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**Farmers must decide on input requirements of their crops**



“A person suffering from some ailment chooses the type of treatment he desires — whether to choose allopathy, siddha, unani or ayurveda treatment. Similarly farmers are at liberty to choose the type of inputs they need for their crops, instead of listening to others,” says farmer Mr. G. Ranga Prabhu, from Theni, Madurai.

Mr. Prabhu earned about Rs. 3,00,000 from banana (G-9 variety) from cultivation in three acres in 9-10 months using only natural manures. A lawyer turned organic farmer, he claims that natural inputs work best and can result in a good yield.

Open invite

“I invite people to visit my field in Theni, to see for themselves the healthy growth of my banana crops. I use only waste from my piggery unit and some other natural inputs such as effective micro-organisms for my crop,” he explains.

Presently there are two views regarding crop cultivation according to him. One group professes its faith in chemical based agriculture and the other, in using natural methods.

“It is best for the farmer to study the pros and cons of both and then decide on his own as to what methods will suit him,” he cautions.

But isn't sourcing inputs such as dung pose a problem for farmers desirous of taking up natural farming?

“True, more than the practitioners, those manufacturing and selling organic inputs today make a good profit. Cows and many animals are practically disappearing from many villages (often sold to the butchers).

“Those desirous of taking up organic cultivation must first start rearing a few farm animals as a means of getting the raw materials for making the inputs,” says his wife Gayatri.

Both agree that dwindling land resources and farmers selling their lands will pose practical problems for rearing animals.

#### Holistic approach

“Though today organic food is fast becoming a fad among the city dwellers, some 50-60 years ago, our grandfathers' grew crops only through organic methods. A holistic approach to the village ecosystem — farm, animals, birds, insects — was undertaken and everything played a role in different stages of a plant growth,” explains Mr. Prabhu.

“But in the name of development and scientific methods of cultivation the learned scientific fraternity ridiculed these effective practices and advocated the need for using artificial inputs.

“Now, the very same elite people realize the dangers of these chemicals filtering into the food we eat, and are suddenly preaching the advantages of going “organic” and “ecosensitive,” adds Mrs Gayatri.

#### Proven fact

According to Mr. Prabhu, it is a proven fact that cost of cultivation comes down to nearly 70 per cent if natural inputs are used. It is also a myth that the yield in organic cultivation is low.

The agro-chemical industry's claims of increased yield usually lasts for only the first few years. After that, farmers report a significant drop and sometimes complete degradation of the soil, whereas organic farmers in the same area are able to sustain good harvests at almost the same

levels.

According to a report published in the Confederation of the Indian Farmers Associations (Cifa), the average monthly income of farmers ranges between Rs 1,578 and Rs 8,321, while the lowest paid government employee gets Rs 10,000, every month. "The report clearly proves the poor financial condition of our farmers," says Mr. Prabhu.

He explains "Government cannot be expected to help the farmers in distress. They think their work is over after they announce the freebies and subsidies. But till date no government ever bothered to monitor whether these concessions ever reached the needy farmer.

Try to practice

"To them these announcements become achievements only during election time. Our farmers should realise that they are responsible for themselves and even if not totally, should at least try to practice natural cropping methods at least in a corner of their farm," he says.

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