a plumber, carpenter, coconut plucker, tile-fitter, etc, will have to just dial the specified telephone number and book the services. Railway and flight bookings, tourist packages, etc will also be offered at the call centre," Velip said.

It was further informed that the Adarsh Krishi cooperative society will be opening its two new branches - one at Codli-Tisk, Dabhal, and the other at Sanguem, on April 8 and 10, respectively.

The society currently operates its business activities through 27 branches across Goa. Velip said that both, the agriculture division and the banking section, will be operational at the two new branches.

The society has over 8,000 shareholders, mostly belonging to the farmer community from remote parts of Goa. Velip said that this year the society purchased 400 tonnes of cashews from the farmers, the highest by any agricultural body from Goa till date.

The society also purchases the highest amount of copra from farmers in Goa and supplies it to Marico Industries, a reputed coconut oil manufacturing firm, Velip said. The society also deals in purchase and sale of paddy, coconuts, black pepper, arecanuts and other agricultural commodities.

Managing director of the society, Ramu Naik Gaonkar, and directors, Laxman Velip and Satish Velip, were present for the press briefing.

Reaping a rich, organic harvest

'I Say Organic' portal liaises with farmer groups for the products



Set up in 2012, 'I Say Organic' (ISO), a Delhi-based organic food retailer, envisages making organic produce a norm rather than an exception in the country.

Ashmeet Kapoor, the firm's 28-year-old founder, has been influenced by a healthy way of life. After graduating as an engineer from the University of British Columbia, he undertook entrepreneurship studies at Brown University. "I was too young to think about what I wanted to do," quipped Kapoor when asked about his departure from engineering to agriculture.

ISO liaises with farmer groups through an established network of partner associations. Most of the 3,000 farmers across 10 States engaged with these partners practise organic farming. Generally, farmers who cultivate using generic methods aren't approached, because there's a considerable change management process involved. "In organic farming, farmers need to work much harder physically," he clarifies on this decision.

Lean supply chain

Currently, ISO works with an 18-tonne cold storage capacity at Okhla. Approximately 1.5 tonnes of total stock are sold through the ISO website on a daily basis. Orders are taken on phone, or online, and deliveries are made within a few hours. Customers may choose to pay online, or on delivery, either by cash or card.

Products are shipped directly from their warehouse in refrigerated vans. ISO partners with labs such as SGS and Shriram to test for quality. Kapoor tries to ensure the product lifecycle remains clean start to finish. Although returns aren't much of a hassle for this nifty start-up, with complaints measuring 0.5 for every 100 orders on an average, wastage of items is a cost it has to absorb. To ensure a regular supply of produce, there are back-up suppliers in place; such supply chain redundancies help bridge any unforeseen gaps between demand and supply.

This doesn't translate to higher prices, though. I Say Organic prices its products at par with those at local markets. A direct model connecting farmers with consumers ensures the trimming of additional margins, which usually drive up costs when procuring from hawkers – they generally sell at twice their procurement price.

An initial self-funding of Rs. 50 lakh got the venture off the floor. So far, ISO has steered clear of external funding. "We're using our own money to grow; when we plan to expand to other cities, we may welcome interest from impact focussed investors," states Kapoor. He would rather his venture, which employs about 35 full-time staff, grew 'organically' than in rapid spurts.

"Agriculture is both a problem and an opportunity. If made sustainable, it makes sound economic sense. Revenue through organic is much higher when compared to conventional farming. Of the revenue generated, nearly 40-45 per cent flows back to the farmer network," says Kapoor. About 20-30 per cent of the remainder is ploughed into logistics, handling, distribution costs, salaries and marketing initiatives.

The company clocked revenues of Rs. 2 crore this financial year and hopes to reach Rs. 10 crore by the next.

Sustainable future

ISO plans to expand to other metros from the current Delhi-NCR belt. Kapoor's brainchild has been able to find buyers in over 6,000 households already. The company has been able to build a stable foundation. The customer proposition quite clearly lies in the convenience of buying organic stuff in a secure manner at value-for-money prices.

A believer of "gradual growth", Kapoor has his mind where his heart is; I Say Organic exhibits quite clearly the out-and-out organic growth path the founder has chosen to follow in his quest to make healthy living a norm rather than exception.

Uncorking success in a Nashik vineyard

Investment banker-turned-vintner Ashwin Rodrigues wants to tap the huge potential for wines in India



Ashwin Rodrigues at his farm in Nashik

Ashwin Rodrigues is as much at home crunching numbers as he is identifying different kinds of wines. A chartered accountant by training, Ashwin threw up an investment banking career in Sydney, returned home to become a vintner.

