

FARMERS CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

- Held at Lalitha kala Parishad, Anantapur on 06-03-2009

Introduction:

A big conference of farmers involved in Sustainable Agriculture was convened by the "Anantha Sustainable Agriculture NGO's Forum" - A forum of likeminded NGOs, involved in promoting Sustainable Agriculture. The conference was held on 06-03-2009 at Lalitha kala Parishath, Anantapur. The conference was well attended by about 1400 practicing farmers (about 50% women farmers) of Sustainable Agriculture from



across the District and reputed NGOs like Centre for Sustainable Agriculture - Hyderabad, AF Ecology Centre -Anantapur, Ananta Paryavarana Parirakshana Samiti - Anantapur, TIMBAKTU Collective - C.K.Palli, REDS - Kadiri and Foundation for Ecological Society - Madanapalle. Besides, a number of Activists and NGO personnel, who are promoting Sustainable Agriculture and Scientists also participated in the conference. Mr. Nammalwar a well known organic farmer and a strong proponent of ecological farming gave the key note address. The purpose of the Conference was to highlight the importance of Sustainable Agriculture, formulate favorable policy recommendations and present them to all political parties on the eve of General Elections for State Legislature and for Lok sabha.

Proceedings of the Conference

The conference started at 11.30 AM and the Presenter, Mr. Balaram, welcomed the following dignitaries on to the Dias:

1. Dr.Y.V.Malla Reddy, Director, AF
2. Dr. Nambalwar, Scientist cum Farmer as chief guest from Tamil Nadu state.
3. Mr. Rajasekhar, CSA, Hyderabad.
4. Mr. Sekhar, FES, Madanapalli
5. Dr. Ramalingam, SERP, Hyderabad.
6. Ms.Pushpa, Timbaktu Collective.
7. Mr. Kiran, Hyderabad.
8. Mr. Prabhakar, AGM, NABARD
9. C. Bhanuja, REDS, Kadiri
10. Mr. Gangi Reddy, Chaitanya, Lepakshi
11. Mr. Narayana, APPS, Anantapur
12. Nine (9) practicing Organic Farmers.

Dr. Y. V. Malla Reddy presided over the conference. In his inaugural address, he made the following comments related to the present agricultural crisis:

- Dry land agriculture in Anantapur district is in severe crisis and farmers are living in severe distress. Now the farming is not any more in farmers' control, as it has gone into the control of companies who produce fertilizers, pesticides, seeds etc.
- Soil, water, crops, food, everything is polluted with chemical pesticides and fertilizers including the breathing air is polluted.
- The lives of the farmers are mortgaged to fertilizer and pesticide shops. The farmers have gone into a debt trap and vicious cycle of poverty.
- To produce one bag of urea, the production cost is Rs. 2500/-. The companies are supplying the urea bag @ Rs.300 / bag to the farmers. The remaining amount of Rs. 2200/- is paid by the Government as subsidy, which is benefiting more the private companies.
- 90% of the rain fed farmers, who can not use urea and toil to make their own manure get no incentive or subsidy from the govt. Why is this? Why the Government is not giving incentives or subsidies to the farmers who do not use chemical fertilizer pesticides? Dr. Malla Reddy stressed on the need to discuss this issue in the conference.
- Farmers have to regain control over agriculture. Farmers' particularly small and marginal farmers here to have security of income, human dignity and honorable living conditions. The farmers and the nation have to be endowed with food security, free from chemicals. The environment and bio-diversity must be restored.
- He assured to extend total cooperation and take all the recommendations and resolutions passed by the conference to the notice of Govt and political parties. Finally he thanked and appealed to the participating farmers to make the conference a grand success.

