

Contract farming of *Coleus forskholii*



The progressive farmer with his healthy crop of *Coleus forskholii*

Contract farming of *Coleus forskholii* (Marundu koorkan in Tamil) is gaining popularity among small and marginal farmers in Salem district and its neighbourhood."It is an easy and a profitable crop for the farmers," said Mr. G. Sivaji, an enterprising farmer of Navalur Therku Kadu village near Athur in Salem district."I am growing *Coleus* for the third year now, and I have extended the crop to 1.2 hectares. The planting material and other inputs along with a cash advance is given by the agency, which is promoting the crop. The formalities are quite simple, and the market is well assured. The advanced money is adjusted at the end after the sale of the produce and the balance amount is paid to us," he explained. *Coleus forskholii* is a popular medicinal plant, and it does well in a variety of soils.

Being a hardy crop, free from any major pest and diseases, it can be grown with least care and investment. The soft stem cuttings of the plant *Coleus forskholii* are supplied to the farmers. The field is tilled three times to get a fine tilth, and liberal quantities of farmyard manure are added to it. Then it is ploughed into ridges and furrows at an espacement of 60 cm. The 15 cm long cuttings are planted on the side of the ridges. The spacing between the plants is about 45 cm. About 30,000 cuttings are needed to cover a hectare. A nursery raised in 5 cents is enough to yield planting material for a hectare, according to Mr. Sivaji. The crop was planted in October and initial irrigations were provided to support the establishment of the young plants. Subsequent rains helped in their quick growth.

A recommended dose of nutrients was applied as basal dressing, and plant protection measures were taken to prevent the incidence of sucking and chewing pests. On the 50th day after planting the crop , 125 kg of neem cake and 62.5 kg of ammonium sulphate per hectare were added, and the crop was earthed up. Another top dressing was done with 250 kg each of muriate of potash and gypsum on the 150th day. The crop was ready for harvesting when the plants were 170 to 180 days old. The top shoots were cut using sharp knives, and the tubers were uprooted using hand hoes. The plants can also be harvested using a simple country plough. About 20 to 25 tonnes of the fresh tubers can be harvested from a hectare of land. The tubers were sold at a nominal price of Rs. 4.50 a kg, according to Mr. Sivaji, the farmer of Navalur.