THE HINDU

Low budget fish gunabajalam proves effective for crops

Cost effective: **The lady farmer Mrs. Thangam demonstrating how to make the fish extract.**

The last few decades have really brought about a drastic change in agriculture. In the name of increasing yield, mindless dumping of chemical fertilizers and spraying pesticides have made agriculture a business oriented exercise.

Questionable fact

Whether, these chemicals have helped the farmers to get profitable yields is questionable going by the number of suicides and those selling their traditional lands with frustration that agriculture has let them down," says Dr. Kamalasanan Pillai, Head of the R&D, VK- NARDEP, Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu. According to Mrs. M.Thangam, a lady farmer at Kozhikoottupothai village in Kanyakumari, agriculture is one profession which always gives back twice or thrice more than what is invested in it. Be it paddy, vegetables or fruit crops, if done correctly using minimal inputs, then the harvest will be a reward in terms of size and remuneration.

Time tested

"Many farmers have forgotten the time tested and proven traditional practices done and followed by their grandparents. It is only after realising through personal experience, that chemicals rather than increasing the yield spoil the environment, farmers are slowly going back to their traditional roots of natural farming systems," says Mr. Manickavasagam another farmer in the village.

In addition they are also healthy practices which do not harm the soil, water or air and those who use them. For example, fish *gunabajalam* (extract in Tamil) or fish growth hormone is a traditional method which is practised by Mrs. Thangam and some farmers in Kanyakumari district. They use this hormone for growing their rose, chilli and paddy crops.

Mrs. Thangam gives details on how the fish hormone is made. Take about 1 kg of waste fish (that is, the leftover after cleaning the fishes) and jaggery each and mix it well in about 10 litres of water in a plastic

drum. Stir the contents well in a clockwise and anticlockwise direction for 3 or 4 days and keep the drum in a shade.After 15 days, filter the solution (1 litre of fish hormone in 100 litres of water for one acre) and spray over the crops.

Spraying time
Spraying should be done either early in the morning or evening as most of the insects attack the crops only during that time.For paddy crops it can either be sprayed or mixed with rice or wheat husk or vermicompost and broadcasted (sprinkled by hand) all over the field. “Another practice we follow is to cut native weeds found commonly here called *Arival mania poondu* (in Tamil), commonly called as Sida into small pieces and boil it in 5 litres of water. It should be boiled till the water level comes down to one litre. About 5 gms of asofoetida should then be added to it (the water should be mixed well till the asafoetida dissolves). “The solution should then be allowed to cool, after which it can be filtered and sprayed.

Shelf life
For an acre one litre of this solution must be diluted in 100 litres of water and sprayed. But farmers should note that this solution must be used within 10 days of its manufacture and cannot be stored for longer periods,” she explains.

Along with Mrs Thangam, several farmers in the village who use both these traditional methods vouch for their efficiency in controlling pests and helping good crop growth. If one has to use chemical sprays for an acre then he has to spend nearly Rs. 1,500 to Rs. 2,000.

But we spend hardly about Rs.100 for making these and yet get the benefits. It is time that farmers understand this and start practising low budget agriculture as it is the need of the hour,” says Mr. Manickavasagam.

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