

Tamil Nadu farmers float club to produce organic vegetables

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MADURAI: In a unique move, a group of farmers in Madurai district on Monday floated a 'club' to grow vegetables using only organic farming techniques.

These 20 farmers in Nariyampatti -- 30 km away from Madurai city -- who formed the club, named it Colonel Pennycuick Farmers' Club after the British engineer who constructed the Mullaperiyar dam, the lifeline of five southern districts of Tamil Nadu.

The village in Chellampatti block mostly produces vegetables such as brinjals, drumsticks, ladies finger, tomatoes, onions and greens. Flower crops like jasmine, tuberose and fodder crops for milch animals are also cultivated. Till date most cultivators in the village used chemical fertilisers and pesticides. "We have fully moved away from chemical pesticides and have started organic farming through our club," said P Boominathan, co-ordinator of the club.

With the Kerala government tightening its noose on excessive use of pesticides on vegetables in Tamil Nadu, these farmers have realised that time has come to change their farming practices. "We have started learning modern organic farming methods. We have to change fast," he said.

Another important aim of this club is to release farmers from the clutches of middlemen. "No matter how hard we work in our fields, the middlemen take away our harvests giving us paltry sums. We want to market our own produce," said N Murugan, a farmer of the club cultivating drumsticks in 3.5 acres of land.

To that end, the farmers are contemplating on roping in youngsters from the village to market the vegetables. A Anbuselvan, who cultivates brinjals in five acres of land, said the club will package the vegetables and deliver to houses directly with the help of youngsters.

"We will give them our produce to market. They will get a job while the consumers will get quality vegetables at their doorsteps," he said.

After 11 months of trial period, the club was inaugurated by assistant general manager of National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (Nabard), K S Mahesh on Monday. "The last 11 months went in building trust among the villagers and bankers. As we venture more and more into organic farming and marketing, we should also grow in size in terms of our membership strength from 20 to 1,000 in the coming days," Boominathan added.

According to agriculture experts, the shift towards organic farming happens among farmers gradually. It has been estimated that 5% of farmers in Tamil Nadu are practising organic farming in recent years.

M Kalyanasundaram, head of entomology department at the Agriculture College and Research Institute in Madurai, said that it was a "very positive gesture" shown by the farming community. He hoped, with courses on organic farming being offered in Tamil Nadu Agriculture University's colleges across the state, this transformation will sink its roots deeper into the farming community. First published by the [Times of India](#)