

Mixed cropping of spices in coconut garden- A Success story of rising Rural women

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Background

Small holdings and family farming are two predominant modes of agricultural production in the Konkan region of Maharashtra. Family farming is a means of undertaking agricultural and allied sector activities which are generally managed by a family which is predominantly reliant on family labour.



Twelve years before, Mrs. Priyanka Nagwekar (34), a resident of Hatis village in Ratnagiri Tahsil of Ratnagiri District ventured into family farming. Both Priyanka and her husband are graduates and her husband was working in a private company in Ratnagiri. She was cultivating subsistence crops like rice, finger millet, vegetables, etc. in the traditional way in her 22 ha farm. Her farm income was very limited due to lack of knowledge and skill about improved agricultural technologies especially coconut and spices crops? She was very ambitious to harvest the full productivity and to make maximum income from the crop. One day she came across the leaflet prepared by Regional Coconut Research Station, Bhatye, Ratnagiri on the role of vermicompost in enhance crop productivity and mixed cropping of spices in coconut garden 'Lakhibaug' concept to enhancing farm income. She was interested about mixed cropping of spices in coconut garden and vermicompost production technology. She started to cultivate spice as mixed crops in coconut garden and successfully planted the spices Nutmeg, and Arecanut as mixed crop in their coconut garden which could get her additional income. She started preparing vermicompost in their farm, which is being used for mixed crops along with coconut crop. This initial step increased her confidence and mooted her interest to start mixed cropping system and vermicomposting as an income generating activity. After acquiring adequate

knowledge and skill, availing capital was the main challenge before her for establishing mixed cropping system in coconut along with vermicomposting unit.

Training and motivational support

Priyanka attended a five days vocational training on coconut and spice cultivation technology and vermicompost production at Regional Coconut Research Station, Bhatye, Ratnagiri. The Regional Coconut Research Station scientists motivated her for taking up coconut and spices mixed cropping and vermicompost production. Regional Coconut Research Station, Bhatye, Ratnagiri provided her different spice crops and vermiculture of *Eisenia foetida* spp. for demonstration. She also attended six days vocational training programme on coconut tree climbing, 'FOCT' programme organized at Regional Coconut Research Station, Bhatye, Ratnagiri in collaboration with CDB, Kochi. Afterwards she became a master trainer of 'FOCT Programme at Regional Coconut Research Station, Bhatye, Ratnagiri and also in the Konkan region.

Output

On realizing the financial benefits, she decided to start a commercial mixed cropping of spices in her old coconut orchard alongwith a vericompost production unit. She felt that there was huge demand for organic coconut and that spice farming is trending among the farming community. She realized that people prefer organic food especially tender coconut and spices including black pepper, nutmeg, kokum and banana. Therefore, she decided to expand her small-scale activity into a commercial business venture. The earnings of her husband was insufficient to run the family hence she insisted him to join her in her mixed cropping and nursery activity. Thus he joined her in farming and eventually they expanded their activity by producing root stock plants for spice grafting. They purchased a four wheeler for farming purposes. During the covid-19



Table 1 : Economic status of Agribusiness starting

Name of startup	Production capacity	Selling rate (Rs)	Turnover /Year (Rs.)	Production cost. (Rs.)	Net Profit (Rs.)
Coconut & Spices	Nuts 6000 Cinnamon 6 kg	@22/- @500/-	132000/- 3000/-	46000/- 1140/-	86000/- 1860/-
Vermicompost unit	12.0 tonnes	@ 15/- kg Vermiculture @ 800 /-	225000/- 8000/-	68000/- 3600/-	156000/- 4400/-
Nursery Management	Black pepper 5000	15/-	75000/-	28000/-	47000/-
	Bushpepper 1000	60/-	60000/-	18000/-	42000/-
	Coconut 1200	70/-	70000/-	19000/-	51000/-
Grant total			573000/-	184740/-	388260/-

pandemic, this vehicle was used for delivering agricultural produces to market and also for home delivery of produces.

Nursery Management :A Jump Toward Next Agriculture based startup

After establishing herself in mixed cropping of coconut and spices, Mrs. Priyanka Nagwekar mooted the idea of setting up a spice nursery with black pepper cuttings/seedlings. Vermi compost is the media for growing spice plants and she has it in enough quantity. Another reason for starting spice nursery was the demand for spice plants especially 'Bush pepper' plants in Ratnagiri and as pot plants in urban areas. She also had a sales outlet in Ratnagiri. She attended another training in Nursery Management at Regional Coconut Research Station, Bhatye, Ratnagiri. According to her, production of vermicompost and vermiculture is the best option for rural women which can be set up with minimum input cost and time.

Outcome

Economic status of Agribusiness starting (Table 1)

Impact - She is grateful and not stressful

Mrs. Priyanka Nagwekar through her innovative agriculture practices could ensure economic stability to her family. Every year, her financial turnover is around Rs. 5.73 lakh from mixed cropping, vermicompost unit and spice nursery. She is gaining net profit of Rs. 3.82 lakh from farming alone. Though her annual income is limited at present, she is planning to go for virgin coconut oil production to make better return in future. She is a beginner in agribusiness startup.

The motivation, inspiration and contribution that she receives from her husband is also commendable. She has not only made her family self-reliant but is also able to provide assured employment for her family members.

Contributing and enabling factors

While sharing her experience in agribusiness enterprises, she told that merely subsistence farming is not a solution to the resource poor farmers but secondary agriculture and agribusiness need to be promoted. ■