



## Its time to look for local alternatives

Ever since the barter system of exchanging crop yields for various services disappeared and the weekly local markets, where farmers were selling their products directly to the consumers, have declined, exploitation of both the farmers and the consumers has become common. Now corporate houses and multinational companies in the name of departmental stores and malls are taking away even retail sale of vegetables, fruits and agricultural products at a throw away price. With a huge capacity to hoard in godowns, these companies create an artificial scarcity in the markets, making huge profits. This is made possible owing to two reasons - the first being the non availability of storage facility for a large number of farmers and second being the immediate need for money by the farmers to meet various needs.

After 40 years of my various trials to come out of the marketing problems, now I have found a very easy and profitable way of marketing my vegetables and fruits directly to 25 families. I have 150 banana, 100 guava, 100 Avocado (Butter fruit), 50 coconut, 120 mango (5 variety), 50 papaya, 10 jackfruit, 20 Chikoo (Sapota) fruit trees enabling me to supply 5 varieties of fruits, all round the year. I also grow 5 to 7 different vegetables and 5 to 6 greens throughout the year. I invited 25 families to our garden and showed them our cultivation methods of not using any synthetic fertilizers or plant protection poisons. They are happy to get our vegetables 2 times a week i.e. every Friday and Monday at their house packed in 2 and 1 kg packets at an agreed cost for future 6 months. In the mean time, they along with their family members spend 6 – 7 hours in a month, helping us in various farm activities like planting, weeding and harvest. They also get a little discount or a gift for their work. These visits make them understand the hard work required on the farm and better understanding about the quality of their vegetables and fruits they purchase. All of them reside at a distance of 17 kms from our farm. We save lot of time and energy in supplying our products at their place.

Another example I want to mention is of a silent revolution that is happening in Assam. Mr. Tenying Bodos, a young man aged only 27 years had visited me in April- 2013, when he was in Bangalore to attend a seminar organized by Organic Farmers Association of India. During his 3 day stay at our farm, I was surprised about his achievements and agriculture knowledge and decided to visit his farm and his group's collective work. Mr. Tanying Bodos, born as a very poor boy, was forced to discontinue his schooling and reached Chennai by train without a train ticket. He worked for a road building company for 6 months without any salary. In 2 years, he learnt operating 12 different road building equipments. He saved

4 lakh rupees in 13 years working in the same company. Since last 3 years, he is growing tea on 3 acres. In the beginning, he was selling green raw tea leaf @ Rs.20/ Kg every 5 – 6 days. Then he developed contact with "Fertile Ground" an NGO at Canada and made an agreement to sell home processed green tea @ Rs.1000. Now 8 small farmers have formed a producer's society and have erected a small green tea processing unit and with their own brand name and directly exporting to Canada and the NGO "Fertile Ground" is marketing it very efficiently. Now after watching this procedure most of the small tea growers are willing to start similar producer societies to get a fair price for their produce.

Infact, many of the corporate companies are frightened of such emerging producer societies. Giant multinational and Indian corporate companies have been making huge profits by purchasing raw green tea @ Rs. 20/kg and processing 5 kgs of this green tea leaf they get one kg ready to use tea dust. By selling this tea dust @ Rs. 300/kg they are able to make profits even in the Indian market. They are also attempting to grow tea on their own farms. But the cost of growing 1 kg raw green tea costs them Rs. 7 as the input costs are growing every year. It was easy for them to buy raw green tea from small growers than growing on their huge tea plantations measuring up to 3000 acres or even more.

Growing any crop is more economical and eco friendly for small and family farms. It is important that everybody understands the importance of small family farms than huge industrial type of agriculture production. Family farms are also important in checking rural migration. Its time that our policy makers learn lessons from Scandinavian countries about the tragedy of large farms.

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