

Government and scientists must encourage rural innovators

May 24, 2012



"In many households grinding poverty and financial constraints seem to be the prevailing conditions. Unlike a steady job that guarantees a monthly income, a farmer can never be guaranteed a regular income from his lands," says Mr. Balasahib Patil from Maharashtra. Mr. Patil developed a new dual poded gram variety called 'Sushil Laxmi' that yields nearly 1.8 tonnes per acre under irrigated, and 0.8 to 0.9 tonnes per acre under rain-fed conditions. The variety is reported to be highly popular among farmers across the States of Punjab, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Madhya Pradesh. Last year the farmer received orders for nearly 2,000 tonnes of seeds from several areas.

Several varieties

Mr. Patil claims to have developed many varieties of gram, primarily through a selection process. "Though my father wanted me to work on our sugarcane plantation, which is cash crop cultivation, and more income can be generated, I wanted to research on gram," he says. Initially unconvinced, his father gave a little over two acres of land for his research. "Since I did not possess large acres to experiment with different gram varieties, I could not preserve many of my varieties. "I started cultivating on leased lands. Later I bought the leased land on my own by paying twenty per cent more. I am now cultivating gram in more than 300 acres," he says. Terming his explorations as being more out of curiosity than to a plan, the farmer says that a chance visit to Dharwad University some years back provided him an opportunity to observe the scientists working on some breeding programmes on gram there.

Keen observation

Observing the scientists there adopting crossing to develop new varieties, he also started doing the same after coming back. "The only difference was that they worked in glass labs and I worked in the open fields. After several initial attempts for nearly eight years the farmer successfully stabilized the characters and then started distributing the seeds to other farmers. "I took a sample plant inside a saline water bottle to the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), Delhi to verify and validate my research. But they (scientists) did not evince any interest in it. "Undeterred, I took the samples to the Office of the Agriculture Ministry. The then Agriculture Minister waived the testing fee (Rs.15,000) for variety testing from AICRP (All India Coordinated Research Project) as a gesture of appreciation," he says.

Commercial marketing

Based on the encouraging results from farmers using the variety, Mr. Patil started to commercially market

the seeds.

“The attitude of some of our agricultural scientists baffles me. Instead of encouraging a farmer like me to develop more varieties, they are asking me to hand over my variety to them for releasing it. “Why should I hand over my child (variety) to some strangers? It is my baby and I have all rights over it, and can myself release it. In fact I stopped interacting or encouraging scientists to visit my farm or share information with them,” he says bitterly.

Income generation

“Though my father initially refused to hand me over his ancestral land for experimenting, after seeing the income generation from the new variety, he handed over the entire 15 acres under my care. I also bought an additional 15 acres to carry on with my experiments,” he says. Currently, the farmer is experimenting on bittergourd and okra (lady's finger).

For more details readers can contact Mr. Bala Sahib Patil, Hassor, Shrol block, Kolhapur district, Maharashtra, phone: 02322-261082, mobile: 98226-09999.

Source: web.thehindu@thehindu.co.in Copyright © 2012, The Hindu