Later Dr. Nambalwar in his key note address shared his valuable experiences, ideas and suggestions. Dr. Nambalwar, said he has a close relationship with the farmers of Andhra Pradesh, as he has been visiting the state frequently during the past many years. He opined that now the world is facing two major problems – Global Warming and Food Insecurity. After the Second World War, due to enhanced industrial development and chemical based agriculture many companies came in to existence in the name of development. The consumerism and industrial growth expanded rapidly and resulted in damage to ozone layer and caused global warming. Unfortunately India has also followed the same path of developed countries;



Unluckily India has also followed the same path of developed countries;

the pollution caused by factories is contributing largely to the green house effect. Ice is melting in high mountains, Glaciers and Polar regions due to rise in temperature, resulting in high run-off in rivers and consequently the sea level is increasing. As a result there have been calamities like more frequent droughts and events like the "Tsunami" in the year 2004. Due to Global warming 70% of the population might face drinking water problem. The coastal habitual would be submerged. Rich countries would not be affected immediately, but the impact on developing and poor countries would be immediate. And the damage to the World environment and livelihoods will be irreparable.

Dr. Nambalwar listed the 3 major factors contributing for global warming and food insecurity, viz (1) Pollution from factories (2) Cutting of trees and (3) Conventional chemical based agriculture. He said that about 47 Universities in India are promoting chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Modern Agriculture is not good. Everything - Seed, Fertilizers, Pesticides, Food grains and Knowledge is being imported. Farmers are using 100000 tones of chemical fertilizers and pesticides every year. Bio diversity is lost and whole environment is affected due to chemical agriculture. Cropping system has been changed because of wrong and lopsided Government policies. All eatables are poisoned and even mother's milk is also poisoned. People are spending more money on health. Use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides has caused for farmer suicides. Half of the global populations (3 billion people) are taking only one meal per day. In 1996, the UNO had resolved to reduce the poverty by 50% by 2015 but when it was reviewed in 2005, it was found that it has not moved even an inch forward! In America and many other countries food crops like Maize, Soya Bean, Sugar cane and Wheat are being converted into Bio-fuels. Lands are converted into Bio-diesel plantations and 33% of food grains are being converted into cattle feed for piggery, dairy poultry etc. He estimated that 50% of the Food produced will be converted into Bio-diesel by the year 2050. The big companies are grabbing fertile cultivated land for SEZs. The world is going to face severe food insecurity because of all the above factors. And so NGOs have to take cognizance of all these things and work for reversing this trend. Dr. Nambalwar gave many suggestions to the NGOs and farmers to face the upcoming issue of food insecurity:

Suggestions:

1. The NGOs should aware and awaken the communities in order to fight against the causes of agriculture crisis, food insecurity and farmer's distress.
2. The farmers should take the organic farming forward by practicing the simple natural principle that farmers take the top of the crop (grain) for their living, cattle take the middle portion of the crop as fodder, while the lower portion (root) is taken by the soil as manure.
3. Banks should be kept open to the farmers all the time and give loans for sustainable agriculture.
4. Farmers have to widely practice and propagate the NPM & LEISA methods like Panchagavya, Amruthapani, Jeevamurtham, Beejamrutham, SRI etc.
5. All farmers should practice the "Mulching" since it is best practice for protecting the soil moisture, controls weeds, helps in developing earthworms and improves soil fertility.
6. All agriculture related research institutions have to work for serving the interests of farmers' bio-diversity and environment but not for the companies.

7. Government should give subsidies directly to farmers but not to the multinational companies.
8. NGOs, Activists and Scientists have to work together for the farmers. They all should put forth the specified demands to politicians and the Government.
9. Farmers have to follow the methods/ practices, developed by Mr. Fukuoka, of Japan (perma culture) Mr. Bhaskar Save, Gujarath and Mr. Subhas Palekar of Maharashtra as they have done many experiments in organic agriculture.

Finally Mr. Nambalwar expressed his thanks to all the participants, especially to women for they have listened to his prolonged speech patiently.

Later Dr. Ramalingam expert on Sustainable Agriculture from SERP, Hyderabad shared his valuable experiences and ideas in promoting sustainable agriculture in the state. First of all, he appealed to the farmers to excuse him as he has done harm to them when he was working as Joint Director of Agriculture in the Government by issuing licenses for selling chemical fertilizers and pesticides. But after his retirement, he joined SERP and has been playing a vital role in promoting the practices of organic farming. Dr. Ramalingam demanded the Government to give subsidy of Rs. 6000 per acre to organic farmers instead of giving it to companies who are producing chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

Afterwards the organic farmers on the dias shared their opinions and demands.

