

Agro bio pharmacy concept well received by Kerala farmers

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On sale: The biopharmacy concept envisages converting Kerala into an entirely organic state in five to 10 years.— Photo: Special Arrangement

Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) or farm science centres exist in almost all districts of the country to support farming activities. But only a handful of them are able to conceive new innovative ideas and transform them into action at the field level. The Kerala Kannur kendra is one such institution that has been successful in introducing an agro bio pharmacy and farmers' engineering service and training (FEST) centre. The major problem faced while adopting organic farming is the non-availability of trustworthy organic products and the cumbersomeness of preparation of organic products.

Different products

An array of products ranging from tobacco decoction to pheromone traps are produced and sold at the pharmacy. The labour for the production of these items is provided by different self-help groups trained by the Kendra. "It is a concept conceived by us and is aimed at providing inputs required for organic agriculture. Safe use of insecticides is just one of the numerous tools of Integrated Pest Management recommended by agricultural scientists to safeguard soil and human health," says Dr. K. Abdul Kareem, Programme Coordinator, Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Kannur, Kerala Agricultural University. "Farmers, however, usually depend solely on chemical insecticides as they think that this is the only practical control measure to obtain quick results. The biopharmacy offers organic substitutes to chemicals," he adds. Another important product available at the pharmacy and is quite rare in other organic bio input manufacturing units is neem oil soap named as Neem-X, which is a ready-to-use neem based pesticide. The biopharmacy concept promoted throughout the State as the organic farming policy of the government envisages the phasing out of chemical pesticides and fertilizers from the farming sector to convert Kerala into an entirely organic state in five to 10 years.

Mango cultivation

Another work the Kendra presently does is highlighting the importance of mango cultivation as an alternative food crop to cashew and rubber in Kerala. Many believe rubber has been destroying the other native crops of the region, including cashew, and thus harming biodiversity. The Kannur KVK has produced and supplied over 50,000 mango grafts of 15 varieties, including rare and indigenous ones such as Phirangiladua, Kalappadi, Mallika, Malgoa, Alphonso, Sindhooram, Banganappally, Banglora, Imampasand and Kudadat as also home-grown varieties such as Chandrakkaran and Kuttiyattor to different farmers. All these varieties have been carefully collected from various sources, including the KAU's Research Stations, Aralam Farm and Karimbam Farm of the Department of Agriculture.

Encouraging

"The response to this novel idea of promoting mango in villages is encouraging as there are no mango growers in the region. Mangoes are not grown on a commercial scale here," says Dr. Abdul. The initiative is envisaged as a drive to groom mango cultivators by encouraging them to adopt scientific cultivation practices, including irrigation, fertilizer application and plant protection measures. To combat farm labour shortage, the Kendra groomed teams of certified para-technicians and named them as paddy task force, vegetable technicians etc. These new generation workers are trained in the use of machines, technologies and customer relations. They apply science based technologies and undertake work on contract basis. The model enables a shift in focus of extension from farmers to technicians.

response

Recommendation

The Kerala Planning Board recommended the paddy task force model for state-wide adoption. Started with 16 women in one panchayat, the task force today has spread to seventeen panchayats with 81

members. A farmers' engineering service & training has also been started to extend services such as repair, maintenance, spare parts fitting, service and training for agriculture equipment. The Kendra was conferred a national award for its work among the farming community.

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