THE HINDU

A model unit shows how to properly benefit from dairying

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Among various types of agriculture, dairy farming is often considered to be quite remunerative. Almost all veterinary institutes in the country keep harping on the relatively high income that a dairy unit can generate for a farmer.

“But what they often fail to emphasise is that cattle rearing alone is not profitable. In fact merely having some milch cattle would prove disastrous for a farmer since the animals need green fodder and hay apart from the regular feeds and to provide this a farmer must have a large area (today, pasture lands are fast disappearing) in which he is able to grow these apart from other crops as well,” says Dr. Sreenath Dikshit, Zonal Project Directorate, Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), Bangalore.

Financially not viable

Merely having 1-2 acres and growing fodder in that along with other crops cannot prove financially viable.

Mr. Sitaram Manjunath Hegde from Neernalli village in Uttara Kannada district, Karnataka owns about 15 hectares in which he grows several crops and also a dairy unit comprising 70 cross bred and 15 HF cows — all managed scientifically.

Banana is grown in six hectares and coconut in two hectares. In the rest he practises arecanut based multi storeyed cropping system, with black pepper and cocoa.

The practices adopted in the farm are more scientific and less labour dependent than those in conventional farms, according to Dr. Sreenath.

The areca plantation and dairy units are live models for agriculture students, farmers, extension officials and agriculture scientists in the region. The cattle shed is well planned with lime concrete flooring which facilitates easy cleaning.

An underground drainage system is provided for draining urine and excess water directly to a biogas plant.

Cow dung collection is done through a modified spade with rubber strap and carried in a trolley to the biogas plant. All cows are tied using an automatic chain system.

No chemicals
Washing of animals is done using high pressure water jet spray to remove ticks and dirt. No chemical pesticide is used to control ticks and other pests. Milking is done using a machine and power requirement for it is provided by the bio gas plant.

The farmer has also established a fodder production unit and a fodder chopper (5 hp capacity), a grinder and mixer unit. Hybrid Napier grass and fodder maize (African tall) varieties are grown in one hectare to meet the fodder requirement of the animals.

Both green and dry fodder are chopped and fed to the animals along with supplement mineral mixture. The animals are vaccinated on time.

Guidance
Since pineapple is grown commonly in the region unutilised pineapple fruit residues like the crown and peel from local pineapple processing industries is used to prepare silage under the guidance of National Institute of Animal Nutrition and Physiology (NIANP),Bangalore.

The silage is fed to the animals along with the other feed ingredients in the form of total mixed ration, replacing green fodder during summer.

Underground drainage is provided to the areca nut garden for removal of excess water. The slurry from the biogas plant is filled in a specially designed steel tanker and moved to the garden for use as manure for the crops. Scientific methods of soil, moisture, water and fertilizer management are followed based on frequent soil test reports.

Natural mulching is done to the areca nut trees with cocoa leaves. His farm is a popular place for fellow farmers for obtaining newer technical information, buying heifer cows, arecanut seedings, fodder root cuttings etc.

Several awards
The farmer has been conferred several awards by the state agriculture and horticulture departments for his work.

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