

ECOLOGY DAYS - 2008

Introduction:

Two Ecology Day celebrations were organized during 2008, by the MMS (Mandal Sasyamitra Samakhya) MSS is Mandal level federations of farmers practicing Sustainable Agriculture. There are 8 MSS organised in the 8 mandals in AF's program area. The first Ecology Day was organized at Kalyandurg on 5th June, covering about 1800 farmers (About 800 women and 1000 men) from 125 villages of Kalyandurg, Beluguppa, Kundurpi and Settur mandals. The second one was organized at Anantapur on 16th June, covering about 1200 farmers (About 500 women and 700 men) from 105 villages of Dharmavaram, Raphadu, Atmakur and Kudair mandals. The MSS members of the above mandals, together with AF staff planned meticulously about Ecology Days including selection of venue, awareness to be created, items to be exhibited, cultural items to be presented and guests to be invited etc. The venues looked like big festival fairs, with women and men pouring in happily, wearing eye-catching colorful attires.

The Objectives:

Following are the main objectives of organizing Ecology Day:

- To create awareness on ecological imbalances through over exploitation of Natural Resources, use of chemical in agriculture etc., and to increase the role of farming community in restoring ecological balance by conserving natural resources.
- To motivate the rural community to protect the whole eco-system and bio-diversity including Human beings, Animals, Birds, Insects, Trees and Nature as a whole.
- To create awareness on (a) Pollution of Soil, Water and Air through the indiscriminate use of poisonous chemicals in the form of pesticides and fertilizers in Agriculture and (b) The hazardous effects of chemical pollution on the total eco-system and human health.
- To motivate the farming community (a) to stop using chemical fertilizers and pesticides totally and (b) to adopt the totally eco-friendly and cost effective Sustainable Agriculture practices.
- To motivate the farming community (a) to stop using the Hybrid seeds marketed by the greedy MNCs and (b) to regain control over Agriculture by using only the traditional, indigenous seed varieties produced locally.

The events organised during the Ecology Day:

Awareness building through Exhibitions

Interesting exhibitions, with attractive stalls were arranged at the venues to attract the attention of the participants.



The stalls exhibited about 20 - 30 kinds of different varieties of food grains, oil seeds etc, which was possible only because of the painstaking efforts put in by the MSS members and AF staff . The stalls also exhibited various Agricultural tools and some weapons used in olden days. The purpose was to refresh the old farmers' memories and create awareness among the young farmers on (a) Traditional and some extinct varieties of food grains, which have high health and nutritional value and which were used to be consumed by our fathers and fore-fathers, (b) Traditional Agricultural tools and Weapons.



There were also stalls exhibiting charts on (a) Non-negotiable practices in Sustainable Agriculture, (b) Life cycles of harmful Pests and Farmer friendly Insects, and (c) Preparation of various Bio-pesticides (Decoctions prepared from locally available herbs and material) and liquid fertilizers. The idea was to drive the farmers away from the poisonous Chemicals and to attract them back to the eco-friendly Bio-pesticides and manures under Sustainable Agriculture practices.

Models of Multiple Cropping were displayed on ground. The idea was to generate awareness, interest and to motivate farmers to stop the disastrous practice of Mono- Cropping of Ground nut and to adopt different successful Multiple Cropping models. These models spread the risk of Crop failures and droughts on one hand and improve the Soil fertility on the other.



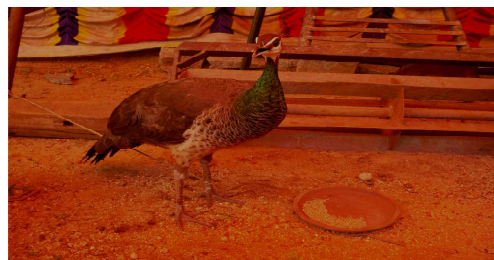
Some stalls displayed water saving equipments like Drip, Sprinklers and models of SRI paddy, to motivate the farmers to practice water saving technologies

There were also stalls displaying a variety of vegetables, fruits, Greens and some food grains produced organically. Apart from this, a variety of flowers, medicinal plants were also displayed. The purpose was to motivate the farmers to take up diversified crops and follow methods of organic farming.



Various local and improved breeds of Bullocks were also brought in to create awareness on the local breeds and to motivate farmers to improve the breeds of their own cattle, rather than exotic varieties of cattle like Murray, Jersey Heifer etc.

A variety of wild animals like Deer, Snakes, Mongoose, Peacocks etc. were also exhibited to



create a thought among the participants that these wild animals, which are gradually becoming extinct, also have a right to co-exist and have a friendly role to play along with us, as children of our mother nature and we should not destroy the forests.

Some stalls sold pillow covers, hand bags, purses and handicrafts prepared by women IG groups. These stalls were arranged to create interest among women to take up skill-based non-farm IGAs.

People have watched all these stalls with great curiosity and interest as they were educative and informative. The people were seen discussing among themselves about the various interesting exhibits, which roused their curiosity. Some of the elder people were happily reminiscing and explaining about the extinct varieties of traditional food grains, their methods of cooking and consumption and boasting how strong they were compared to, to the youngsters, with a touch of pride. Men farmers were totally engrossed in seeing the traditional agricultural tools, used by their fore fathers, weapons of olden days used for hunting, and the multiple cropping models and charts on Sustainable Agriculture. The women folk were attracted to the wide spectrum of food grains, the various products of IGAs, the animals and birds and various Bio-pesticides (Decoctions), bio-manures and liquid manures. There were lively discussions all-round the stalls and we were quiet content that the purpose of setting up the exhibition was fulfilled.

