

Organic movement sprouts in Andhra

Buddham, January 15, 2017



On the occasion of Sankranti, a farmers group organized an awareness program on ecological farm practices at Buddham village, Karlapalem mandal, Guntur district on January 15 2017. More than 100 farmers cultivating rice organically in more than 200 acres in the surrounding villages, women and villagers attended the event. Farmers from Deccan Development Society, a 33 old NGO based in Zaheerabad renowned for its principles of organic, biodiverse and millet farming were invited to preside over the meet.

The region has been famous for inorganic rice cultivation only until a few farmers from the village started growing rice organically. "After being affected by Soriasis, I have stopped using chemical fertilizers in my farm and eventually turned as an organic farmer" said Dasaradha Maharaja, organic rice farmer and the founder of 'Go Adharitha Prakruthi Vyavasayadarula Sangham' which translates to Cow dependent Natural Farmers Group. "Coming together also helped us exchange knowledge and market our produce" he said.

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Sankranti, the festival which also holds great importance to farmers became an occasion to organise the farmers awareness meet on January 15 2017. The growing diseases, land pollution and non-availability of healthy food including vegetables are the major reasons for us to initiate this awareness meet said " D S N Raju a social activist promoting health and environment awareness in the region.

The meeting intended to focus on ecological farm practices, nutritious crops and vegetable cultivation for household consumption. Hence we invited the farmers from Deccan Development Society who have pioneered in these" informed Maharaja. The meeting started with a rally around the villages with slogans carrying the message of 'own seeds', 'own manures', 'community farming', 'organic farming', 'kitchen garden' and particularly 'women in agriculture' echoed across the streets.

"Chemicals fertilizers affects the soil health, strength of the crop and ultimately our health" preached Samamma, DDS women farmer. "Monoculture and crops such as rice can't meet the needs of our home and instead makes us dependant on market" she added. "To ensure we eat healthy food, we should convert our lands into biodiverse farms" she suggested. "Organic farming yields less is a myth" assured Samamma who shared several examples of organic farmers making huge profits.



On learning from the local farmers and villagers, about the increasing cases of diabetes and other severe diseases, she said millets can address the issue. Millets which can grow on poorest of the soils and naturally grow without the need of chemical inputs can certainly perform better when sourced with water and good soil resources." she added.

"Millets have been part of our culture. Our ancestors ate Ragi, Sajja and Korra and cultivated them before rice and irrigation practice started" said Shivaji another farmer from the group. However post green revolution , they have disappeared and sorghum is grown alone for cattle feed.

Mogalamma, a young farmer from DDS said how through collective efforts, they have been able to market these forgotten grains for their nutritional value and bring the attention of the government for millets. "We are happy to

be introduced to these nutritious grains which have been forgotten. I am hopeful of introducing the same to my children and family" said Lakshmi on learning the millet recipes at the event. Sharing several millet recipes, Mogalamma who is also trained in value addition encouraged everyone to start consuming millets so as to reduce the growing nutrition deficient diseases and diabetes caused by high rice intake.

Organic future

Women who have gathered in great number took interest in learning about organic vegetable cultivation and kitchen garden. "A good start to turn organic is by raising kitchen garden" said Indira who have been growing vegetables using organic manures in Hyderabad. Women determined to grow vegetables in their gardens and collectively announced it to the villagers that they will strive to meet their families and village's vegetable needs by the end of this year.



Under the guidance of DDS, the group decided to develop a model farm incorporating the principles of biodiversity and permaculture in the village. In next 6 months of time, we wish to make Buddham a resource centre for organic farming" said Raju. "Eventually the centre will also be a source for marketing the organic produce" he added. DDS farmers promised to support the farmers in Andhra with seeds, trainings to prepare manures and ways of ecological

farm practices. "DDS have always promoted such farmer exchanges and will continue to promote them" said Jayasri, Joint Director, DDS. She invited farmers from Andhra to the Annual Biodiversity Festival of the Deccan to learn closely the traditional knowledge of the farmers on their seeds, soil and crops.

"Going back to the traditional farm practices is the real way of celebrating Sankranti" said an aged woman from the village.