

Low investment, high income scheme for women



The self help group members at their vermicompost manufacturing unit at Kozhikode in Kerala.

Unlike most other vocations, income from agriculture is not always steady. An unsteady market, fluctuating price and adverse climate can adversely affect farmers. Against this backdrop empowerment of farmwomen is very important for strengthening the economic security of the farming community.

No major investment

There are a number of agriculture based enterprises that can be practiced by women, effectively utilizing the leisure time available to them. But it becomes important to select an enterprise which does not require any major investment. A good example is Mrs. Lysamma Baby of Kozhikode district in Kerala and her team of three women who have become successful entrepreneurs in vermiculture technology. All the three women hail from poor families with a land holding of 10-70 cents and had to depend on their husbands' earnings for all their requirements. Their husbands mainly worked as daily agricultural labourers earning about Rs. 90-100 per day.

Field visits

The women were advised to undergo training in vermicompost technologies and were also taken for field visits to several successful vermicompost units in the district, according to Dr. T.K. Jacob, Training Organiser. Since the members were economically backward, they were asked to form a self-help group (SHG) for availing loan and other subsidies from the local Panchayat institutions. Accordingly a SHG named 'Nidhi' was formed.

A project on vermiculture was prepared on their behalf by the scientists, and the local Panchayat provided them with a loan of Rs. 5,000 for starting a vermicompost unit. The members identified

a common place in the land of Ms. Lysamma for construction of the unit. The group constructed 4 vermicompost tanks with ant wells around them. The tanks were provided with iron net frames on top to protect the worms from rats, lizards and birds. A temporary thatched shed was also constructed over the tanks to cover and protect the tanks from rains. The scientists gave on-site technical help for the construction of the tanks. The initial culture of earthworm species was supplied by the KVK. Ms. Lysamma, the group leader who owned a single cow and a calf, agreed to supply the required cow dung for the unit. The unit became functional within 3 months.

Waste generation

The group members collected and gathered their own kitchen and farm wastes for the production of the compost. Initially all the members worked together, and then decided to work in rotation. They spent 2-3 hours a day at the unit. The first compost was ready within 60 days of release of the worms into the tank. They got more than 200 kg of compost in the first harvest. The success of the unit was due to low investment and the women could work during their leisure time. The group members also started small-scale cultivation of vegetables, banana etc. in the interspaces of coconut palms in their lands.

Dependence reduced

The members feel that the quality of the vegetables and banana produced utilizing vermicompost is superior and their dependence on the local market for vegetables has greatly reduced. Two members of the group completely brought their land under organic farming applying only vermicompost. The group started selling the excess compost at the rate of Rs. 8 -10 per kg. The local demand for the compost is high and the group is not able to meet the demand.

Bank deposit

Ms. Lysamma says, “We feel proud as we have started generating our own income and presently we now have a deposit of more than Rs. 25,000 in the bank.” The group has so far realized a total income of Rs.53, 514 from vermicompost alone in the past 2 years.

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