

Eco-friendly way to good living

Author - Baba Mayaram, Published on - 30.6.2015

Jayappa and Sharadamma, a husband-wife farmer duo from a non-descript village in Tamil Nadu have earned a name for themselves in the field of organic farming. Today they have a lush green farm with 150 mango trees, five tamarind trees, 60 jackfruit trees, 15 trees of amla and five lemon trees besides several other crops — all cultivated through organic farming techniques. By opting for organic farming, they have not only increased their farm productivity but have also helped their peers to develop the art.

Jayappa and Shardamma, like most of the farmers were practicing chemical farming for several decades in Thally village in Krishnagiri district until one day when Krishna Prasad, an organic farming practitioner and director of Sahaja Samrudha — an organic farmers' collective visited their farm. "He saw a pumpkin in my house locally known as mantu kaddu. His experienced eyes identified that it was different from the usual breed", informed Jayappa who told Prasad that he had grown it with organic manure. After returning to Bangalore, Prasad wrote an article on pumpkin and provided the contact details of Jayappa.

A few days later, Jayappa started receiving letters requesting him to send the seeds of the pumpkin against the extra postage stamps that were attached with the mail. Jayappa who extracted 780 seeds from just one pumpkin, sent two to three seeds to each person and returned the postage stamps to Prasad who utilised them for official work. "Krishna Prasad helped us realise the benefits of organic farming. It not only requires lesser investment than chemical farming but is sold at a higher price in the market. It is good for human health and environment", said Jayappa.

With a firm belief in organic farming and Prasad's work, Jayappa, along with Samrudha, joined hands with Prasad to fulfil his mission of making the farmers aware of the benefits of organic farming.

They started visiting farmers in different villages and discussed with them, the benefits of organic farming. Today farmers from far-flung villages visit the couple to learn about the techniques and procedure of organic farming. By practising organic farming in their three acre land, they have successfully nurtured mango, tamarind, jackfruit, amla, berries, sapota, guava and lemon trees along with a few variety of cereals and pulses. The backyard of their house is blessed with banana, ramphal, coconut, peppermint, strawberry, sweet neem, chilli, papaya, cardamom, pepper trees. There are also green vegetables like spinach, red lettuce, eggplant, tomatoes, beans and pumpkin. The fruits and vegetables are sold to Sahaja Organics — a Bangalore-based company at a price higher than the normal rate in the market.

Over the years, Jayappa has studied about trees religiously. From the quality of the fruit to the taste of the fruit and the recipes of using it, Jayappa knows everything about his trees. While pointing towards a tree, he explained how, the birds that take shelter on the trees are helpful in protecting the crops from insects. The couple believes that the crisis that has spread in the agriculture sector has given a push to the use of organic farming in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala. Like them, many farmers have switched to organic farming methods in the recent years. The fertility of the soil lost due to excessive use of chemicals can be restored only by applying organic methods like crop rotation, use of green and organic manure. For the soil to be fertile, it is important to ensure balance of all the nutrients in it.

The active presence of earthworms, friendly insects and bacteria in the soil increases its water-holding capacity. Compost and natural manure produced from cow-dung and rotten leaves are also quite useful. To protect the crops from harmful insects, instead of pesticides, organic farming promotes use of natural blends of neem, cow-urine and ash. It is important to make organic farming a low-cost affair so that the high investments in farming that has become a reason for increase in farmer suicides can be tackled. Water conservation also plays an important role in making organic farming sustainable as only this will make rearing of livestock possible which in turn will produce organic manure.

Jayappa's life has changed. He has a pukka house and earns enough for a modest life. His two sons working in Bangalore are now thinking of joining their parents in their effort. "They are not happy staying away from us", says Jayappa with a glitter in his eyes.

Contrary to the trend where farmers are giving up their traditional profession and are opting for new sources of livelihood, organic efforts are helping farmers like Jayappa and Shardamma to continue with their faith in soil. They have become self-dependent while taking care of their environment. That's the magic of organic.

(Courtesy: Charkha Features)

Published in [The Pioneer](#)