

## Aromatic crops provide good returns in hilly regions

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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. 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 lady farmer of Bargur hills in Erode district of Tamil Nadu, 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. Mrs. Puttiyamma owns about 4 acres of land and is presently growing Rosemary in about half an acre.

### Rosemary group

"I was growing ragi and double beans and reaped only a minimum margin. With no alternative I sought other casual jobs to meet my family's basic needs." "I heard from sources in my village about MYRADA KVK (Mysore Resettlement and Development Agency — Krishi Vigyan Kendra) which is encouraging farmers in our area to grow Rosemary (an aromatic herb) and are also helping them to market the same produce by forming the rosemary group (Group of farmers with common interest being to market Rosemary)," she explained. She joined the group 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.

### Harvesting tonnage

Mrs. Puttiyamma harvested around 2 tonnes/year of fresh leaves and earned about Rs.20.00 per kg of fresh leaves in the past three years. "I have earned about Rs.40,000 per year from 1/2 an acre of land under rain fed condition whereas the returns from rest 3.5 acres of Ragi crop and beans have been only half of this income. My income kindled the interest of other farmers who also started growing the crop," she said.

**Oil extraction**

As there has been an increase in the number of farmers who took to Rosemary cultivation the District Rural Development Agency, Erode funded the establishment of an oil extraction unit nearby. The unit reduced the herbage loss during transport and has been able to increase the income to about Rs.3,600 per acre besides providing employment to the rural youth. The tribals of this region grew crops such as ragi, double beans, tapioca, turmeric and some fruit varieties. But due to constant incursion by wild animals from the bordering reserve forests many of them could not succeed in their farming operations, explained Dr. P. Alagesan, Programme Co-ordinator, Myrada Krishi Vigyan Kendra. "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 says.

**Clear understanding**

Myrada krishi vigyan Kendra encourages group approach to get fair price to the product. A clear understanding between marketing agencies and growers committee is ensured. The tribals are made to interact with officials Hope — an organization in Nilgiris — are pioneers in the cultivation and promotion of the crop. In order to get additional revenue in the rosemary field/garden, other long term crops such as Tea, Eucalyptus citridora can be encouraged as a border crop, says Mr.Pachiappan, of the Kendra. The Tamil Nadu Agricultural University conferred an award on the lady farmer.

To speak to the farmer readers can contact Dr. P. Alagesan, Programme Co-ordinator, Myrada Krishi Vigyan Kendra, No.272, Perumal Nagar, Pudukkottai Road, Kalingiyam – Post, Gobichettipalayam – 638453, Erode District, Tamil Nadu, e-mail : myradakvk@gmail.com, myradakvk@dataone.in, website : www.myradakvk.org, Phone : 04285 241626, 241627.

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