THE HINDU

An experiment with asafoetida leads to a crop protection technique

Chellamuthu, in his field with the asafoetida placed inside a gunny bag at Kodumudi, Erode, Tamil Nadu.

INVENTIONS AND discoveries by farmers do not often get recognition from experts because they find a lack of scientific validity. But farmers who benefit from such discoveries vouch for their efficiency. Mr. K. Chellamuthu, a farm labourer, at Kodumudi village, Erode, Tamil Nadu, came under a lot of criticism from experts, when he developed a herbal spray for control of eriophyd mite in coconut trees.

Non poisonous

"Unlike toxic chemical sprays, the bio-spray being non poisonous, does not cause harm to the crops, field, environment and humans," says Dr. K. Natrajan (mobile: 9443358379) a physician and organic farmer in Kodumudi. Giving details on its preparation, Mr. Chellamuthu says:

"About one kg of custard apple leaves, turmeric rhizome, *peenari changu (*Tamil name*)* (*Clerodendrum inermi*), Aloe vera, Nochi (*Vitex negundo*), neem kernel (*Azadirachta indica*) and calotropis (*calotropis gigantia*) each should be ground into a fine paste by adding sufficient water and about five litres of essence extracted from it.

"The essence must be diluted in 15 litres of water (to make it 20 litres) and sprayed on to the crown of the tree at the rate of 2 litres per tree after harvesting the nuts. "The procedure should be repeated once every two months.

"Nearly 2,000 coconut trees treated with my herbal formula are healthy and about 300 farmers are using it," says Mr. Chellamuthu.

Regular spraying

Regular spraying (once every 2 months in the beginning and later twice a year) controls the infestation, according to Chellamuthu. The farmer also advocates use of asafoetida for increasing crop yield.

"I accidentally discovered that asafoetida acts as a pest repellent and aids plant growth," he says.

The school dropout only knows that asafoetida benefits plant health but does not know why.

Aids crop growth

For an acre he places one kg of asafoetida inside a sack and places it in the irrigation channel. "The water along with the dissolved asafoetida repels pests and aids crop growth," he says.

Where did he learn this technique?
“I once jokingly suggested to my neighbour, to use the surplus half-a-kg asafoetida he had, on his ring gourd plants affected by pests. I wanted to tease him and did not know the consequences,” he says.

Healthy yield
To the neighbour’s and his own surprise, the plants not only survived the pest attack but also grew well to yield bigger, healthier gourds than the normal ones. Similarly a farmer from a neighbouring village, on hearing about this, also used it in his 2.5 acres for jasmine plants and got a good yield.

“I started experimenting asafoetida’s effect on paddy, sesame seeds, ground nut, tomato, brinjal and other crops and found that the yield increased and the plants were healthy,” says Chellamuthu.
Several farmers in the district have stopped spraying pesticides and follow Chellamuthu’s practice.

Positive report
The Centre for Plant Protection Studies at the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore, undertook a scientific study on the effect of the bio-spray on paddy and brinjal crops and endorsed its usage. For more information readers can contact Mr. Chellamuthu at Karukkamapalayam, Oonchalur Post, Kodumudi via, Erode District, Tamil Nadu, phone: 04204-266127, mobile: 9486602389.