

Utilising experts' advice leads to a substantial yield

March 28, 2012



Though several technologies are available to farmers today, the main problem is lack of proper communication and dissemination of information to them. "Only easy accessibility to information can make a farm technology popular. Development and dissemination of technologies play an important role in achieving food production and security," says Dr. V.A. Parthasarathy, former Director, Indian Institute of Spices Research (IISR), Kozhikode, Kerala. "Many farmers still practise traditional/conventional agriculture and are either not aware or not prepared to make use of proper and advanced technologies to increase their yields," he adds.

Friendly approach

IISR takes a lot of efforts to ensure personal interaction between scientists and farmers to demonstrate and disseminate the various expertise it develops to farmers in their fields. Such demonstrations motivate the farming community and result in quick adoption of technologies, according to him. The institute bagged the prestigious Sardar Patel Outstanding Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), Institution award for the second time recently. Mr. N. N. Chandrasekhar, a cardamom planter from Kodagu, talks about his personal experience as to how well he utilised experts' advice and harvested a substantial yield. The planter initially inherited 25 acres and adopted coffee-based cropping system with black pepper as intercrop in 16 acres, and a local cardamom variety called Mazarabad in eight acres.

Harvesting tonnage

He harvested only 1,300 kg of dry cardamom from the entire plantation – a poor yield. He later migrated to Kodagu and purchased 35 acres of land and started planting coffee as the main crop, along with black pepper (3,000 vines) and orange (500 plants) as intercrops in 17 acres. In the remaining 18 acres, he raised cardamom as main crop.

"Initially I harvested 4,000 kg (dry weight) of cardamom and the yield subsequently dropped to 300 kg. I incurred an expense of seven lakh rupees and got Rs. 10 lakh as income." Disheartened and disappointed, the farmer accidentally happened to attend a seminar on cardamom and black pepper cultivation, organized by the Cardamom Research Centre (CRC) at Appangala in Kodagu. "When the yield of cardamom dropped, I visited CRC to find out ways to overcome the problem. This is my life and I cannot abandon it and try to find some other job. I knew well that my life and income depended on increasing the yield and after a thorough discussion, I decided to bring one acre of land under cardamom, strictly following their recommendations."

Planting space

The farmer cleared the existing variety plants from an acre and planted a high yielding variety released by the institute. He planted the crops at 7x 7 feet spacing, accommodating about 1,000 plants in an acre. A mixture of well- composted coffee husk and cow dung each (2 kg), neem cake (250-500g), and NPK mixture (300gms) was applied per plant, twice a year (pre and post monsoon applications). Two sprays of Bordeaux mixture (1 per cent) were done to protect the plants from major diseases.

Tackling insect problem

To tackle the insect problem, Phorate or Cypermethrin were sprayed as per the advice of the scientists, and sprinkler irrigation provided to protect the plants from drought. "It was a turning point in my life," says the farmer. "The plants yielded 1,300 kg of dry capsules per hectare and were more resistant to pest infestations, posing a major problem in cardamom cultivation. I spent about Rs. 1 lakh on the crop and earned a net profit of Rs.3 lakh from such a small area."

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