

A Farm of Hope and New Ideas in Rural Odisha

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Traditional folk agricultural knowledge has enabled farmers to produce crops sustainably and conserve the environment. The inspiring endeavor initiated by scientist Dr. Natabar Rout in Odisha reveals innovation and creativity in agriculture through simple means. A farm started recently by a scientist-turned-farmer Dr. Natabar Rout is fast emerging as a farm of hope for many crisis-ridden farmers of coastal Odisha. Dr. Rout was trained as a hydro-geologist and carried out many exciting and useful assignments in the area of watershed management, traditional water resources, natural resource mapping, disaster relief and rehabilitation. His primary research on traditional water sources in

KBK region of western Odisha

revealed that traditional water sources have played a very important and useful role, but later government schemes ignored natural drainage channels (possibly because dominant persons pushed for water schemes close to their land) so that water got diverted to non-drainage channels. This disrupted the system as well. This research led to a new understanding in official circles for corrective action which was missing earlier.



Dr. Natabar Rout

Natabar Rout is from a poor coastal village. His memories of growing up here have given him a deeper sensitivity against discriminative practices which sometimes led to denial of educational opportunities to weaker sections. When he was involved in disaster rehabilitation work at the time of the super cyclone by the government, he helped to mobilise volunteers known for their dedication to help cyclone victims. In the process Dr. Rout came closer to the problems of coastal Odisha. He realized that many farmers were suffering from serious economic and health problems. One important reason he found was the heavy use of chemical fertilizers and even more particularly chemical pesticides. While the more obvious problems manifested in the form of gastric problems, skin problems, constant itching, allergies etc., there was also an increase in more serious ailments including heart diseases, kidney problems and mental health problems. Water sources were getting contaminated. Some rural women said with distress that men who handled pesticides were already having kidney problems, but when pesticides contaminate groundwater sources then even women and children will have such problems. Such problems motivated Dr. Rout to establish a model farm called Vision Eco-Farm in Gundichapur village in Cuttack district close to the small town of Atgarah.

KITCHEN GARDEN



Kitchen Garden As coastal Odisha has very few

initiatives of organic and eco-friendly farming, this farm can provide much needed alternatives to escape from current crisis-ridden and ecologically harmful farming practices which are also creating serious health problems. Farmers and women self-help group members have already started visiting this farm in significant numbers. Here they not only see eco-friendly, low-cost, self-reliant farming practices, but in addition they also get advice and good literature on appropriate farming practices. One attraction is the nutrition garden growing almost 21 varieties of vegetables and other plants including several creepers. At the centre of this beautiful garden is a ditch that absorbs waste kitchen water. Some cow dung and cow urine is also put in this. This is arranged in such a way that this provides moisture and nutrition to the surrounding plants. The plants are selected in such a way that they complement each other and can grow in harmony

instead of competing with or obstructing each other. This farm has already gained recognition as Central Horticulture Experimental Centre which will make it possible to provide seedlings to farmers. Some rare varieties such as cherry tomatoes or very small but very tasty tomatoes are also grown here. Visiting farmers are provided a few seeds so that they can start growing in their own fields, and they are also encouraged to bring seeds from their village to give for the collection



here.

Dr Rout to establish a model farm called Vision Eco-Farm in Gundichapur

village in Cuttack district. Dr. Rout wants to increase collection of indigenous seeds in a big way and for this he has more hopes from finding indigenous seeds in remote and isolated areas. Using all natural waste in productive ways is another important concern which is finding many creative outlets in this farm of hope. Earlier Dr. Rout attracted a lot of attention for his successful high income mushroom farming as well as his pioneering work in mushroom spawns and bottles specifically designed for them. He could have made a fortune in this but he decided to give up this to start a model farm of eco-friendly practices. However here also he continues to give training for successful as well as hygienic mushroom cultivation particularly to women self-help groups. A group of village farmers like Puri Sabri, Amit Sarangi and Pabitra Kumar Jena have teamed up closely with Dr. Rout. Jena says, "I already had a gut feeling that I should return to organic farming but this successful farm provided me the strength to do so." Many other villagers are saying this after visiting these farms. A farm scientist Abhishek Dwiwedi says, "It is very difficult for me to leave when I come to visit this farm of hope." First published by [The New Leam](#)