

Popular demand: Value addition means mushrooming success



Mr. George Thomas of Kozhikode seen harvesting the mushrooms.

The problems are increasing: labour shortage, spiralling costs of chemical pesticides and fertilizers, difficulty in marketing, and absence of proper guidelines in price fixation for harvested produce. So, farmers are desperate to ensure minimum and sustained income from crops that face these problems in minimal measure. Low investment and good returns seem to be the major considerations for farmers now. It is in this back drop that mushroom cultivation seems to be catching up with many small farmers as it is a “low investment and maximum return crop”.

Remunerative

Mr. George Thomas is a small farmer having about 4.5 acres of land. Though there are a number of crops grown in his field, the desire to experiment with a crop that requires little input, less care, and at the same time gives good returns made him turn to mushroom cultivation.

Today Mr. George is a model in organic mushroom cultivation and has been conducting training programmes for other interested farmers in the district. Initially he used the spawn of *Pleurotes sajor caju*. He took a bank loan of Rs.1 lakh from a co-operative bank and constructed a shed. For providing ventilation, four windows were provided on the walls at equal distances. The windows were fitted with fine mosquito nets for preventing entry of insects.

Reducing temperature

The roofing was done with tiles and over it a green shade net was spread. Below the roof (inside), a layer of plaited coconut leaf was installed to further reduce temperature build up in the shed. On the floor, he spread a layer of concrete jelly (of one inch thickness) and sprayed water regularly over it to maintain humidity. About 600 beds were constructed inside the shed.

A second variety called CO2 released by the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore, is also being grown in hanging baskets inside the shed. Paddy straw is used as the medium for growing all the mushrooms. All the work, such as hot water sterilization of straw, bag filling with sterilized straw, spawning, humidity maintenance in the sheds through water sprays are carried out by his family. At present the harvest is done daily and Mr. George is able to harvest 5 kg of mushrooms every day.

Marketing

How does he market the product? Mr. George said, “The mushrooms are sold in the local market at Rs.100 per kg. I am able to earn Rs.500 a day. I have been able to get a net income of Rs.15,000 in 2006 and Rs. 25,000 in 2007.” In addition he has also started value addition by converting a portion of the fresh mushrooms into pickles. “My pickles are being exported to U.S and Gulf at Rs.50 per 300gm bottle,” he said.

Brand

name

A group of ten farmers have already started marketing under the brand name Ayur mushrooms,” said Dr. T.K. Jacob, Principal Scientist, Indian Institute of Spices Research, Kozhikode, Kerala.

Contact details: Mr. George Thomas, Panackavayal House, Kalangali, Athiodi Post, Koorachund, Kozhikode, Kerala, and Dr. T.K. Jacob, Principal Scientist, Indian Institute of Spices Research, Kozhikode, Kerala-673012, e-mail: jacobtk@spices.res.in, phone: 09447539967.

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