

Empowerment begins at home

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Those who sipped a cup of Yashoda's home-brewed tea have never been unimpressed. The special tea is prepared using locally available herbs and aromatic leaves. Yashoda and her husband Chandraprakash of Biligerepalya village in Tiptur taluk of Tumakuru district are well-known for their innovative activities that include value addition of agricultural produces.

Until 2008, the couple were into chemical farming, much like everyone else around them. At a time when they were grappling with finances, for the expenditure towards the farm was much higher than what their yields brought back, and what came to their rescue was the radio. Several pro-farmer programmes that were aired made them realise that organic farming could help lead a sustainable life.

Value addition

With new-found eagerness, they plunged into organic farming and started experimenting with locally-available resources. Chandraprakash began participating in various agricultural training programmes and would dig for information wherever he went. After several such engagements, they began preparing tooth powder, shampoo, bath soaps, herbal syrups, supplements for babies, gulkand, malt, papads and savouries from finger millet, at home. "We only make use of those things that are abundant in nature. For instance, we don't always bank on rose petals for gulkand; we make use of the common hibiscus," say the couple. As for the ingredients they don't possess, they buy it from the farmers themselves and try hard to get organic inputs. Ingredients required for chyawanprash and kashaya are got from the Malnad region. The chyawanprash sees an annual output of 4-5 quintals.

Initially, they tried the home products themselves to ensure their quality and that they don't have any harmful side effects. Then they began selling to family and friends who would come home. When they began to like it and the demand increased, the couple decided to expand the reach. Production has steadily increased, reflecting the consumer demand. Since food items are perishable, they produce them based on the demand, says Yashoda.

Locals admire the work of the couple and feel that such small strides contribute a lot to achieve self-reliance. Yashoda and Chandraprakash manage most of the tasks and are less dependent on labours. Their goods are now sold in local agricultural fairs and in some shops in Bengaluru. They prefer direct marketing, which they feel helps to know consumer preferences. The couple have also thought about getting their products certified by an authorised agency. They have reserved one acre to grow food produces in their six-acre farm. Arecanut is grown on two acres and coconut on the rest. Vegetables are also grown in a small proportion.

The attitude of the people, which was cynical at first, when they began this practice, has now changed to being more supportive. "The change in farming practice has helped us to earn a decent livelihood. We have been able to repay a large part of the loan," says Chandraprakash. When most farmers are becoming dejected with agriculture and trying to give it up, Chandraprakash and Yashoda stand out as shining examples, giving hope to the despairing. First published by [Deccan Herald](#)