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Debt increases with dependence on fertilizers, pesticides

All technological progress minus agriculture is like a mirage in the desert



Practical: Vishwasrao Narayanrao at his vermicompost unit at Washim

“Farmers first” becomes an ideal motto for any nation to progress.

“Unless farmers are empowered the economy of the country can collapse. India boasts of development, scientific advancements, and achieving self sufficiency in food grain production. But malnourishment, suicides, and health problems are stark realities that still exist in many rural areas.

Unfortunate

“It is a well known fact that farmers in our country are considered unfortunate as there seems to be no great future for them in their profession,” says farmer Mr. Vishwasrao from Washim, Maharashtra.

For Mr. Vishwasrao, both his profession and health did not prove to be conducive. Born with a single kidney, blind in one eye, and surrounded by abject poverty, he worked as a farm labourer for many years.

“Though life proved frustrating, the desire to live made me invest the small amount of money I saved from my hard labour in buying a thorny and weed-infested fallow land deemed unfit for cultivation in my village.

Some consolation

“I worked hard on the land, and the presence of a river near the land proved beneficial for irrigation. Within a year, I harvested a good yield of jowar, cotton and wheat.

“But after some time I realised that growing crops is not all only about irrigation as the outputs started declining.”

A local agriculture official explained to me about chemical and organic fertilizers, insecticides, and water management.

“I followed his advice and the yield increased but even this lasted only for a few years,” he says.

According to the farmer, overuse of chemical fertilizers and neglecting organic manures could be the reason for the declining yield, and he again started looking for the cause.

Search for a guide

Mr. Vishwasrao's search brought him in contact with several farmers practising organic farming.

They impressed on him the need for making one's own input for the crops and that it drastically saves money for the farmer and helps get a good yield.

Own inputs

The farmer started dumping all the cut weeds, refuse and other wastes he could find in a three foot pit he dug and added urea and superphosphate to the waste to accelerate the process of decomposition.

“It proved economical. I got nearly 30 cartloads of manure for my fields and it cost me about Rs. 600,” he says.

He is now using his well decomposed manure, vermicompost, and neem extract as spray for the crops. He is getting a very good yield of soyabean, greengram, bengalgram, tur and wheat.

“Recently, I harvested a record yield of 16 quintals from 2 kg of tur dhal seed. I sold the seeds at Rs. 200/ kg and got a gross income of Rs. 3,20,000. Farmers also benefited as they got it at a much cheaper rate, at Rs. 200/ kg instead of original price of Rs. 500/ kg,” he says.

Advance booking

In fact Mr. Vishwasrao's tur dhal became so famous in the region that many farmers started booking the seeds in advance for the next sowing.

The farmer also gets good yield of 35-40 quintals of chilli from an acre and gets an additional amount of Rs. 52,000 from selling them.

“As a farmer, I am able to realise that many of us incur debt mainly because we buy fertilizers and pesticides. If this dependence can be reduced, it can in turn reduce indebtedness and distress. Give a man a fish, he will eat for a day but teach him how to fish, he will eat for a lifetime, goes the popular saying. The same is the case for farmers,” he says.

Need today

“What we need today is a means to sustain throughout our lives. If our country needs to grow faster, empower the farmers. Only then true growth and development can take place. Without agricultural improvement all technological progress is like mirage in the desert,” he says prophetically.

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