

Farmer sows intercrop seed, reaps benefit

- Successful experiment with sugarcane and marigold in East Champaran sets off a trend

R.N. SINHA IN MOTIHARI

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Lalan Prasad Shukla (right) at his farm. Picture by Ajit Kumar Verma

Intercropping by a progressive East Champaran farmer and subsequent good returns have encouraged many others to emulate him. Lalan Prasad Shukla is a graduate and comes from a suburban village near Motihari town. Shukla first began intercropping — growing two or more crops in proximity — as an experiment in 2011.

He grew sugarcane with marigold over an acre of land and the total output of about Rs 1.75 lakh encouraged him to expand this kind of farming over more acres. He now intercroops on over five acres and earns not less than Rs 9 lakh annually.

His investment is around Rs 1.5 lakh. His successful experiment prompted the district horticulture officer to host a meeting of the district-level horticulture development committee under the district magistrate in September 2013 to encourage local farmers. The meeting was attended by district horticulture officer, agriculture officer, officials

from Nabard, district industries office, the lead bank and the farmer at the centre of it all, Lalan Prasad Shukla himself.

The meeting resolved to extend subsidies to farmers to encourage intercropping. The subsidy amount remains an unfulfilled promise but the inspiration farmers from nine blocks in the district derived from Shukla proved to be an eye-opener to many. District horticulture officer Ganesh Prasad and agriculture officer S.K. Vajpayee had no answer when asked about the subsidy to farmers. But farmers like Ram Pukar Singh of Kalyanpur and Indrajit Chauhan of Turkaulia have switched to intercropping and are doing well.

“Over 12 farmers from Lalan’s and adjacent villages in Motihari block have switched to intercropping. The system pays well,” said a farmer, Lokesh Kumar Shukla.

“We intercrop marigold with sugarcane in October-November and then again in February-March,” Lokesh said.

“Farmers who adopted intercropping are now free to sell their products — flowers as well as jaggery — in the open market without depending on any sugar factory for safe disposal of their farm produce,” said Lalan. Lalan was earlier known for his record sugarcane produce but as the condition of sugar mills in Champaran dwindled, he toyed with the idea of floriculture in 2000 and after procuring knowhow from Calcutta, began the same. Soon others followed suit.

Farmers like Pawan Kumar Shukla, Dinesh Kumar Kushwaha, Vinod Prasad, Mangal Prasad, Subhas Kushwaha, Lakhon Ram, Kedar Shukla and Shyamakant Shukla — once aggrieved by the closure of sugar mills — are now a happy lot. He then agriculture minister had honoured Lalan with the title of “Kisanshri” in 2007.

In 2012, during the centenary celebrations of Bihar, Lalan was one of eight people from various fields whom then chief minister Nitish Kumar honoured with the title of “Bihar Gaurav” in the field of floriculture. The same year, Lalan was a special invitee for a discussion on agriculture by actor Aamir Khan, who was visiting Bihar to promote his television programme *Satyamev Jayate*.