

Three hectare dryland continues to generate constant income

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Different varieties: The trees provide protection to crops from strong winds, among other benefits.- Photo: Special arrangement

Planning is crucial in generating continuous income from farming. "Right from selecting the crops to be planted to making use of rainwater effectively for irrigation every thing is crucial to help a farmer get good returns. It is the job of agriculture experts to correctly guide the farmer and ensure that there is no communication gap in the lab-to-land transfer of technologies," says Dr. Shalander Kumar, Head, Central Arid zone Research Institute (CAZRI), Jodhpur.

Challenge

"In a country where more than 80 per cent of farmers own less than a hectare of land, many areas may be unfit for cultivation, due to low soil fertility or inaccessible water source for irrigation. These pose a great challenge to us and the real success comes in effectively overcoming them with active involvement from the farmer's side to make it remunerative," he says. Nearly 30 years back a small farmer in Jodhpur, Rajasthan, Mr. Nand Kishore Jaisalmeria did not even dream that he would be able to get constant revenue all through the year from his less-than-three-hectare land that was considered barren and dry. In the early 1980's a team of scientists from CAZRI happened to visit his land and advised him to plant ber (Gola, Seb, Umran) varieties developed by the institute along with a recommended package of practices. Fencing of the farm was done by growing different drought tolerant tree varieties like neem. The trees not only provided protection to crops from strong winds but also helped the farmer get some income through the sale of dried twigs, wood and green fodder. The dried leaves falling on the land acted as effective cover in preventing moisture evaporation and as effective manure for the trees themselves as they decomposed.

Moisture conservation

A continuous trench was dug along the live fencing to stop unwanted stray animals from entering into the farm. During rains, the trench got filled with water and served as moisture conservation for the bio fence trees grown all along the boundary. For the first 20 years the farm was totally rainfed. Later the farmer was advised to take up integrated farming like rearing honey bees and some goats. In the first year of planting the ber the farmer bought tanker water from the city to irrigate the crops. From the second year the orchard was able to survive. Later a bore-well was dug.

Nursery

With the objective of starting a rural nursery, Mr. Jaisalmeria and few rural youths were trained on ber budding technique to increase the number of seedlings in the farm. In the initial 15 years he was able to sell lakhs of plants every year to farmers, NGOs, and Government departments from different states. Today the major revenue for the farm comes from sale of Ber fruit, rental charges for hiring honey bee boxes to other farmers, selling the goats, dried wood and twigs as firewood. Each ber plant produces about 30-40 kg fruits per annum. "Three varieties have been planted so as to get fruits regularly from December to March. Harvesting of Gola variety is done during mid December to sometime near mid February, Sev variety comes to harvest during third week of January and lasts till last week of February. Umran starts yielding from first week of February to mid March. I sell the fruits at the local market and am able to get an annual net income of about Rs 1,25,000 from my three hectares," says the farmer.

From one hectare

"From one hectare the farmer is able to earn Rs.41,000 a year, which is much higher when compared to traditional annual crops in the region. It is nearly 35 years since the ber orchard was created and even now it is well maintained and is a source of sustainable income," says Dr. Shalander.

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