

'Multi-cropping has economical and agronomic benefits'

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In the times of mono crop culture, where certain crops are grown in lakhs of acres of land, small farmers in the remote rainfed areas of Telangana are still following an age-old practice. They grow as many as 12-15 crops in a single plot of 1-2 acres, growing a wide variety of crops that are suited for rainfed agriculture.

Moligari Chandramma, 65, has just planted 12 crops in an acre, and repeated it in three-four acres more at Bidakanne near Pastapur in Medak district.

Advantages

Asked why she chose to grow so many crops, she said, "It is a practice I inherited from my parents. I sowed the seeds of 12 crops that include sorghum, maize, pearl millet, foxtail millet, finger millet and red gram."

Within the sorghum family, she would plant 5-6 variants.

"What some crop plants take from the soil can be given back by growing other crops. Also, if one or two crops fail, you will still be able to harvest enough to guarantee food throughout the year," she added.

Apart from providing a fall-back option, multi-cropping helps in management of pests.

"There are both economical and agronomic benefits. Unlike in mono cropping, multi-cropping or inter-cropping will help small and marginal farmers in many ways," PV Satheesh, Director of Deccan Development Society, told Business Line.

A large chunk of about 3,000 women member-farmers in the society follow this practice, covering about 15,000 acres.

"Besides getting a basket of grains that takes care of their nutritional needs, polycrops help them enough fodder stocks for their cattle," Satheesh said.

"The climate is changing and becoming hostile to farmers. Even if four-five crops survive, your food needs are met," Chandramma said.

This traditional practice of farming also involves storing of seeds of so many varieties of crops. "We don't have to depend on anybody for seeds," she added.

[Study on multi-cropping](#)

A recent study conducted by the Centre for Economic and Social Studies (CESS) and DDS also highlighted the importance of multi-cropping.

The study, *Interfacing Farmers' Science with Formal Science* noticed that some farmers even grow 20-25 crops or varieties in a plot of one acre.

"While growing different crops, farmers were not subjecting themselves to a narrow view of yield returns. They are conscious of the fact that their crops don't just yield grains but also fodder, fuel wood, uncultivated greens and medicinal plants," it said.

"The concept of Plant Guild is deeply rooted in farmers' understanding of their agriculture," it pointed out.

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