

Effective strategy to overcome land, water degradation



The farmer, Mr. Subbaian of A.G. Pudur village, Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu seen processing the crop.

Water and soil are the two basic components for successful agricultural practices. If the soil and water are clean and free from pollution, then getting a good yield is easy. But for Mr. R. Subbaian, of Kanakkan Thottam in Coimbatore district, Tamil Nadu both the soil and water in his field were polluted due to the chemical waste seepage from the nearby dyeing factories in Coimbatore into the Noyyal river which runs across his village.

Waste water seepage

The soil and the water in and around the village had been spoilt due to the waste seepage and several farmers had sold their lands and had moved into the cities. But with a determination to succeed and a sentimental attachment to his ancestral property, Mr. Subbaian went about hunting for information as to what crops grow well in his land. "I was told that Alfalfa (called as *Kudhirai masal* in Tamil) will grow well in these types of soil and I decided to cultivate it," he said.

Multiple cropping

With a view to increasing farm income he had also taken up multiple cropping. In his 10 acre farm he has planted coconut in 3 acres, curry leaves in 2 acres, alfalfa in 2 acres and tender coconuts in the remaining 3 acres. He has also planted arecanut as an intercrop in his coconut garden. "Multiple cropping system is ideal for farmers as it is an effective method of derisking the income loss for farmers. In case one crop fails, farmers need not worry but can easily tide over the financial crunch through income from the other crops.

"In fact much of the crop loss and farmers suicides' happen only in areas where there is monocropping. Can you ever show me an instance of failure in multi-cropping?" he asks. The crops are mainly grown organically as chemical farming had proved to be a failure for him. "Though I was doing chemical based

agriculture nearly a decade back, all that was left from it was only debts which accumulated to nearly Rs. 30 lakh. "In addition, the chemicals polluted the soil and water which were spoilt further due to the chemical seepage from the mills," he said.

Planting details

Explaining the planting details, Mr. Subbaian said, "About 15 kgs of seeds are required for an acre and the seeds should be planted on raised beds and watered." The first harvest can be done in 50-60 days of sowing and thereafter the subsequent harvests can be done once every 25 days. In one year about 15 harvests can be done, according to him. From an acre about three tonnes of Alfalfa can be harvested, and at present it is being sold at the rate of Rs. 3.50 per kg. "With a expenditure of about Rs. 50,000, I have earned a gross income of about Rs,1,40,000. After deducting the expenses I have been able to make a profit of Rs, 90,000 in one year," he said.

Processing unit

He sells the harvested crops to several dairy farmers in and around the area and has also set up his own processing unit where the harvested crop is processed and sent to several horse stables in Coonoor, Udhamandalam and Bangalore. At present, more than 300 acres in and around Coimbatore district have come under this crop.

Contract farming

"As I require nearly 20 tonnes of the produce every month, I have also encouraged the neighbouring farmers to grow this crop and I buy the harvested produce from them, process it, and send it to the customers," he said.

In about seven years, Subbaian has been able to pay back his debts.

Contact details : Mr. R. Subbaian at 4/5-A, Kanakkan thottam, A.G. Pudur (P.O), Irugur (via), Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu: 641-103, mobile: 0936-3228039, phone:0422-2627072.

Source: web.thehindu@thehindu.co.in Copyright © 2010, The Hindu