

Rosemary shows the way to keep wild animals at bay



Saved by scent: Mrs. Puttiyamma, tribal lady farmer of Bargur hills in Erode district of Tamil Nadu in her Rosemary field.

Experiencing unexpected losses in agriculture due to adverse climate or pest attack is a common feature in the life of farmers. Even the best technologies fail when they have to gamble with adverse climate. The problem is all the more acute for those living in hilly regions bordering reserve forest areas.

Crop and life loss

Because apart from the vagaries of climate, farmers also have to keep track of movements of wild animals in their fields which cause sudden and disastrous loss both to the crops and sometimes to human lives.

Mrs. Puttiyamma, is a tribal lady farmer of Bargur hills in Erode district of Tamil Nadu who has successfully proved that all the above stated facts are not a deterrent when it comes to growing crops in the hills and successfully marketing them.

Casual jobs

Mrs. Puttiyamma owns about 4 acres of land and is presently growing Rosemary in about half an acre. "I was growing ragi and double beans and reaped only a minimum margin. With no alternative I was forced to seek other casual jobs to meet my family's basic needs. "It was then that I heard from sources in my village about MYRADA KVK (Mysore Resettlement and Development Agency Krishi Vigyan Kendra) which has been encouraging farmers in our area to grow Rosemary (an aromatic herb) and are also helping them to market the produce through the Rosemary Group (created mainly for farmers growing Rosemary)," she explained.

She has joined in the Rosemary Growers Group three years ago and started cultivating the crop. Rosemary thrives well both in irrigated and dry land conditions and is not disturbed and grazed by any wild animal because of its aroma. As it is a perennial crop there is no need for investing money for seeds and land preparation every year and the crop provides a stable income.

Income details

Mrs. Puttiyamma has so far harvested about 2,898 kg of fresh leaves and has earned about Rs.11.00 per kg of fresh leaves in the past three years.

"I have so far earned about Rs.31,878 in 3 years from 1/2 an acre of land under rainfed condition whereas the returns from rest 3.5 acres of Ragi crop and beans have been only Rs.17,500. My income kindled the interest of other farmers who also started growing the crop," she said.

Oil extraction unit

As there has been an increase in the number of farmers who have taken up Rosemary cultivation the District Rural Development Agency, Erode, has funded for establishment of an oil extraction unit nearby. The unit has reduced the herbage loss during transport and has been able to increase the income to about Rs.2,000 per acre besides providing employment to the rural youth.

The tribals of this region were mainly growing crops such as ragi, double beans, turmeric and some fruit varieties. But due to constant incursion by wild animals from the bordering reserve forests many of them were not able to succeed in their farming operations, explained, Mr. P. Alagesan, Programme Co-ordinator, Myrada Krishi Vigyan Kendra.

Aromatic crops

"When some of the tribals approached us for guidance our team visited the area and after careful study realized that aromatic crops can be safely grown there as the climate is cool and favourable and also the fragrance emanating from these aromatic plants will keep the wild animals at bay," he said.

The tribals were made to interact with officials of the HOPE IN NILGRIS organization in Udthagamandalam who were already pioneers in the cultivation and promotion of Rosemary crop. After the exposure visit, the farmers showed more interest and involvement in the cultivation of Rosemary. Mrs. Puttiyamma was conferred the 'Velanmai Chemmal' award by the TNAU in 2006. At present more than 100 acres of the hilly region have come under this crop cultivation. Information and training to the tribals were arranged by Myrada-KVK.

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