

Only market driven strategies can boost organic farming

M.J.PRABU

The Hindu,
6th March, 2008

Lack of genuine marketing infrastructure was a big problem for the growers

Through organic farming has been proved to be a low investment technology for growing crops, marketing organically produced crops has not been an easy task especially for some farmers. Lack of information on marketing channels and absence of proper governmental guidelines has forced many of them to sell their produce for a throwaway price, an irony when today, organic produce fetches a good price (Rs.3-4 per kg more) than chemical produces.

The villagers of Meekeri village, popularly called as organic village, situated about 16kms from Udhagamandalam, faced a similar problem in marketing their organic produce.

Bio village

The village has been adopted by the Institute of Commercial Horticulture (ICH), Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU), Udhaganandalam, under the Hill Area Development Programme as a bio-village.

The farmers of the village were trained to cultivate their crops under organic practices by ICH. Crucial inputs such as *Panchagavya*, *Dasagavya*, Biodynamic compost, vermi-compost, Cow pat pit *Azospirillum*, *Phosphobacteria*, and bio-control agents such as *Trichoderma viride* for growing the crops were provided by the Institute.

Increase in yield

Field demonstrations were conducted under the guidance of Dr.N Selvaraj, Professor and Head of the Institute. Speaking on behalf of the villagers Mr.N.Sekar, a farmer said, "There is an increase in yield of 5-10 per cent when compared to chemical farming.

"But the real problem faced by us was lack of marketing infrastructure and a good price for our produce. Though some NGOs had approach us for buying the produce, their promise of paying us never materialized."

Organic Association

At this point of time the villagers under the guidance of Dr.Selvaraj, approached the Organic Farmers Association, after reading a series of articles on organic farming and it's marketing in the Farmers Note Book column of The *Hindu* to develop a marketing channel for Meekeri. "Representatives of that Association immediately visited our village and interacted with us. They were satisfied with our produce and made an advance payment for our organic products," said Mr.M.Sekar.

Poison free food

Organic Farmers Association comprises nearly 10,000 farmers as its member's spanning all over the country and have around 200 outlets under the brand name 'poison free food' through which the farmers market their produce.

According to Mr.R.Ranganathan, President, absence of proper marketing channel proves detrimental to marketing of organic products.

The government should take active steps to encourage organic farming in the state. It has been proved that organic farming is a low budget, risk free farming practice which has only positive

impact on both the farmers and environment.

Marketing made easy

But does the association help only those farmers in the state for marketing their produce?

“Organic farmers throughout the country are welcome to contact us for marketing their produce,” said Mr.Ranganathan.

Country wheat, city chaff

R.V.Smith

**The Hindu,
17th March, 2008**

Threshing will be the main activity in the fields around Delhi soon. Threshing machines make work faster but they are a nuisance all the same, claiming human limbs in the bargain. This has been accepted as an occupational hazard now and so the tears that are shed over the loss are not idle ones, but those whose bitterness is tinged with determination.

Stroll around these fields in April and find out for yourself the intensity of the work that takes precedence over anything else on the farm, where those who labour under the sun eat their thick rotis with onions, eyeing the sheaves that are yet to be threshed. If in one of these a bird has laid eggs, it lies untouched until such time as the feathered friend finds it convenient to transfer the nest elsewhere.

Look at those women blowing the grain in the strong wind to drive away the chaff. They are sturdy specimens of the region adjoining the Capital and their arms are just as strong as a man's..

But not everywhere does one find women in groups. There are fields where a man threshes with his son for helper and a woman and her daughter-in-law blow away the chaff, the grain coming down in a gradual motion to form a huge mound of clean wheat that looks golden in strong sunlight. And there places where only a single woman blows her burden in the breeze. Linger on till the sunsets behind the distant tree in a golden halo. That's the time when the chores are over for the village folks and they relax on stringed cots among the sheaves, which are precious to them. Here they eat and sleep at night too. And as the hookah is puffed you hear a witty tale that has come down unsullied over the years. Hear it through and you will return home a wiser man.

How much of life we miss we only realize when away from metropolitan existence. Here in the fields the air is free of exhaust fumes and tempts one to breathe deep until the women start arriving, with lunch for the farmers on

their heads, and balancing it just as they would a 'chatty' on their dainty way from the 'pang hat' of the village well.

Good and bad days

As the farmer ate his meal one spoke to him about his life. His mouth full of roti and chili pickle he confided that there are good days and bad ones. On Monday and Saturday a man will not plough with his face to the east. On both these days the demon of the four directions (Disa Sal) remains in the east. He wiped his brow and quenched his thirst with the water his wife gave him to drink. "Wednesday is good for sowing and Thursday for cutting the crop," he added.

"Now it is as pleasant as it should be. But you should see the fields in the summer months when the *loo* blows like the devil here and we wonder if the rains would come at all. And talking of the devil, I'm worried about my son. he has gone to a hamlet in the north. And today is a Tuesday".

One asked why this concern and the man cited a rural belief. "A farmer will not go north on Tuesday and Wednesday, south on Saturday and west on Friday and Sunday because of the influence of Disa Sal." As one shook one's head in disbelief, the peasant knotted his brows, probably wondering why city dwellers remain immune to age-old rustic wisdom.

Women channel water to village

Priya Ranjan Sahu

**The Hindustan Times,
8th March, 2008**

Everyday when Kamala Hentala trudged along a 2-km rocky terrain to a stream high on a hill fetch water, she would think about a better alternative.

Kamala's village in Orissa's Malkangiri is in one of India's 10 poorest districts, according to the Planning Commission. To reach Mahupadar, her village, it is a 12-km walk from the Tarlakote gram panchayat, a remote area with little infrastructure.

At least 800 villagers in Malkangiri district were displaced from the area now submerged under the waters of the Machhkunda project. But water is the most precious commodity residents could think of.

Kamala along with other women would walk up the forest path to collect water from the stream escorted by their men armed with bows and arrows because of the lurking danger of wild animal attacks. Finally Kamala took the initiative and convened a meeting of women to find a way out. "We decided to bring water from the stream to our villages by setting up hollow bamboo poles." She said.

More than a hundred women from Mahupadar and its neighbouring villages started working on joining hollow bamboo poles and polishing them for a water pipeline. The day they had set up the 'pipeline' and water flowed into the villages it was time to celebrate.

However, soon they found out that during summer the bamboo pipes could not supply enough water, though the stream had sufficient water.

The women then started work on the second phase of their project. They collected dry logs and carved them into semi-circular units to direct the flow of water from the stream into the pipeline and constructed reservoirs in the village for shortage. To top to up they connected the reservoirs to their homes with the bamboo pipes.

“These women have worked wonders without our help,” said Balaram Hentala, village head of Mahupadar. The villagers, thanks to their women brigade, now not only have clean drinking water but enough to water the fields. And have been growing paddy, pulses and vegetables.

Now, they have started a self-help group to generate enough resources to upgrade their water project by saving a handful of rice and a part of their income everyday. They know how to dream and hope that some day they would have their own health and education facilities in the village.