



## Family farming

### *Only way to protect farmers and farming*

**F**amily farming is a characteristic of farms that can be maintained by the family members without much dependence on high cost external inputs. That was the tradition and the culture of the whole world. But, after the start of industrial revolution and urbanization, the system of family farming gradually started diminishing and huge farms and industrial type or centralized system of crop cultivation got importance. These farms relied on machinery for transport and crop cultivation, chemicals for fertilizing and plant protection and weedicides to control weeds, necessitating the use of fossil fuels, thus resulting in over exploitation of coal, petroleum oils, minerals. This also led to extensive deforestation resulting in global warming and the destruction of soil health.

In my 4 acre farm with a tube well which provides protective irrigation water, we produce almost all our food needs for a family of 6 persons. It is also sufficient for about 10 outsiders who visit us occasionally at our organic farming training centre. Annually we sell 5000 coconuts, 10 tons of sapota, 2 tons of banana, 2.2 tons of Avacado, 2 tons of papaya and 2 tons of vegetables apart from having 200 timber trees growing on the edges. We have 6 cattle, 8 goats and 25 backyard poultry birds. We make most of our seeds, enough compost manure and vermicompost. Our only external input is electricity and a few items for the kitchen. We lead a comfortable life with a little saving each year regularly. Four of the family members are regularly employed on the farm. We hire one person to help us on the farm.

Let us look at the change in landscape in Europe too. Anybody can understand that unit crop production is diminishing year after year inspite of quadrupled use of high cost external inputs. Large farms have come up by displacing small farms. One who visits Arnhem open air museum in the Netherlands (Holland) would understand the debacles of huge mechanized farms. Hundred years ago, families were managing farms very economically with sustainable agriculture production. Horses were used for land cultivation and transport, and the men in the household were maintaining them with inputs available on the farm. The women maintained the cattle which needed only hay, silage and grazing from 2 acres land. The cattle were yielding around 15 liters milk without any external concentrates. But over a period, this has changed. Since last 60 years, the cattle are being fed 5 - 10 kilos each of feed like brewery malt, sugar beet pulp, oil cakes, wheat brans and concentrates, to produce 40 liters of milk, on an average.

This apart, cattle are also being injected with antibiotics and hormones along with other expensive medication.

Similarly, 40-50 poultry birds were maintained at the backyard and a few sheep or pigs were kept and fed with farm residues and lower quality grains and vegetables. All these animals like horses, cattle, poultry birds, pigs or sheep were held in the stable under their homes with wooden floor and the house was kept warm with breath of these animals without any heating equipments or fuels. But now the industrial farms have specialized dairy, piggery, poultry production systems, which depend on external inputs, thus leading to high production costs. Adding to the agony, charges for warming the houses constitute 20% of the family income. Now these huge farms of crops, dairy, poultry and piggery are under huge debts. Farmers are finding it difficult to even dispose the dung and urine produced on these farms.

I had visited many dairies who have huge stocks of cheese, skimmed milk powder and fat oils, unsold and protests are very common in almost all Scandinavian countries demanding for better prices. This is the same fate for piggery and poultry farmers. In the same country Netherlands, I visited a small farm on the bank of Rhine river. The farmer owns 8 acres of land, and still cultivates his lands by horses and grows 3 crops like wheat, sugar beets and potatoes.

It is a pity that giant corporate houses are encouraged to take over farming as an industry, displacing millions of small farmers from their lands. The use of expensive inputs in agriculture will not only be uneconomical but also unsustainable and destructive to the soil. Human health will be in danger with chemically produced crops. The farmers will be forced to migrate to cities and do odd jobs to meet out their needs. On the other hand, nurturing and supporting family farming is the only healthy way to meet food needs and provide more employment in the rural areas. ◆

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