

# UNEP lauds pesticide-free farming in Kerala

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**Kuruvai village in Palakkad credited with replacing pesticides with agroecology**

The success of a group of farmers in Kuruvai village in Palakkad district's Vadakkencherry panchayat in cultivating paddy without chemical pesticides has come in for praise from United Nations Environment Programme. It finds a prominent place in a book on replacing highly hazardous pesticides with agroecology brought out by Pesticide Action Network International.

The book was released at the fourth session of UNEP's International Conference on Chemicals Management in Geneva early October.

Examples similar to the Kuruvai success from Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu; from China and the Philippines too find their place in the publication, which described them as "some of the many excellent projects and programmes underway across Asia" underlining how agroecological practices help to improve yields.

The presentation on the Kuruvai model at the UNEP session, 'Agroecology in Action: Safe Food Movement in Kerala', called it "the success of community-mobilised implementation of safe food campaign". Meriel Watts of PAN Asia-Pacific, in an e-mail to Vadakkencherry agricultural officer M.V. Resmi, thanked her for the inputs and described them as being useful in getting agro-ecology into the text of a draft resolution at the Geneva session.

N. Chenthamarakshan, secretary of the 18-hectare Kuruvai Padasekharam, said on Sunday that farmers were pleasantly surprised by the results. The paddy collective in great distress was adopted by State Agricultural Technology Management Agency in the second crop season (Mundakan) in October 2015 to change over to agroecological methods using the concept of farmer field schools.

Using friendly pests to fight enemy pests and with zero chemical pesticide, the result was resounding success, said a government official.

The average yield during the season went up by 30 per cent, bringing the farmers a profit of over Rs. 74,000 per hectare plus the government subsidy of Rs. 11,500.

The following first season (Virippu, 2015-16) was a success too. The third season of pesticide-free cultivation is underway. The farm has achieved natural biological control of enemy pests. The farmers can now manage on their own and have even started producing bio-controls.

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