

Green basics' aims to provide solutions to farming problems

March 15, 2012



There seems to be genuine concerns now that farming may be fast becoming a rich man's hobby; no more a poor man's livelihood. "Nobody seems to be really bothering about the catastrophe waiting to happen to food production soon. Shrinking lands, declining crop yields and disinterested government policies are all driving this sector towards a dangerous end," cautions Mr. Ramana Babu Killi, Executive Director, Green Basics, an agriculture start up company in Andhra Pradesh. "Even the common man knows that this area is important for providing food and he needs to play a strong role in sustaining it, but an awareness is missing.

No change in lifestyle

"Most of the rural people are just not excited about agriculture. In the last 15 years the price of one kg of rice has risen from Rs 3-4 a kg to Rs 35-42 a kg. "But the lifestyle of the farmer who grows the rice has deteriorated from bad to worse. The rise in price has not helped him live a better quality of life," he says. Coming from a village in Srikakulam district, Andhra Pradesh and also a graduate in this line, Mr. Ramana says he nurtured an idea of trying to do something for the people in his region and thought that by starting an organisation would be a good move since it can give a shape to his ideas.

The result was Green Basics, started three years ago. "Through this I dream of providing a comprehensive solution to farmers' problems, from seed to seed and to make agriculture sustainable," he explains. Presently Green Basics works among paddy farmers in AP to help boost production through mechanization and optimization. They offer integrated services to farmers – providing high quality seeds, cultivating saplings, mechanized transplantation of the saplings from the nursery to field, and post transplantation care. They charge around Rs 3,000 for their services. Their customers are typically small landholders, owning 1-2 acres of land.

Encouraging response

"So far the response from the farmers is great, as they are more than happy to pay for these services. Farmers benefit from increased savings, not having to pay for the seeds and labour, and above all a 20 per cent increase in production," says Mr. Ramana. The start-up till date has worked with over 300 paddy farmers, ploughed over 250 acres of land, and trained 2,500 farmers on seed multiplication. It provided tablets to 40 farmers' clubs they have established across 40 villages. Mr. Ramana is really fired up by this initial success and looks to expanding soon. He has plans to cover the entire paddy growing region of

Andhra Pradesh and then extend to the rest of India.

Mobile applications

He also wants to build mobile applications for farmers to access crucial information regarding crop performance and treatment. He has already got onto implementing some of these with support from National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD). "I am also conducting classes on social entrepreneurship, agribusiness, and sustainable development at Centurion University, Orissa. I realise one thing very clearly - It is easy to take classes on sustainability but very difficult to live and sustain on small lands here. "Depending on the Government and expecting a proactive approach from Ministers and bureaucrats is a dumb man's dream. It is not going to happen. These people are too busy worrying about making money, getting commissions and saving their positions," he says with a sigh.

Three years old

Though only three years old, the start-up emerged the National Winner at the iDiya social entrepreneurship competition, organized by the Indian School of Business and has recently been selected as the finalist by the Unreasonable Institute, U.S. Mr. Ramana is now trying to raise \$10,000 in order to get accepted for the Unreasonable Institute 2012 program.

Helping entrepreneurs

Unreasonable Institute is a social start-up accelerator based in Colorado,US, which helps entrepreneurs with mentorship, exposure and capital to build their ventures.

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