

GOVARDHAN ECO VILLAGE

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What is Organic Farming?

Green seems to be the most popular color these days. Everybody is boasting of their “greenness”. Green cars, Green houses, Green gadgets, even Green clothing! Ever wondered what all this ‘Green’ means? Anything that favors and is in harmony with nature is termed Green. But what about the food we eat, can we make that Green too? Welcome to the world of Organic farming!

Contrary to the popular notion Organic farming is not just about going back to traditional farming practices. Organic farming involves using techniques that aid in achieving good yields without damaging the environment or the people who live and work in it. So any farming practice, be it old or new, that complies with this principle can be adopted in Organic Farming. Use of modern chemical based pesticides and fertilizers that not only damage the water resources, but also leave toxic residues on the produce, are strictly forbidden in Organic farming. To be a successful organic farmer, the farmer must not see every insect as a pest, every plant out of place as a weed and the solution to every problem in an artificial chemical spray. The aim is not to eradicate all pests and weeds, but to keep them down to an acceptable level and make the most of the benefits that

they may provide. Another important feature of Organic farming is the use of native seeds as opposed to genetically modified seeds.

Many skeptics often deride Organic farming practices as an impractical solution to the impending food crisis. Owing to their relatively lesser yields, many farmers prefer usage of genetically modified seeds and chemical based farming. But what is often overlooked is that long term usage of chemicals makes the soil toxic, reducing it to an infertile mass. Though producing fantastic yields in the initial years, it has been observed that the yield in chemical farming drastically drops with progress of time. So much so, that the land needs to be left inactive for years to facilitate its recuperation. Thus employing chemical based farming is proving to be penny wise but pound foolish!

Organic farming on the other hand works in cooperation with nature, aiding not only the growth of plants but also boosting the soil life, ensuring long term yields. By carefully adopting all the Organic farming practices not only can one ensure high yields but also the purity of the produce. Starting next month a series of articles on various Organic farming practices will be put up. So watch out this space!

FARMING @ GEV

In an attempt to establish a network with like minded farmer groups and to testify our growing commitment to protecting rice, the GEV took part in a workshop on participatory crop improvement and farmers breeders meet. Held in October this year at Jawhar in the Thane district of Maharashtra, the workshop was attended by many organic farmers from different parts of the country and also scientists from farming institutes like BAIF and MITTRA. The Main Objective of the workshop are

1. To create a forum for interaction between farmer breeders and Institutional Scientists.
2. Documentation of farmer breeders / Rice savers experiences.
3. Dialogue between Farmer-breeder and Scientist on the common platform.
4. Capacity building and Enhancing Rice breeders' skills
5. Developing Rice Crop improvement Guidelines based on Farmer breeders Experience.
6. Formation of National level Farmer breeders Network.



Conservation of rice varieties was also started at Jawhar in 2007 with objectives of Conservation, Revival and Sustainable use of rice. The Approach taken was promotion of on-farm seed banking and exchange of seeds within and between groups and villages. Today there is a central seed bank at Jawhar having 350 varieties of crops such as paddy, millets, pulses, tubers, and vegetables and 2 community seed banks covering 9 villages. The participating groups also visited the central seed bank, where hundreds of landraces of paddy, millets, vegetables, tuber crops are maintained. Traditional Seed storage systems, seed treatment practices were also kept for demonstration. Organic farming techniques like portable vermicompost, vermiwash, natural pest repellents, composting techniques were also demonstrated. The participants from Karnataka, Orissa, Kerala, Maharashtra, and West Bengal have displayed varieties of local seeds. GEV in coordination with BIAF is actively participating in the process of purification of traditional rice varieties and in initiating local vegetable seed collection programs.



The present day educational system is in the process of migrating to experiential learning methods. This may seem to be a breakthrough in the field of modern education but if we carefully observe, the ancient Vedic education model incorporated these principles. This model laid more emphasis on personal understanding and realization on part of the learner, than parrot like cramming. Apart from the subject taught, a lot of emphasis was laid on the qualification and character of the teacher and the student, which in present system is conspicuous by its absence. Its only the 'grey matter' which matters and the result is one finds students enrolled for sophisticated courses and degrees but failing to develop a resounding character. Or on the other hand, students often fall into the vices of bad habits and complain of poor concentration, memory, grasping power etc. While relegating it to some genetic deficiency no one tries to look into these problems at the root. The Vedic system however recommended its students to be pure in their habits and thus ensured good quality students. The guiding principle was, "No one can give rapt attention who is not pure in mind. No one can be pure in mind who is not pure in action".

LEARNING FROM THE VEDIC EDUCATION MODEL

Another striking contrast between the two systems was in terms of the accomplishment of the students. On one hand modern academics recognizes one to be an accomplished scholar if he has something new to offer, which surpasses or disproves the previous theories. The Vedic model trains its students to be innovative while maintaining respect for their teachers and previous scholars.

The ancient classic Srimad Bhagavatam defines personal understanding and realization: "Personal realization does not mean that one should, out of vanity, attempt to show one's own learning by trying to surpass the previous Acarya (Preceptor). He must have full confidence in the previous Acarya, and at the same time he must realize the subject matter so nicely that he can present the matter for the particular circumstances in a suitable manner. The original purpose of the text must be maintained. No obscure meaning should be screwed out of it, yet it should be presented in an interesting manner for the understanding of the audience. This is called realization." Thus Vedic model laid more emphasis on developing the right character which is crucial in determining how a person utilizes his knowledge, whether for personal gratification or for communal welfare.



Noted cartoonist and the President & Editorial Director of Witty World Magazine, Mr. Joe Szabo recently visited the Govardhan Eco Village. Here in India to study the traditional culture and practices, Mr Szabo interacted with students of Lady Northcote Hindu Orphanage. Filming various aspects of the kids daily routine, he spent an entire day with the kids. Highly impressed with the GEV, Mr Szabo exclaimed, "I have never before run out of memory in my camera!"

Among Szabo's cherished works is "The Finest International Political Cartoons of our Time" series that showcases socio-political cartoons from nearly 60 countries by many world-renowned cartoonists, including fourteen recipients of the Pulitzer Prize. His most widely recognizable publication, WittyWorld International Cartoon Magazine, reached 103 countries for over a decade. Szabo is the recipient of twelve international awards, including an International Press Prize from Belgium and a Lifetime Achievement Award from Mexico.



Last month a team from GEV visited the Paryavaran Dakshata Manch(PDM), an environmental protection organization in Thane, Maharashtra. The main focus of PDM is in Environmental Education, research and awareness. Conducting wide variety of courses and environmental awareness programs, PDM has a wide reach in many schools in and around Thane. They also conduct regular festivals for school kids with lots of environmental games, lectures and videos. Kids are also given lessons in origami, paper bag making, Kandil making and in making toys from waste paper pulp. PDM also has a 5000sqft theme park named Ankur, demonstrating Organic farming, Rain water harvesting, Vermi composting, Terrace gardening, Apiculture, Herbal plants etc. They also host nature loving groups in their retreat centre near Murabadi river, 22 km from Kalyan, Maharashtra, where they conduct nature trails and sky gazing. PDM also boasts of publishing the only environmental magazine in Marathi called 'Apla Paryavaran'.

*"Tell me and I'll forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I'll understand."
- Chinese Proverb*

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