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Lightweight machine weeds out paddy farmers' woes



Priced at Rs. 30,000, the Government is yet to grant subsidy

Useful: The compactly developed conoweeder being tested by a farmer in his field

A French Jesuit priest Henri de Laulanie first developed the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) method of paddy cultivation for the poor farmers in Madagascar during the 1980's.

“In the last two decades the technique is fast becoming popular among millions of farmers worldwide. In India the success of SRI can be perceived as being made possible by many small farmers who dared to experiment and innovate new techniques,” says Mr.

Senthilkumaran, Director, Information, Education and Communication, M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), Chennai.

Simple and efficient

Take the example of the conoweeder, a simple, hand-operated device to remove weeds from the paddy field.

To encourage small farmers to adopt this cultivation the State Governments passed orders to their respective agriculture Universities to make the machine available to farmers through

their Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) freely as and when they require.

With the numbers being limited, the KVKs' in many areas found it difficult to cater to the demand.

“But one significant problem that the Government failed to notice during the supply of the machines was, whether it was user friendly. Many farmers complain that the conoweeder supplied by the Government is too heavy and difficult for them to use,” says Mr. Senthil. In some places farmers could not take up SRI cultivation because they did not get the weeder on time and for others it proved physically strenuous to move the machine in their fields.

“Being a farmer myself, equipped with an engineering degree, I decided to develop an easy to handle weeder that served multiple purposes,” says Mr. S. Karthikeyan, from Kumbakonam, Tamil Nadu. He adds, “as a farmer I could easily realise the exact requirement of a paddy cultivator and designed the machine.”

Distinctive feature

“The most distinctive feature of Mr. Karthik's weeder is that being lightweight it can be easily operated. Even women find it easy to work with it. “This is not the case with the commonly available conoweeder. It is heavy and requires good strength to operate it,” explains Mr. Senthil. Says Mr. Karthik: “Unlike the other weeders my device can be easily made to run in slushy fields to a depth of even one foot. The wheels can be changed and used for readying even dry fields.

One litre of petrol

“It needs only one litre of petrol and can be used continuously for an hour. It is advisable to use it two times at 15 days interval for increasing the tilling growth of the crop by 5060 numbers.”

Normally 12 to 15 people are required to remove the weeds from an acre, working for 5 to 6 hours. But a single person can easily perform this action using this device and complete the work in 2 to 2.5 hours. “This kind of technology needs to be encouraged for adoption on a larger scale. The government and financial institutions should consider supporting such

initiative by subsidizing the equipment,” stresses Mr. Senthil. But the sad factor is the innovator has applied for a subsidy from the Government and is yet to hear something positive from them.

Farmer's meet

MSSRF organised a meet of more than 50 farmers two months back to create awareness about this new device. The innovation was also tested at TNAU, GKVK, Bangalore, State Agriculture Engineering Departments, Research Institutions and several farm fields.

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