

Backyard poultry units generate income when harvest fails



The trials and tribulations that farmers face every day to survive remains an experience to live through, rather than getting debated in closed auditoria.

Dr. V A Parthasarathy, Director of Indian Institute of Spices Research, (IISR) Kozhikode, Kerala, said that to earn even one rupee, a farmer needs to sweat and toil several days in the sun and rain. Often it is the case of the rat eating the stored grains, or dubious middlemen cheating innocent farmers. It is time that our farmers turn their attention to other areas such as animal or poultry rearing to generate additional income. These extra activities always ensure some amount of money flow in a farmer's hands. They act as parachutes when the flight to a good harvest fails.

Low investment

There are many agriculture-related enterprises for generating additional income with low investment. But it is up to the Government and scientists to popularize such low cost, less labour intensive technologies among our farmers, especially the farm women. 'Kaveri Kudumbasree', a self help group under the leadership of Ms. Preethi Sunil at Narinada in Chakkittappara Panchayat in Kozhikode, is a role model in successful backyard poultry using improved breeds. Ms Preethi Sunil and 13 other members of the group belong to poor agriculture families and depend on their husbands, economically. As agricultural labourers, their meagre income is not sufficient to meet their daily expenditure on food and education of children. The women rear local breeds in their backyard.

As the breeds are poor layers, they did not get sufficient eggs for meeting their own family need. The demand for country eggs in the local market is very high and eggs with brown shell even fetch better price at Rs. 4 - Rs. 5 per egg. During one of their visits to the Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), they discussed the problems they faced with local breeds.

Training programme

KVK conducted a two day training programme for the group on shelter and feeding requirements of birds, improved breeds of poultry, identification of common diseases infesting the birds and method of vaccination against some common diseases. After the training, the KVK supplied them 45-day old immunized chicks. Frequent visits by subject matter specialists to their units further inspired confidence in them and gave them a practical orientation in handling the birds.

Moreover, veterinary services were assured to them over a phone call. Dr. Shanmughavel, subject matter specialist said that the improved breeds are Grammasree, Gramma Lakshmi, Kalinga Brown and Rhode Island Red are ideal for back yard poultry. In Kerala, Grammasree and Kalinga Brown are found suitable for backyard poultry. A house holding 10 cents can easily rear up to 20 birds.

Cage size

A cage of 120 x 90 x 60 (Length, width and height) cm size made of wood or bamboo with coconut leaf or plastic thatching is sufficient for housing 10 birds. Five to six month old birds start laying eggs. A single hen can produce 230-250 eggs in the first year and around 180 eggs in the second year. Dr. Shanmughavel said that it is economical to rear the birds for 2 years and dispose them for meat purposes afterwards.

In the improved breeds a non-egg laying period extending up to one month may be observed in the 2nd year. Lighting of a zero watt red light in the cage during night reduces the length of the non laying period. Precautions may be taken to protect the birds from high temperature and rainfall which affect the egg laying capacity of the birds.

Feed

In addition to kitchen waste, rice or wheat barn at 80-120g/day/bird improves the health of the birds. Mixing of sea shells or egg cases in feed as a source of calcium carbonate improves the color and size of eggs. Supplementation of the food with leguminous fodders at 200g / 10 birds / day in the hanging method enriches the nutrition of the birds.

Ms. Preethi, leader of the group said that we were keeping 2 to 3 birds (local breeds) in our backyard for egg and meat purposes. After adoption of new technologies, we are getting more income at no extra cost. Earlier due to sudden outbreak of diseases, several birds died. But, after training the women members started rearing breeds such as Grammasree and Kalinga Brown that are disease resistant, they now know how to identify common diseases in birds and treat them at the initial stage.

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