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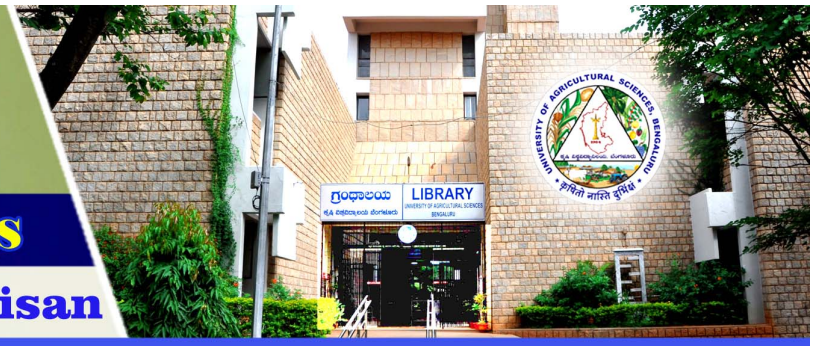
Pg .01 Friday 01-01-2021 **Jai Kisan**



AGRICULTURE

Farm tech is the way ahead to boost output

ADOPTION of new farming technologies by our farmers is relatively inadequate compared to China, which produces three times the output that India does, though the holding size is 44% less than India's.

This is because of lack of extension efforts at the village level. Extension workers in the train-and-visit system contributed significantly to the Green Revolution in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Now, farmers resort to sending pictures of pests and diseases on crops through WhatsApp, to seek solutions from scientists of agricultural universities and Krishi Vigyan Kendras. While mobile technology can complement the efforts of extension, it cannot substitute for village-level workers. While restructuring, this point needs to be considered.

Despite Covid-19, there was a 3 per cent increase in agriculture production in Karnataka, as farmers and Covid-affected migrant labour devoted considerable time and attention to their crops.

However, the livestock sector, especially poultry, was affected due to fall in demand for meat, resulting in decreased demand for maize. Although the minimum sale price (MSP) for maize was fixed at Rs 1,850 per quintal, farmers received not more than Rs 1,200 per quintal. This is a classic case wherein though MSP was much above market price, the price realised was 35 per cent lower than the MSP.

Therefore, it is crucial to recognize that MSP alone or even with procurement, market price may not be higher if supply is more than demand. So farmers need to be educated on the appropriate crop pattern and area allocation for security in agriculture.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has taken a very progressive step to introduce agriculture subjects from the primary education level.

There is also a dire need to clear pending cases such as permitting of GM crops like 'Golden Rice' to overcome Vitamin A deficiency in children and nursing women, hybrid mustard, clearing the moratorium on Bt brinjal and allowing field trials of GM varieties in many other crops, as they have been approved by competent and expert committees. It is equally important to prevent or avoid pseudo agricultural experts interfering by promoting their own non-scientific methods of production.



M MAHADEVAPPA
Former Vice-Chancellor, University of Agricultural Sciences

A distressed farmer destroys his cabbage crop after he failed to get a good price for the produce | ASHISHKRISHNA HP

01-01-2021 **Ind Exp Pg 07**

A return to roots to uplift his community



Text: Shrinidhi R
Photos: B M Kedarnath

A rare PhD graduate from the Kunbi community, **Jayanand Derekar** returned home to transform the lives of people in Uttara Kannada's Joida taluk through health, education and food security initiatives

Located 14 km away from Joida town in Uttara Kannada district, Deria is a sleepy hamlet nestled deep within the thick forests of the Western Ghats. Home to the indigenous Kunbi community, Deria houses 52 families, totalling 400 people.

Almost four centuries ago, the ancestors of these families were chased away by the Portuguese from Goa and then they settled in Deria, to live a life of isolation. Cut off from access to civic amenities, they lived without medical assistance, access to education or even roads for decades.

However, things are changing fast in Deria and many other such hamlets in Joida thanks to the efforts of 42-year-old Jayanand Derekar, a member of the community who broke several barriers when he succeeded in obtaining a higher education.

Growing up in a community which had negligible exposure to the outside world, Jayanand still managed to top his college in Joida in II PUC. With no degree college present in the taluk, he was apprehensive about heading out for his education as there was no money available. "It was Prashant Rane, a physical education teacher in my college, who helped me get admission for BCom in Karwar as well as a hostel," he says.

