

## My LEISA farm

My farm is situated near a forest area, 25 kms. From the Karwar-Kaiga Road. Houses are spread apart and the nearest house is half a kilometer away. I purchased a farm of size 13 acres with 10 acres of coconut plantation with the help of a bank loan in 1986. Most of the coconut trees had only 4 fronds. During that year (1987) I just got 30 coconuts. But now in 2000 I could able to harvest 36000 nuts. On two acres of land I have planted vanilla and aloe vera on an acre of land. Bee keeping is yet another activity pursued.

Children of farmers educated in rural government vernacular schools migrating to urban areas in search of white collared jobs is considered normal. But the son of a (Retired) Divisional Manager of Syndicate Bank, educated in private English medium school in cities from nursery to graduation, having no special interest or knowledge in agriculture or rural areas, opting to be a farmer on the outskirts of a village is a paradox, isn't it ? But then I seem to be doing everything paradoxically! so much so, that even my opting for LEISA (though I didn't know that such a concept existed) was a paradox, a protest !

Some officials of the Agriculture Department visited my farm in 1988, within a year of my becoming a farmer (on paper!). I put forth a few of my problems before them. They suggested a few chemical remedies and even offered fertilizers at 75% subsidy to be delivered at my door-step. I ordered 3 and a half tonnes for my farm and utilized it.

A few months later a Horticulture Department Officer visited me. I didn't even know the difference between these two departments. This gentleman was shocked when I told him I used the particular fertilizer in such a big quantity. He said that they had suggested it only to reach the target set by the government. So what was the solution for my problem? He suggested another chemical. Was he given a target for this chemical? I asked sarcastically. He just smiled and said nothing. That was the day the LEISA concept entered my life unknowingly, when I decided not to fall a prey to these marketing policies of the government and industrialists.

Then what were the alternatives? Natural and bio-friendly measures suggested my ex-college mates who came from agricultural families. I was advised composting, as a lot of greenery was around my farm in the forests. I dug many compost pits, got some local cattle, mainly for their dung (manure) and set up a gober gas plant in 1990. But cutting trees / greenery was hurting me – in a small way, wasn't it deforestation? So I started looking for alternatives again.

My farm has a stream on 2 sides. Here, dry leaves, twigs etc from the forests are washed off during monsoons and stored in pockets. I utilized this manure / compost and got good results. To increase availability I put up small bunds / check dams using locally made rings / barrels (see end of the article for details. This ensured ample availability of “Kusree” (As it is locally called) for my farm.

For additional fertilizers, I tried vermi-composting. But lack of knowledge and experience showed and my attempt failed. But I want to take it up once again. Now, I have planted lot of glyricidia trees, which can be harvested for greenery once in 3-4 months. Co-incidentally, it takes 3-4 months for Vermi compost to be ready. All bio-waste such as grass, left over food, vegetables etc. can be used in vermi-composting. Then I can save the greenery in the forests around my farm, but not cutting it and also avail a lot of manure in the form of vermi-compost.

My farm is partly irrigated by drip system and micro sprinklers irrigate a part. I have a 3 HP AC pump set and a 2 HP solar pump. The farm is fenced by solar electronic fencing. With the help of a “Palm Climber” (an instrument to aid in climbing coconut trees), I pluck the coconuts myself. My wife helps me in all the farming activities. So, I am self sufficient in the basic needs of the farm.

About 9 workers are employed on the farm. They come to work here, when they don't have work on their fields or homes, purely at their discretion. I provide them work and wages whenever they come. They get their wages at the end of the day's work. In times of necessity, they are even given advance money, which they repay at their leisure, interest free!

This policy has ensured them a social security. I am benefiting from their loyalty and honesty. I can not only maintain my farm but am also developing it by taking up new projects, using their traditional and conventional know-how, their experience, expertise and enterprise coupled with guidance from expert friends of mine.

To conclude, I quote a kannada poet, “Better a own hut then a borrowed palace, better hard-earned porridge than an engraving 5 star meal!”

Better self-sustaining and independent forms and farmers following bio and eco friendly measures of LEISA than the cash guzzling, health-hazardous, tension creating, industry and subsidy dependent way of chemical farming.

*About 9 or 11 sticks, with an approximate diameter of 7-9 inches are stuck on the ground in a circle with a diameter of about a meter. Thick wild creepers growing in the forest are cut and woven between these sticks forming a ring or a barrel-like shape to a height of 5 feet such barrels are placed in two rows in the stream, where the bund/dam is to be put up. These rows are placed in such a way that the barrels in the first row come in between two barrels of the second row or vice-versa (like the Olympic rings). These barrels are then filled with boulders from the stream. This bund is quite strong to withhold the pressure of water flowing in the monsoons in the stream.*

*The bunds are not built across the stream but only to a small extent, so that the water gets diverted and the vegetative mass (twigs, leaves etc) gets stored /heaped near the bunds.*

*Although the barrels disintegrate in 2-3 years, the bund is held together by the boulders which are now cemented together naturally by sand and silt.*