

Cutting fodder costs by adopting an innovative method

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Lower investment: The grass grows to a height of six to eight feet in a span of two months.— Photo: Special Arrangement

Scientists from the Krishi Vigyan Kendra-Kannur (KVK) of Kerala Agricultural University, Panniyur, have developed an innovative method to grow fodder grass (CO-3 variety) on rooftops of cattle sheds to help dairy farmers grappling with space constraints and fodder scarcity.

A recent experiment by Dr. T. Giggin, Assistant Professor of the Institute promises to address the green fodder requirement issue of space constraint for cattle growers easily.

High density planting

The technique, called high density double planting with drip irrigation, involves growing fodder grass in plastic 'grow-bags' usually used for cultivating vegetables.

The grass grows to a height of six to eight feet in a span of two months, according to Dr. Giggin. At the KVK campus, the grass is grown in around 300 UV stabilized bags, placed equidistantly, with a foot's space left between the bags.

Water and manure are supplied using drip irrigation. "The first harvest can be done after 10 weeks of planting and thereafter harvest can be done every 30 days. One set of plantation can give yield as many as eight times a year. Different varieties of grass can be grown by this method," says Dr. Giggin. The innovation is attractive because of the financial gain it can give the farmers. A cow, which is usually given concentrate feed costing Rs.22 a kg, can easily be given five kg of green grass at Rs.5 a kg. Such a huge saving in production cost will be a boon for the dairy sector which faces regular decline in number of dairy animals every year.

Basic reason

"In a place where land availability for agricultural use is very low due to fragmentation and high cost, dairy farmers resort to expensive concentrate feeds as a replacement for green fodder. This is the basic reason for the high production cost of milk in many states and also the reason for many progressive farmers in Kerala moving away from dairy," says Dr Giggin.

Apart from growing, farmers can also take up selling the root slips of the green grass that can give them some additional income. A single root costs Rs.2 and there is quite a demand for procuring fresh green grass.

Investment

An investment of Rs.100 a month produces fodder costing Rs.6,000 in six months. Grass grows faster in this method as ample sunlight is available. Moreover nagging problems of pests and weeds are mostly absent. A single bag has a three year utility span. The KVK has initiated this method for paddy cultivation also which is helpful even in water-scarce areas.

“The lush greenery in the terrace prevents direct sunlight from falling on the terrace which in turn reduces the temperature inside the cattle shed. This means less need for fans, and lower power consumption thus saving on electricity,” he says.

Providing green fodder for milch animals has always proved to be a difficult task for cattle rearers because sourcing the grass itself is hard work. Even if available, depending on the season (especially summer months), suppliers charge a huge amount.

Cost

A truckload of green fodder can cost anything from Rs.3000- Rs. 5,000 and depending on the number of animals the farmer needs to buy one or two times a month.

“We have tried this method as an experiment and found it to be quite successful. Our center is now trying to create awareness among cattle growers in the region to adopt a similar method and benefit,” says Dr. Giggin.

For More Details

Interested farmers can get in touch with Dr. Giggin, Asst Professor,
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