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### Importing grains cannot solve food shortage problems



Utilising space: Mahavir Singh, from Rajasthan, inspecting his field.

“It is a universally acclaimed fact, that importing food cannot solve the problem of food shortage. Modern technologies do offer vast prospects for crop improvement but that alone need not make it popular among small and marginal farmers,” says farmer Mr. Mahavir Singh Arya, from Churu district of Rajasthan.

Despite facing acute problem of water shortage, Mr. Mahavir, an advocate of organic farming, developed numerous varieties of wheat and mustard, and claims that he never used any inorganic fertilizer to grow crops and still managed to generate good yield.

Ignorant

“Urban people do not seem to know the real problem we farmers face,” he says and adds:

“To them it becomes an issue only during price hike. Though farming being an important area — a large section of the public view agriculture as something involving the government and it becomes a job for elected persons to resolve the farmers' problems.

“The fact, that we import food to cater to domestic demand, besides large scale migration to cities does not seem to cause any serious concern in the urban man’s mind.”

Real life

According to him, though urban people may be fascinated by the simple village life, in reality life isn’t all that easy in villages.

“The aspiration of rural folks to seek out greener pastures in nearby metros, educate their kids and push them out of the village. Hence statistically, food supply is dwindling and demand is shooting up — we are all sitting on a volcano ready to erupt anytime,” he feels.

“A farmer’s life is a tale of continuous experimentation and struggle for existence and even getting a good price for the produce is difficult for us,” he explains.

Different odds

Inspite of all the odds, inquisitiveness made him visit Hissar agriculture university to see some breeding experiments in crop varieties and learn the method of selection and crossing between different varieties. He returned to start experimenting in the fields.

Encouraged by the success, he got interested in breeding and thereafter he made it a point to visit various research institutions and universities, to keep himself updated.

The farmer developed more than 10 varieties of mustard by crossing the

varieties available in Delhi region. The maturity period of all these varieties varies from 130 to 150 days and the yield from about 1.8 tonnes to 2.4 tonnes per hectare. All the varieties are disease resistant and high yielding, according to him.

He chanced upon a variety of tall and high yielding wheat and crossed it with a locally popular variety.

The next year, the farmer observed that the crops grew taller, bore bolder grains, that were resistant to disease. He selected plants possessing characteristics like height of the plant,

resistance to disease, etc., every year and developed the variety 'Mahavir Kisan Mahan.'

#### Different varieties

In the same way, he kept on crossing varieties obtained from different regions with other local varieties and successfully developed more than 15 varieties of wheat.

The maturity period of all the wheat varieties varies from 135-160 days, except one, named Mahavir Kishan Pragati, a short duration dwarf variety developed by him that comes to harvest in 95-110 days. The yield of these varieties varies from 4-8 tonnes for an hectare.

#### Extra effort

"For a farmer every available area of space needs to be utilised so that some sort of income can be generated. In places like ours where water is a scarce commodity, extra effort is needed to obtain even average yield. Government should look into the cause of the millions of farmers like Mr Mahavir who toil day in and day out to feed the over billion plus population of the country." says Sundaram Verma, a progressive farmer himself and Honey Bee Network collaborator of Rajasthan.

Mr. Mahavir mentions that the government may be trying its best, but an extra effort towards providing enough support to the farmers would go a long way in making India a self reliant country in food crops.

For more information, contact Mahavir Singh Arya, village Gudan, taluka Rajgadh, district Churu, Rajasthan, Mobile 09461932854.

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