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Reviving traditional methods to protect farm livestock



Popularising these methods will revive our culture and local knowledge

Simple remedies: Punniamurthy, Professor and Head, Ethno-veterinary herbal training unit, Thanjavur, interacting with farmers. -Photo:M. Govarthan

Apart from lands, animals remain a potential source of investment and income generation for small farmers.

“And investments are not risk free. They need to be protected. If a low cost and effective protection can be made available, then naturally farmers tend to use it,” says Dr. N. Punniamurthy, professor and head, Ethno-Veterinary Herbal Training and Research Unit, Veterinary University Training and Research Centre, Thanjavur.

“My aim is to popularise the ethno-veterinary system among small farmers, so that it becomes a part of primary health care.

Help save money

“In fact, by popularising it we will only be reviving our culture and system of traditional medicine. Knowledge about local plants and spices available to treat the animals will help the

farmer attend to the animal or bird at the earliest. And in most cases it will also help save him money,” says Dr. Punniyamurthy.

There are still many farmers maintaining a few goats, sheep, one or two cattle or some chickens.

If an animal falls sick, these people rely first on their conventional knowledge to treat them. If the problem persists they seek the help of qualified veterinarians.

Common property

The traditional medicinal system does not belong to any single person and is a property of the entire community. “We need not be afraid of people patenting medicines that have come down to us from our forefathers,” seems to be his conviction.

At present Dr. Punniyamurthy is engaged in the process of documenting existing medicine, medical practices, and evolving ones based on herbs and locally available materials.

Leads to conservation

“There are so many medicinal plants in a village to make the farmer self-reliant and not wait for the veterinarian. Once ethno-veterinary medicines become popular it leads to conservation of traditional medical knowledge and to conservation of medicinal plants,” he says.

When the farmer starts realizing that a particular herb finds frequent mention in ethno-veterinary medicine literature, he will start cultivating it. Such remedies are important also because the medicines therein do not have toxicity and are easily available.

Decline in knowledge

The introduction of synthetic veterinary medicines resulted in a decline in knowledge base traditional knowledge about the medicinal properties of plants and their potential in treating animal diseases, according to Dr. Punniyamurthy.

“Due to excessive use of veterinary pharmaceuticals and a move towards sustainable

approaches to livestock production, a growing global need exists today for identification and application of botanicals in veterinary medicinal properties,” he adds.

Dr. Punniamurthy established the research centre to identify, recognise, validate, document, and propagate such traditional remedies.

He sent a proposal to the State Government, which granted Rs. 18 lakh and the Central Government also supported the project by offering Rs. 80 lakh.

Simple and dependable

With the funding, he plans to offer farmers simple, dependable medicines, based on traditional healing systems for animals.

So far he has inspired several thousand farmers in the State to treat their animals.

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