

Transitioning to LEISA

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Though I was born in a farming community, I did not take up to farming initially, but served the government department. I had a feeling that while the professionals in most of the fields grew day by day, it was only the farmers who were left behind, without much change in their lives and living styles. I wanted to solve this problem, starting from my family. I resigned my job and took up farming in the 1970s. It was the time when the chemical agriculture was in full swing. Besides farming, in order to help farmers get better yields and also enable myself to get better income, I started a business in fertilizers and chemicals. Naturally, I also started applying chemicals indiscriminately on my farm. In 1996, when I calculated the returns over investments made, I was shocked to know that I was infact making huge losses. I wanted to know the reasons and got interested in alternative ways of farming.

By this time, "organic farming" was being talked everywhere. I read some interesting books on Organic farming. I toured many organic farms and every organic farm raised hopes in me to follow alternative ways of farming. Understanding the ill effects of pesticide residues in food affecting health, I was motivated to produce chemical free food through organic farming. I started raising horticulture crops on my farm.

In a foolish attempt, I converted my entire farm into organic overnight, without a forethought on the extent of income loss due to this. The experience has taught me a great lesson that the change should be gradual. There could be two ways through which this change could be brought about.

1. Changing the farm, part by part over a period of time
2. By reducing the quantity of chemicals used gradually – over time organic inputs should replace all the chemicals on the farm.

In my experience I realized that, through organic farming practices, there is a drastic reduction in water requirement. Rainwater harvesting, water conservation and proper water management results in raising ground water. Activities like compost making, earthworm rearing, waste management of biodegradable agricultural wastes keeps the family employed on the farm all through the year.

Just to cite an example of converting farm wastes into useful organic manure – we collect the following things first – green leaves; dry leaves; weeds from adjacent farms; cow dung and urine; fodder wastes from cattle sheds; gobar gas slurry; coir pith; tank silt; quarry dust and rock phosphate. The process is as follows: when the green leaves are added to the cow dung in a heap, enormous heat is generated (in the order of 60-70 C), thereby killing the pathogens. The items (1-7) mentioned above are put in alternate layers (cow dung in between layers) in a heap and leave it for 45 days. the heap is turned once or twice. In 45 days, the items get semi-decomposed. The partially decomposed material can be used in two ways. a) as a bed for vermi compost preparation. In another 45 days, vermi compost is collected and applied to the crops. (b) for good quality manure, where coir pith, tank silt and quarry dust are added to semi decomposed material which turns into good quality manure in 45 days.

It is beyond doubt that conversion can't be done without money loss, but could be done with safety and precaution, so that the losses could be kept minimum. Though the returns are not immediate in chemical free farming, there is guaranteed sustainable income with chemical free produce.

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