

## Growing different crops to script a success story

August 15, 2013



Great work: Poornanand Venkatesh Bhat in his garden.- Photo: Special arrangement

Hard work, dedication and some innovative thinking to make use of available resources for getting maximum benefit are practised by few farmers. Mr. Poornaand Venkatesh Bhat from Uttara Kannada district, Karnataka is an exception. A contractor-turned-farmer by choice, he started cultivation in 21 acres but soon had to give it up since his land was bought by the Government to set up a naval base. He invested the money he received from the Government in 19 acres of barren wasteland. Through sheer hard work he transformed the barren land in a few years into a big arecanut, nutmeg and pepper based intercrop plantation.

Today almost all leading agricultural scientists and students across the country are visiting his farm to learn more on arecanut, pepper and nutmeg growing techniques. "His contributions towards plantation crops in general and spices like nutmeg in particular are noteworthy. Majority of nutmeg plants during seedling stage are males though sporadically some female seedlings are also found.

### **No technique**

There is no other way to identify the sex of the nutmeg plant during seedling stage. It takes a minimum of five years after planting to know the gender of the plant. But Mr. Bhat has succeeded in detecting the sex of the plant at seed stage and he intends to patent this process of sex detection," says Dr. S. Prabhu Kumar, Zonal Project Director, ICAR, Bangalore.

### **For nutmeg varieties**

He has also identified and developed four varieties of nutmeg and has about 2,500 nutmeg trees in his garden, which is considered to be the world's largest nutmeg conservatory according to scientists from The Indian Institute of Spices Research, Kozhikode. Each tree in his farm bears about 1,000 fruits a year (from sixth year of planting). One kg of nuts contains about 170 dry fruits along with the hard outer shell and one kg of mace. The farmer is able to get an income of Rs. 1,600 per kg of mace and Rs. 500 per kg of nuts. Not stopping with mere selling of the nuts, he has also gone into value addition of the produce. His

nutmeg jams and pickles are quite popular in the market since they are rare and tasty.

### **Many technologies**

"This innovative farmer-scientist has developed many technologies in nutmeg like harvesting and separation of fully matured nuts, washing, blanching, drying, storage, processing, grading, storing and value addition. These things are usually done by research and development institutions," says Dr. Prabhu Kumar. He is also an expert in arecanut and black pepper cultivation.

He gets double the average yield from both these and is also involved in black pepper processing to manufacture white pepper, which has great demand in the export market. Till date 6,000 to 7,000 farmers from Karnataka, Goa, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra have visited him to learn this process.

His arecanut, pepper, nutmeg, coconut nurseries are popular among farmers. In fact many farmers who have such plantations have bought the seedlings from his nursery. "Before starting nutmeg-arecanut cultivation I grew only turmeric. I was able to get about 20 tonnes of turmeric from an acre. In fact this was considered quite a feat in the region and I had many visitors to my place after local media reported it," says Mr. Bhat.

### **Monthly expense**

About 25 permanent workers help Mr. Bhat in his daily farm work and his monthly expense for their salaries works out to Rs. 35,000. His annual income from his farm is more than Rs. 80 lakh. "Even CEOs in some big companies do not get such a big income. He is an example of dedication, innovation and hard work to make the best use of available resource to reap the maximum benefit," according to Dr. Prabhu Kumar. Both his sons — a lawyer and a banker — have left their jobs to help him. He is a good example for those interested to take up farming.

### **Advice to growers**

"Be it one acre or 50 acres never put your entire investment or attention on a single crop. Grow different varieties and plan it in such a way so that once harvesting of one crop is over, harvesting of the other starts. This way a farmer can get some sort of continuous income," seems to be his advice for other growers.

The farmer has been conferred several awards both by the state and central government for his sterling work.

### **For More details**

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