

Tradition and technology ring in success

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For Arulprakasam, a progressive farmer from Thooyaneri village near Melur, technology has helped not only in reaping profits, but also in overcoming challenges posed by climate changes.

Believe it or not...from a small area of 1,000 square metres, which is equivalent to 25 cents of land, the farmer has harvested 14 tonnes of cucumber recently over a period of 110 days. Describing the process as “green house cultivation” or protected cultivation, the farmer says he achieved the distinction after taking advice from officials of the Department of Horticulture. The ultraviolet treated poly-sheets covering the stretch help in protecting the crop from direct sunlight for long hours.

Farmers are encouraged to raise crops by applying innovative techniques under the National Horticulture Mission, says Assistant Director (Horticulture) Muthu Durai.

In a volatile weather pattern, farmers are trained to adapt to modern techniques. Use of hybrid varieties results in higher yield. The government assists the farmers by providing technology and attractive subsidy, among other incentives.

Admitting that drought has hit horticulture crops in pockets like Vadipatti, Alanganallur and Kottampatti, the official, however, describes it as “negligible.” Interestingly, mango is a drought-tolerant crop and in rainfed pockets it has suffered marginally.

A farmer of Vadipatti, Arockiam, says that apart from mango, crops like guava, sapotta, amla and lemon are also grown under greenhouse cultivation in the region. Asked to explain the greenhouse cultivation concept, he says, “Heat generated by sunlight falling on the crop directly is filtered by the UV sheets. Thus the temperature is reduced by a few degrees. In the process, pest menace is also avoided to a large extent as the entire area is covered.”

Like Mr.Arulprakasam, another farmer in Karuvelampatti village near Tirupparankundram has raised cucumber through greenhouse cultivation successfully. The total cost involved is Rs.6.5 lakh and 50 per cent of it comes as government subsidy. Problems in cultivation are overcome with effective water management and pest treatment.

Good scope in Madurai

Mr.Muthu Durai says that there is tremendous scope for expanding horticulture crops in the district from the present 2,400 hectares. "Gone are the days when farmers in Hosur and other hilly regions alone could produce hybrid varieties. In a district like Madurai too, farmers are turning tech-savvy and the success story of Mr.Arulprakasam is sufficient to speak high of our achievement," he notes.