

# 'Villages must become self-reliant to increase food production'

The village, once known for its high debt, is completely organic today

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When the father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi, envisioned 'gramaswaraj,' he would never have dreamt that the country's agriculture sector would face numerous problems as it is, today.

"From price increase to lack of marketing opportunities, today's farmer finds himself in a cauldron of problems.

From seeds to labour, a farmer has to depend on external sources today for growing his crops," says Dr. Kamalassanan Pillai, Bio-technologist, Head of R&D, VK- NARDEP, Vivekanandapuram, Kanyakumari.

## Two ways

According to Dr. Pillai, for agriculture to become viable, villages have to become self-reliant. This can be achieved only if natural and sustainable farming systems are practised and easy marketing channels are established. "Without these two crop failures and suicide stories could continue to haunt us," he emphasises.

## Concentrate on seeds

"The first thing farmers should concentrate on is the seeds," he says.

Farmers should carry out seed selection after every crop, so that they can improve upon the productivity of the native seed.

Instead of buying hybrids, they should sow and preserve native seed varieties. The next thing is inputs in the form of manures.

With most of the villages having cattle and livestock, manufacturing organic inputs must become an important agenda for every farmer.



**ROLE MODEL:** Dr. Kamalassanan Pillai (sitting second from left) along with the farmers in front of the eco shop. - PHOTO: M.J. PRABU

Farmers should concentrate more on bio-manure from animals, biomass waste and liquid bio-manures.

The third factor is marketing. Every village must have a place (called eco-shop) where the produces from the farmers' fields and organic inputs such as bio fertilizers, vermicompost, trichoderma viride and azospirillum are made available to farmers and interested persons.

Has such a project been achieved in any village so far?

Yes, under a project called bio farm started by the Vivekananda Kendra in Kozhikoduputhai village in Kanyakumari district.

## Basic plan

The basic philosophy of bio-farm, according to Dr. Pillai, is that the farm and home

level diversity of subsystems has to be increased. That is, livestock, poultry, vermicompost unit and biogas plant are linked to the local ecological and economical context of the farmer.

## External dependency

"By doing so, the external dependency of the farmer reduces progressively over the years, and his food security increases," he says.

Bio-farm empowers the farmers to use and take care of the local common resources by revival of local knowledge systems with expert guidance.

It also includes farm-level processing of agri-produce, enabling the farmers to enhance the shelf-life and direct marketing to the consumers, which we are yet to be tried.

Are there plans to expand such eco-shops in the near future?

We will help other NGOs and like minded organisations in opening such eco-shops in other parts of the State or country based on our experience at Kozhikottupottai.

Initially a paddy growing area, the lure of more income from rose flowers from a major flower market nearby made the farmers of Kozhukoothupatti shift to chemical rose cultivation.

## Low yield

Though at first they were satisfied with the returns, over the years there was a decreasing return both in terms of yield and income, while at the same time the input costs were escalating.

It was then that the Vivekananda Kendra-Natural Resources Development Project (VK-NARDEP) went to the village to establish the bio-farm project.

The village today is completely organic and farmers manufacture their own animal manures and leaf extracts which help to repel pests and reduce disease incidence by enhancing the internal energy system of the crop.

Once known for its high debt rate among farmers and stone quarries in neighbouring hills, Kozhikoduputhai village today stands transformed into an outstanding example of sustainable agriculture.

For more details and visit to the village readers can contact Dr. Kamalassanan Pillai, Bio technologist, Head of the R&D, VK- NARDEP, Vivekanandapuram, Kanyakumari - 629 702, Tamil Nadu, email: azollapillai@gmail.com, mobile:9387212005.