Rodrigues discovered a fascination for wines. "The diversity of the wine comes from the different types of grapes, where they are grown, and in what manner," he says.

“People advised me against it, with most saying it is a difficult business the world over,” says the Mumbai born owner of Good Drop Wine Cellars. “I was told, if you want to make a million bucks in the wine industry, start off with a billion. I didn’t have that kind of money,” chuckles Rodrigues, “though my job in Australia was paying good money.”

Initial years

Born into a family that has an export business of minerals and chemicals, Rodrigues says, “I went to Australia to work as a CA, and was thinking of migrating there. Only when I started researching and came across many local wines, I decided to chart my own path.”

In 2007, he threw caution to the winds and decided to become a vintner to tap the huge potential in the Indian market. Noting Australian citizens’ penchant for local wines, Rodrigues says his “natural reaction was to first import wines from Australia to India. I realised importing would be a tough call, due to the high duties. I decided to do the next best thing and make wine.”

Adelaide’s Barossa Valley, in South Australia, one of the premium wine making regions in the world, was where Rodrigues “got his hands dirty, working on a daily wage basis, from the ground level,” learning all about wine making and its many intricate flavourings.

Right from pruning vines, scrubbing tanks, to filling barrels, Rodrigues learnt the ropes in Australia, first as a Cellar Hand at the Yalumba Wine Co, then as Assistant Winemaker at Tin Barn Vineyards, and finally as a Winemaker at the Renaissance Winery.

After working at three wineries, Rodrigues shifted to California, the US, and did a harvest there, before returning to India in 2009.

Joining a wine company in Nashik, the wine bowl of India, for a year, to learn the nitty-gritty, Rodrigues identified a market in affordable sparkling wines, inspired by Italian bubbly like Prosecco and Asti.

He then went on to make wines in a rented winery in Nashik for two years, before branching out on his own. “The initial funding was tough. I had a little nest egg saved from my CA days in Australia,” says the 41-year-old.

Own merit

The most promising result of the entire exercise was the Rio wine brand from Good Drop Wine Cellars, which hit the market early 2013. Currently, the flagship brand Rio, is available only in Maharashtra and Goa.

“Rio is an entry level wine. It is available only in pints at Rs. 100-120. It is a carbonated wine, what I call a fizzy wine with forced carbonation, and is available in red, pink and white,” says Rodrigues. Yet another label is Casa Blanca, a sparkling wine, retailing at Rs. 850, a white and a rose wine.

Rodrigues has been toiling away in Nashik, for the last five years. He insists there is a long way to go for his company, since wine consumption is less than 1 per cent of the alcoholic beverage market in the country.

“In Mumbai, wine is just 2 per cent of the alcoholic beverage pie. Annually, beer rakes in Rs. 1,000 crore, whisky Rs. 1,000 crore and other spirits are around Rs. 3,000 crore in revenue. In the midst of this, wine would be about Rs. 50 crore in Mumbai annually, while imported is another Rs. 10 crore,” he adds.

Marketing cost

Rodrigues insists that marketing expenses “are what take a major toll. Though there is a huge potential market, in reality, it takes a lot of resources,” he says.

The winemaker is familiar with the best grapes grown in the region. “Sangvi, Dindori and Pimpalgaon all in Nashik, grow the best grapes. The quality is very good,” he insists, adding: “In table grapes, the emphasis is on harvesting a larger crop, while in wine grapes, it is just the opposite. The smaller the crop, the better. We want concentration of flavour.”

Rodrigues says his firm is past Phase 1, which is to establish the brand. “I earn around Rs. 60 lakh a month, and by the financial year 2015-16, it should be Rs. 12 crore a year based on the existing capacity,” he adds.

Research body develops package to control white stem borer in Karnataka’s coffee plantations

The Central Coffee Research Institute (CCRI) has developed a package to control the white stem borer (WSB), a serious pest affecting the Arabica coffee variety.

WSB is reported to be responsible for an estimated loss of about half a million plants each year resulting in crop loss of about 1,500 tonnes per annum. CCRI said in one of the recent experiments it has found out that it was possible to kill the borer beetles in the affected plants before their emergence to prevent the spread of infestation.

“If the adult beetles are prevented from emergence, then there is immense possibility of reducing the stem borer infestation levels to insignificant levels within quick time,” said Jawaid Akhtar, Chairman, Coffee Board, in a statement.

In the said experiment, CCRI had sprayed an insecticide formulation containing chlorpyrifos 50EC and cypermethrin 5EC on the affected stems and found that it was effective in controlling the spread of the borers. In view of the very encouraging results in the preliminary trials, the CCRI has planned elaborate multi-location field trails during the pre-monsoon flight season of this year (April-May 2015) to validate the results on a large scale.