Awareness building through messages by eminent persons

Many officials from different sectors and departments like Agricultural University, Weather Research Center, Forest Department; Horticulture Department besides MPDO, MRO and RDT staff attended the campaign. They addressed the gathering in different aspects of ecology, environment, agriculture etc. There were very interesting messages on (a) the ecological imbalance, its causes and effects, (b) the over exploitation of natural resources, (c) the usage of poisonous chemicals in agriculture and its hazardous effects on people, animals and environment, (d) the usage of hybrid seeds and its disadvantages, (e) the depleting bio-diversity, particularly cattle population etc.



Following were the excerpts from the speeches delivered during the Ecology Day:

- Ecology is the study of how living creatures like human beings, animals, birds, insects, micro organisms. The natural environment is inter-dependent on one another and co-existed in a natural and harmonious way. It includes all the living and non-living creatures in this world.
- The five important elements in ecology are land, water trees animals and air and these precious elements should be protected. Land is the most important one among them.
- The human can survive only by allowing the nature to survive. We have to carry forward the nature's wealth to our future generations.
- Now a battle is going on between ecology and humans. People are working against the nature.

- We should protect the ecological balance, in the same way as we protect our own families and children.
- Over exploitation of natural resources like, land, water and trees has led to a severe ecological imbalance.
- The disasters, that are awaiting in the future, because of the misuse of the natural resources, were highlighted during the campaign.
- Forest is like a mother's lap to all the living creatures. If we protect the forests today, they will protect humans and other ecological elements in the future.
- The deforestation process sets up a cycle of perpetuation of ecological degradation adversely affecting and causing extinction of bio-diversity and all forms of flora and fauna.
- Overgrazing, deforestation, encroachment for agricultural crops and general improper management of land and water resources lead to ecological imbalance and because of these things a quarter part of earth's surface has now turned as desert or degraded.
- The deforestation has caused wild animals like tigers and elephants to enter into the villages and cause damage to the fields and people. It has also resulted in increased carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, low infiltration of rain water into the ground and increased run off, frequent flooding and a gradual extinction of bio-diversity.
- Because of the air and water pollution many animals and insects are vanishing.
- Water is one of nature's most precious resources that is being exploited indiscriminately by man's thoughtlessness and greed. Systems for optimum harvesting of rainwater have either not been designed or not being put to use efficiently. Traditional surface water bodies like tanks have been neglected. Overexploitation of groundwater resources by indiscriminate sinking of tube wells has resulted in lowering of the water table.
- If we go on continuing like this, the day is not too far, when we will have to get water as payment for work and security will be needed to take it safely to home.
- We know that prevention is better than cure. But we don't apply this wise adage. We should think and utilize the precious natural resources systematically and nurture them for future generation.
- India uses nearly 100,000 tones of Chemical pesticides annually. Pesticide use in India has multiplied 20 times between 1960 and 1980.
- A WHO study, which analyzed food samples across India, found that 50 per cent of the food samples were contaminated with pesticide residues.
- In Punjab state, urea, mono-chrotophos and DAP residues were found in human blood, as Punjab user high level of chemicals in agriculture.
- Many small children below 5 years are suffering from Asthma. Most people are living by taking medicines and they die with adverse effects of medicines".
- Pollution of water causes several health problems, such as diarrheas, amoebic dysentery, cholera, typhoid, hook worm, round worm and infective hepatitis.
- 10 years back purchasing bottled drinking water was viewed as a luxury, but now it is viewed as a need.
- The quality of the air that we breathe in is polluted heavily by smoke from domestic cooking fuels, thermal power stations, industries, vehicles, and mining activity.
- "If we don't give importance to the atmospheric pollution, we will have to carry oxygen cylinders on our shoulders in the near future.
- The Green Revolution introduced the trend towards hybrid and high-yielding varieties of seeds which replaced our traditional seeds. The newer varieties required large

quantities of chemical fertilizers, pesticides and large volumes of water for irrigation. Even small and marginal farmers who do not have, either capital for seeds and fertilizers or water for irrigation were also lured by the promises of phenomenal yields, and landed in debt traps.

- Without the required water, the strong chemical fertilizers and pesticides destroyed the productivity of their already degraded lands. The micro organism which helps the fertility of the soil were destroyed by the use of chemicals. The farmers lost not only the productivity of their lands, but also their rich pool of indigenous varieties of seeds. Nutritive diets available from traditional food crops grown earlier have been largely replaced by weaker diets based on non-traditional foods and imported grains.
- The need to go back to the cultivation of traditional food grains was stressed and the memories of the people were refreshed as to how healthy and strong were the foods prepared with traditional food grains like Arikelu, Samalu, Ragi, Bajra and Jowar.
- The villagers are selling away their cattle indiscriminately in distress. This has caused shortage of milk and animal dung which are vital in improving human health and soil fertility.
- Cattle population has decreased due to mining (Hillocks & growing land) also. Mining results in removing of all vegetation and topsoil leaving the land barren and devastated. This has affected milk production, the production of bullocks for farm operations and production of animal dung which has affected soil fertility very badly. The overall impact is a collapse of food production system.

Awareness building through Cultural Programs

The speeches were interspersed with lively and highly enjoyable as well as educative Cultural Programs. The situational songs sung by RDT's cultural team highlighted the program content in a lucid manner. The songs described the importance of Forests, Rains, Protection of Soil fertility, Protection of Trees, Planting trees and NPM practices. These songs attracted the people very much and it was observed that the participants were totally engrossed and enjoyed very much. Traditional plays like Bayalu natakam (Open air Drama), Tholu bommalata (Puppetshow), Kolatam (Stick Dance), and film song dances were performed , which kept the audience enthralled.

All the people relished the simple but delicious luncheon arranged at the venues. They returned back to their villages by evening or late night, discussing about the events and feeling happy about the day.