At the college, Jayanand crossed paths with Professor Indira from Mysuru who had visited Joida earlier to study the lives of women there. Encouraged by Indira, he went on to earn a master's and then a PhD in sociology.

While all of this would have been an encouraging personal story, it was Jayanand's decision to return to his village that signalled the beginning of good times for Deria. Instead of taking up a job elsewhere, he floated the Sanjeevani Seva Trust in Joida to take up the cause of providing electricity, medical care, education, food security and development to a taluk which then had over 52,000 people and none of these facilities.

"We first focused on setting up a mobile hospital. We also wanted to light up people's lives with solar power," he says, talking of the early days of his initiative.

Today, nearly 45 villages have been illuminated with solar power, with the support of some NGOs. Each house in these villages has four bulbs, a battery and a mobile plug point, the entire kit costing Rs 20,000.

Devadutta Kamat, a social worker from Kumta, is helping him run the mobile hospital, which reaches out to 100 families every day and covers a distance of 140 km. "We (the trust) maintain the hospital without any funds from the government and pay salaries to the staff," Jayanand says.

Researcher Balachandra Hegde, who has seen Derekar's work up-close, says, "An insider's view of the community greatly helps in effective interventions. Jayanand has done exactly that. He saw the need for a mobile hospital after seeing that the government hospital at Diggi village was hard to reach."

On the education front, Jayanand managed to get a first grade college sanctioned. The Morarji Desai and Rani Chennamma residential schools have also come up, bringing down the dropout rate considerably.

Today, school-going children of the community can boast of having an average of Rs 6,000 in their bank accounts, having earned the money by beekeeping and other farm activities during their vacations.

In the past decade, apart from a main road that connects Deria to Joida and Dandeli, over 100 minor bridges and roads have come up, helping people reach the panchayat offices.

The region also boasts of a wide variety of tuber crops, with as many as 33 varieties grown.

In an attempt to revive and spread the traditional systems of agriculture, Jayanand started the 'tuber mela' in 2015 and this has attracted nationwide attention. Growers showcase a wide variety of tubers at the mela and this has given a boost to preserve and conserve the rich tuber diversity, which is also key to their food security.

This has also created a market for tubers, in local homestays and even in places as far as Goa. A cold storage with a three-tonne capacity has been set up here. Derekar is exploring the possibility of value addition of tubers now.

In 2014, the community was given the Plant Saviour Community award, which came with a purse of Rs 10 lakh.

"Jayanand has utilised the opportunities properly and emerged as a change agent in the region. A collaborative approach, collective action and preservation of indigenous knowledge are the highlights of his work," says Prof Indira.

Scan the QR code for the video

01-01-2021 **Dec Hrd Pg 4D**

Farmers taste cardamom high after ditching poppy

SUMIR KARMAKAR
GUWAHATI, DHNS

When a group of farmers in Anjaw — the country's eastern most district in Arunachal Pradesh — agreed to shift from the "lucrative" poppy cultivation to grow the aromatic large cardamom a decade ago they were not expecting a huge turnaround in their fortunes.

But their decision to move away from the harmful poppy cultivation has paid off. Come February, the farmers will get to see their organically grown large cardamom exported under a brand name of their own, a reward for the gamble they took years ago.



Cardamom produced by growers in Anjaw district.

Last week, Chiroidor Organic Producers Company Limited, a farmers' company in Anjaw, signed a MoU with Farm Native India Private Limited, which agreed to pay up to Rs 425 per kg to the farmers and take their brand to the international markets as well.

"Farmers were initially reluctant mainly because of the price," Chono Tindya, secretary of Chiroidor Organic Producers Company Limited, told *DH* on Thursday.

"Poppy cultivation fetched much more money than crops like large cardamom. But things have become better since 2017, when we started becoming organised and got our crops organically certified."

The farmers' company at present has 359 farmers as members. They are cultivating large cardamom in nearly 500 hectares of the hills.

"Many are still into poppy cultivation. But if our organic crops get more prices in the market, we will be able to convince more farmers to give up poppy cultivation," Tindya said.

01-01-2021 **Dec Hrd Pg 07**

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