CCRI said that the coffee growers could try this method on their fields on a limited area to quickly validate the results in their estates.

The method involves wrapping of the main stems of stem borer infested plants with strips of gunny bags and spraying the covered stem with the insecticide formulation at the dosage of 1.2ml/ litre of water along with 1 ml of a wetting agent.

How farmer producer bodies can help improve growers' lives

Adopting innovative selling models and focussing on packaging, labelling will result in better products



Humannet/shutterstock

Farmers' cooperatives in the erstwhile socialist economies worked largely to bring together small farmers enabling them to pool their resources and enhance their output. Currently, farmer producer organisations (FPOs) work in the dynamic and ever-evolving market economies and promote the entrepreneurial spirit.

Some FPOs have adopted innovative selling and distribution models such as the Lehra Agro Producer Company Ltd in Maharajganj, Uttar Pradesh. However, most FPOs are either simple farmer producer aggregates functioning to increase their share in the consumer price or work to eliminate one or two intermediaries from the supply chain such as the Nallavur Farmers' Producers Organisation.

Despite several success stories, marketing still remains a challenge. Let's take the case of Grameen Aloe Producer Company Limited (GAPCL) – an FPO owned wholly by women farmers.

Located in the Jawaja region of Rajasthan, it grows aloe and manufactures aloe-based health and beauty products.

GAPCL members have already undergone several hours of training but as Bhanvari Devi, a Board member of the company, says, "We know we manufacture an excellent product, but the cartons of aloe juice bottles that we pack at the factory just don't move!"

GAPCL and other FPOs must redefine their products for the market, taking on the role of a market leader rather than just a follower of established marketing practises.

Brand ambassadors

Aloe is championed as a cure for a number of ailments and nobody other than the 300 members of the company can be a proof of the products' benefits. These members must become the first users of aloe and be the visible beneficiaries of its properties.

Brand education

The aloe products of GAPCL are labelled as 'Magra's' – named after the semi-arid, difficult to till Magra region of Rajasthan where the members of the company grow the aloe plants.

Communicating to customers the back-breaking work the women did to convert the difficult lands to aloe farms, the plantation and irrigation techniques they adopted and the hardship they had to undergo for harvesting should be able to paint a positive picture on the customers' mind.

Product benefits

The benefits of aloe vera juice may already be well-known but new users still need to be educated about them. This should result in enhancing the products' value perception in the minds of the customers.

Aloe juice – perceived to be a medicinal product – doesn't appear exciting to young and healthy people.

Novel recipes can encourage new users and augment consumption by old users. The large producer-owner base of GAPCL can act as a laboratory for innovation and test marketing.

Packaging & labeling

Packaging of aloe products should be able to draw the attention of shoppers. Member-producers of GACL work closely in the inhospitable Magra region and the packaging should also be eco-friendly. A reusable container for packaging, for example, is eco-friendly and also enhances the value to the customer.

Employing the traditional channels of sales may not be economically viable for GACL while selling at co-op exhibitions and melas isn't feasible.

Members of the company represent a formidable sales force that can use customer relationship management to encourage repeat sales resulting in lower sales cost. Selling initially to niche markets such as residential complexes should be cost-effective.

The former is Deputy Director, NIAM, Jaipur and the latter is Director, Vandana Welfare Society, Ajmer. Views are personal.

Dip in arrivals holds cardamom steady

Cardamom prices ruled steady last week on matching demand and supply at auctions held in Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

Arrivals declined to 272 tonnes due to holidays from 338 tonnes the previous week, but remained much below the arrivals at the auctions at the same time of the previous season.

The harvesting has almost come to an end and now the material arriving is of the crop harvested earlier. Big growers are making a regulated release now, PC Punnoose, General Manager, CPMC, told *BusinessLine*. At the same time, the upcountry buyers have slowed down following a bearish sentiment in the markets due to good summer rains in the main growing Idukki district of Kerala, he said.

Therefore, they are of the view that the crop would be good and early in the coming season. Export buying continued to remain slow and an estimated 30 tonnes might have been bought by exporters, trade said. Arrivals last week were at 272 tonnes against 485 tonnes during the same week of the previous season, trade sources claimed.

The individual auction average last week vacillated between Rs. 720 and Rs. 770 a kg. Total arrivals during the season up to April 2 stood at 16,167 tonnes against 17,940 tonnes during the same period last year. The sales were at 15,776 tonnes and 17,368 tonnes respectively.

The auction average as on April 2 was at around Rs. 765 (795) a kg. Prices of graded varieties (Rs./kg): 8mm bold green 1,050; 7-8mm 875-900; 6-7mm 775-800; below 6 mm 750-760.