



Biodiverse farms are sustainable farms

I very well remember my father, who could produce food enough to feed his 94 member family from 30 acres of rainfed farm and 5 acre irrigated garden. He used to grow 5 varieties of micro millets, 3 varieties of oil seeds, 5 varieties of pulses, 12 varieties of vegetables and 6 varieties of fruits. He had a shallow and vast water pond in the garden where we used to get 4 varieties of fish, 2 varieties of crabs and a variety of prawns. Many times we used to catch plenty of fish and also crabs from a perennial stream beside our garden. We had 600 pongamia trees shedding 3 tons pongamia seeds apart from 800 cubic meter of dry leaves and 200 cubic meters of dry flowers. We had 400 animals like bullocks, cows, sheep, goats, buffaloes and even donkeys which provided manure and served other needs. All the above crops were for home use. The only crop for sale was tobacco on 4 acres that was enough to meet the costs of very few needs for the family.

Now after 60 years, we, his 12 sons, 48 grand sons living in 45 families do not have so many animals or crop diversity. We purchase BPL card rice at Rs. 10.00 per kg as beneficiaries of food security act. Most of us are doing agriculture though it is not economically viable as compared to a security man's job or a real estate agent. However, may be owing to my grandmother's blessings or her ambitions made me to become a self reliant farmer and lead a comfortable and an honourable life.

At our farm, we grow 3 types of micro millets, 2 types of oil seeds, 3 types of pulses, 10 varieties of vegetables, 8 kinds of fruits, most of the spices, coffee and 60 coconut trees. We have 7 cattles, 8 goats and 10 chicken and 2 kinds of fishes in our water tank apart from 150 green fodder bushes and around 750 trees including 200 silver oaks and 100 teak trees. We grow food for 20 persons, 3 meals a day. From the trees, we sell 6000 to 7500 coconuts, 2 tons of sapota, 600 kgs of banana, 60 kgs papaya, 1000 kg avocado, 2 tons of vegetables each year. At our farm we have 30 different crops, 20 varieties of trees. We produce compost and vermicompost in plenty. Most of the seeds and seedlings are produced in our own garden.

Recently, I had been to several villages in Tiptur taluk, in Tumkur district. Most of the farmers have only coconut cultivation. They have not received even 40% of their usual 500 mm rainfall during the past 14 years. Coconut yields are only 10 to 15% of their potential. More number of bore wells are being drilled which are also drying up due to receding under ground water table level. Farmers are in deep debts.

Similarly, I am familiar with Kustagi taluk in Raichur district. Here, farmers went for Bhaguva variety of pomegranate. They faced worst results in 3 years. Now farmers and even doctors, advocates, IT professionals and real estate people are jumping into pomegranate cultivation as monocrop. I pray for them to be saved from disasters like in Kustagi.

I know an IT engineer from Kolar district who cultivated hybrid tomato. Due to glut in the market, he incurred huge loss and had to auction his ancestral property. I can give you 20 such examples. Let people cultivate many varieties of crops and adopt integrated farming systems with trees, animals and crop cultivation for eco friendly, sustainable and peaceful life.

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