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Helping small jackfruit farmers boost yield and income



Heritage tag: Narasimhaiah pointing to his 300 years old jack tree.

The farm of Mr. K. Narasimhaiah in Doddaballapur taluk in Hubli is easy to locate. Almost every person in the region seems to know him. The reason: a 300-year-old jackfruit tree that stands majestically in the midst of several mango trees in the field. “The last Maharajah of Mysore Jayachamarajendra Wadiyar, and former Diwan of the royal palace, M. Visvesvaraya relished the fruits of this tree and loved their taste. In fact Mr. Visvesvaraya used to take some fruits back home whenever he visited my place,” says the farmer proudly pointing to the tree.

Taste

The taste of the fruit is so famous in the State that it brings people from far during the harvest season. Mr. Narasimhaiah is a happy farmer, for the tree bears nearly 300 fruits annually, which he sells for Rs 20,000- Rs.30,000.

“This is not an isolated or freak case. Many farmers in the region are selling their fruits for a

premium price today as they are considered the best in terms of taste, colour, and appearance. "Today people book orders through phone for reserving the fruits," says Dr. K. Narayana Gowda, Vice Chancellor, University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore.

Several jackfruit growers are able to get some money from their trees through a project called DBT-Rural Bio-resource complex project started by the University.

"Realising the potential of the fruit and the need to exploit it beneficially, the University staff advised Mr. Narasimhaiah to maintain the tree properly and also raise seedlings from the mother tree for the project.

Seedlings

Accordingly the farmer raised the seedlings and supplied it to the project at Rs.15 per plant. The officials handed over the seedlings free of cost to several small and marginal farmers in the area," explains Mr. K.N. Srinivasappa, program coordinator, KVK, Bangalore rural district, UAS.

"One advantage in planting the tree is that after some initial caring the tree does not require much further attention, and most importantly, does not need labour. Especially today, when rural India faces acute labour shortage, jackfruit farmers are quite happy as the tree generates some income at a very minimal cost," he says.

The University, in a bid to encourage many people to take up this particular variety of jackfruit cultivation, started selling the seedlings at the annual Krishi melas, specially arranged jackfruit exhibitions, and other functions.

Account details

"If you see the accounts for the last 3 years one can see that during 2007- 08, about 8,900 seedlings worth Rs.1,33,500 were sold. In 2009-10, about 7,056 seedlings worth Rs.1,05,840 were raised and sold. Farmers who used to sell the fruit for Rs.15 to Rs.60 earlier, now get a better price of Rs.50- Rs.500 per fruit depending on the size," says Dr. Gowda.

A State level jackfruit mela was organized at Lalbagh. On an average, a farmer earned

Rs.10,600 in five days. Nine farmers sold the fruits for Rs.2,751 in two days at another function held in the University campus for three days, he adds. The project brought benefits to about 75 villages and more than 4,000 farmers in the region.

Demand

“The demand for the region's jackfruits and seedlings is increasing every year due to the platform, awareness and importance created under the project. Today farmers are selling their fruits at Horticultural Produce Co-operative Marketing Society (HOPCOMS), Bangalore from Rs.5 to Rs. 8 per kg. A private ice cream manufacturing company has also procured 2,000 kg of jackfruit at the rate of Rs.12 per kg,” explains Dr. Gowda.

“Even though this fruit is totally organic in nature, more than 50 per cent of the produce goes as waste nationwide every year due to lack of awareness among consumers.

“A number of value added products can be prepared from the jackfruit tree. The leaves are excellent fodder for animals, fallen leaves act as natural soil mulch and manure, and its wood is useful in the manufacture of musical instruments, while its latex is useful in ayurvedic preparations,” says Dr. Gowda.

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