

Not all weeds are harmful, some have beneficial properties too

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Alternative: It was noticed that many beneficial insects like ladybird beetle preyed on pests attacking the paddy crop.- Photo: Special arrangement

Sometimes a farmer may use a seemingly unsuitable measure to solve an agricultural problem and derive success from it. And that is what Mr. R.Baskaran from Patteswaram village in Kumbakonam, Tamil Nadu, did to get a better yield in paddy — at a time when several farmers in the Cauvery Delta region were facing losses during the last cropping season due to water scarcity. “Being a paddy cultivator for several generations in the region, I suffered heavy losses due to monsoon failure and drought. We cultivated the crop under the usual system (growing paddy in nursery and transplanting them).

Withstand drought

“But when monsoon failed we used to go through a lot of hardship as water became scarce. It was during one such time last year that I heard about direct sowing method for paddy and its benefits. This method enables paddy crop to withstand drought and grow well. I decided to try it out and accordingly decided to cultivate white ponni variety in my seven and half acres and am able to see how it has been really effective,” says the farmer.

By adopting direct sowing method the farmer was able to reduce the crop period by 10- 15 days than what he normally spends at the nursery field. Application of organic manure according to him has also helped to increase the water holding capacity of his field. The tillers grew well and there was less chaff after the crop was harvested.

“Even after the crop reached the harvest stage (130 days) the leaves had a greenish colour, probably due to the application of organic sprays like Amrithkaraisal and Panchagavya. At the same time, my neighbours, who transplanted paddy after I did, encountered leaf scotching of their crops due to water scarcity,” he says.

Unique factor

Apart from direct sowing and organic methods, the farmer observed a unique factor which according to him has contributed in managing the water stress in paddy eco system —the role of weeds. In general, farmers always consider weeds to be harmful for the main crop and destroy them. “This is exactly the same notion farmers have on insects lacking a clear understanding of the difference between pest and predators.

There are two categories of weeds: One, companion weeds, and the other, competitive weeds.

Close observation

Companion weeds help to maintain soil moisture and competitive weeds compete with the main crop for water and nutrients. To differentiate between them, one needs to closely observe the field to spot the difference.

“In my experience, weeds with longer roots are competitive weeds and those with shorter roots are companion weeds. I also noticed that many beneficial insects like lady bird beetle used these companion weeds as their shelter and preyed on different pests attacking the paddy crop. “I also noticed that my soil surface appears to be hard but because of the companion weed growth there is enough moisture in the soil for the main crop,” explains Mr. R. Baskaran. Several farmers who visited his field were surprised to see the good growth in spite of water shortage last year. The farmer cultivated white ponni variety which is normally known for water lodging and is a 140-day crop.

However, use of organic methods and by direct sowing, the crop was able to stand upright with long tillers (20 cm) and came to harvest at 130 days (10 days earlier). He harvested 4-5 tonnes and spent Rs.20,000 for labour for all his seven acres.

Expenditure

“If done under the normal method for an acre labour/machine hiring cost alone would have cost Rs.15,000,” says Mr. K. Suresh Kanna, Deputy Director, Kudumbam, an NGO that works with several farmers in the district.

For more details

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