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Timely crop management, the mantra for success



In the advertisement industry it is common for film stars to endorse certain products as brand ambassadors. But for farmers to follow a particular technology or grow a specific variety, the best endorsement comes from another farmer already practising it.

Mr. P. Chandra Sekhar Azad (70 years) from Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh, is a brand ambassador for 'Prathibha' turmeric variety in the state.

Mr. Azad has been able to convince hundreds of farmers in the region to take up Prathibha cultivation. The Indian Institute of Spices research (IISR), Kozhikode, Kerala developed the variety.

#### Conviction

“Nothing substitutes determination and hard work for succeeding in agriculture. Forget all other hurdles; if you possess the will to succeed, you can surely make it,” says the farmer.

Agriculture can never become a loss, if one makes use of new technologies and scientific practices available. Hundred per cent involvement coupled with timely scientific management and usage of modern technologies can definitely increase the productivity many fold, seems to be his strong conviction.

Mr. Azad turned to agriculture around two decades ago. Till the age of 50, he was running a small printing press at Vijayawada. "Later I turned to agriculture, cultivating turmeric, paddy, maize, banana, etc in my nine acres of land which I inherited from my father," recalls Mr. Azad.

Like other farmers in the area, he cultivated turmeric as the main crop, "But the crop did not prove to be profitable in the beginning. Low yields and high infestations ruined the yield," he adds.

The farmer's search for a high yielding and good quality turmeric variety came to an end when he happened to hear about a variety called Prathibha.

"I came across the variety developed by IISR nearly seven years back," says Azad.

#### New beginning

He started growing the variety from 2004 on an experimental basis procuring 50 kgs of rhizomes. "I never realized that this could mark a new beginning in my faith on the variety and association with the institute," he adds.

During 2007-08 the farmer supplied 12 tonnes of seed rhizomes to the Horticulture Department, Nizamabad, Andhra Pradesh. During the subsequent year he supplied nearly 30 tonnes of rhizomes to Adilabad district, and another 12 tonnes to the Ranga Reddy district in addition to several farmers in and around Guntur district.

#### Secret of success

During the last season, he cultivated the variety in 2.75 acres.

"I am following organic farming methods using minimum chemical fertilizers. "Timely crop management is the mantra for success in agriculture," he points out.

In his experience, Prathiba is highly resistant to rhizome rot while all local varieties such as Thekurpet and Duggirala are prone to infestation.

Harvesting is done with the help of bullocks. He also employs labourers for cleaning the rhizomes.

Cleaned turmeric is then boiled using huge turmeric boilers. The boiled rhizomes are then dried in sun for 20 days and polished using mechanical polishers. But still a major chunk of the produce is being sold as seed rhizomes.

“What makes Azad different from other farmers of his age is his readiness to adopt innovations.

Even at this age he is computer friendly. He keeps in constant touch with the scientists at each and every stage of cultivation through phone and internet.

Record maintenance

“He maintains a record of all farm activities; clicks photos of the crop at regular intervals, and sends them to the scientists for their advice,” says Dr. V.A. Parthasarathy, Former Director of the institute.

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