

Farmers must also start marketing their produce

July 3, 2014



Though natural or organic farming is nothing new in the country, the number of farmers who have started taking it up seriously has seen a positive rise in the last some years.

“Though exact figures are not available to indicate the number of cultivators in this system of farming one thing we can be sure of is that compared to a decade back, today, both farmers and consumers are very much aware about the importance of pesticide-free crops. In fact in every village across the country farmers are aware of the importance of organic cultivation,” says Dr. Dr.R.Vaidyanathan, Head, Oilseeds Research Institute, TNAU, Tindivanam, Tamil Nadu.

Attitude

Be it 10 acres or as little as two acres, the drive to do sustainable farming stems from the farmers’ attitude.

Escalating inputs costs, especially, are creating a mindset among growers to try and see whether this method could help them cut down on expenses. If it does help, then they continue to do it, serving as guides for others desirous of doing the same, according to Dr. Vaidyanathan.

Mr. K. Somu is one such small farmer whose farm (3.40 acres) in Villipuram attracts several visitors everyday from different parts of the state to see and experience personally the magic of this system. The progressive farmer is cultivating fodder crops like sorghum, bajra and trees for wood and bamboo (for preventing soil erosion) along the borders of his farm.

The crops are grown in a three tier system. Tree crops like coconut, arecanut, oilpalm and different fruit trees are grown as main crops and in between them intercrops such as turmeric, pineapple, banana, papaya, curry leaf, amla, sweet lime and orange are grown. Creepers liker pepper and betelvine are planted around the coconut and arecanut trees.

Irrigation

Apart from these about 100 varieties of herbal and medicinal plants are also grown. All the crops are irrigated using drip, sprinkler and rain gun irrigation.

Weed control is managed by using natural mulches such as banana leaves, coconut leaves, newspapers etc and Pongam cake, castor and mahua cake are applied to the soil to protect the crops from soil born pest, disease and nematodes.

Some of the produce from his farm are converted into value based products and seem to have a good market at his farm gate itself.

“Farmers must change their mind that they are for just growing crops. The marketing world today is tough and competitive. People are on the lookout for good quality products and don't mind the expense on travel if they get a good product.

Marketing

“I am easily able to market my products in my farm and in a separate organic outlet opened at the Government established Farmers market (Uzhavar Sandhai) in my area. My organic fruits like papaya and others are sold out in a day at the outlet and I get the money back the next day,” he says.

Along with him, about 100 farmers in the region have started a registered farmers federation unit called Vedapuri Organic Farmers Federation to market their produce

“Though there is a notion that organic food is priced at a higher cost than others a visit to the local rice retail shop would prove that in retail shops best quality raw rice grown conventionally is sold for anything between Rs. 45-55 depending on the area, location and size of the shop. Whereas, if you buy the same rice wholesale (75 kgs bag) from an organic farmer the cost per kg works out to be Rs. 50 a kg,” says Mr. Somu. A farm must be an integration of different activities, according to Mr. Somu. Birds, animals, crops, fruit trees, honey bees etc all have a role in food production. Honey bees especially are one of the main agents in aiding good yield especially for fruiting trees.

Honey bees

“I have about 10 honey bee boxes and today at about two km from my farm you can see different wild flowering plants on both sides all because of these bees. Eliminating one or all of them and talking about growing food is like setting one's own house on fire,” he says with a smile.

Mr. Somu is presently doing his III rd year B.FTech (Bachelor of Farm Technology) at the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) programme from TNAU.

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