- ⇒ NPM practices were introduced in the crops of cotton and chilli in the villages of Warangal district and it resulted in reducing the crop investments from Rs. 20,000/- to Rs. 2000/-.
- ⇒ In India, organic farming is being practiced in 2 million acres of land in 22 districts.
- ⇒ Mulching is one of the essential practices in organic farming as it helps in retaining moisture and developing earth worms.
- ⇒ Azolla in paddy fields controls weeds and supplies nitrogen to the crop.
- ⇒ Application of tank silt increases the soil fertility. Optimum crop yields can be obtained by using panchagavya and Jeevamurtham”.

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Ms Jayamma, Woman Farmer from K.Kuntlapalli shared that she has been practicing NPM practices with locally available material. She has been giving awareness to other farmers and motivating them to take up organic farming. The NPM farmers are selling their products at higher rates in the market. They have planned to form a society of NPM farmers.

Mr. N.V. Narayana, Farmer from Chinna jalalapuram village said that he has been doing agriculture since 1992, using chemical fertilizers and pesticides. He was cheated by the shop owners during all these years and had debts to an extent of Rs.150,000/-. Now with the cooperation of RIDS an NGO, he has been following organic farming in his 7.5 acres of land. He got an income of Rs.48000/- from his farm land by investing Rs.3500/- only. He demanded Government to give subsidies to the farmers directly and it should also see that NPM shops are arranged within the reach of farmers.

Mrs. Lingamma from Mallapuram village explained about the FFS, (Farmers Field Schools) where in men and women farmers are participating from 7.30 am till 11.00 am. She said that many farmers in her village are practicing LEISA / NPM practices and are not using any chemical fertilizers and pesticides. The green matter developed on the field bunds is being used as green manure. The solution of green chillies and garlic has proved very effective in controlling the 'Aphids' on groundnut crop. She appealed the conference to take the demands of small and marginal farmers to the notice of Government and Politicians for favorable policy decisions.

Mr. Sreenath, from Kuntimaddi village expressed that there is no support to farmers from Government. LEISA / NPM practices will save the farmer from committing suicides. He appealed the farmers to grow 9 kinds of crops called "Navadhanyalu" and change from chemical farming to organic farming. He opined that by eating all varieties of food grains, people will be healthy and free from all kinds of diseases.

Ms. Pushpa, from Timbaktu Collective explained the NPM activities practiced by the farmers in their "Dharani Society". She added that farmers are able to reduce the investment by Rs. 1000 - 1500 per acre by practicing organic farming. The society was formed with 900 farmers in the year 2007. The society is buying the organic crop produce from farmers, processing and marketing it at Bangalore, Chennai and Local markets for higher rates. The farmers are following the PGS system certification for making the processed agri-produce.

Mr. Mohan Reddy, an activist from Hyderabad narrated his experiences with the farmers of Warangal district. He appealed the farmers to follow the recommendations made by an eminent Water Management Specialist Mr. T.Hanumantha Rao. He also explained about 3 mantras , (1) Retaining the total rain water in the crop land by making small bunds in the field (2) Increasing vegetative cover on the crop land and (3) Ploughing the crop residues back in to the soil. If these 3 methods are followed, the production will be 3 times more when compared to the normal yields.

Mr. Narayana, farmer from Mallipalli village expressed his gratitude to AF/RDT for promoting vegetative cover on soil bunds by dibbling seed and planting plants about 20 years back under watershed development program. The green matter is now being used for composting. He appealed that every farmer should follow LEISA/NPM practices and discourage chemical agriculture in the district. He demanded the Government to declare Anantapur District as "Sustainable Agriculture District" and give more subsidies to NPM practicing farmers.

Mr. Thippeswamy, from Thippanapalli village opined that farmers are adding 'poison' to the soil in the form of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Farmers should change from unsustainable Agriculture to Sustainable Agriculture by adapting Palekar models.

Mr.Prabhakar, AGM, NABARD appealed farmers to take up more horticulture and vegetable cultivation under Sustainable Agriculture Program since Govt is giving more subsidies. He added that NABARD is also giving funds to the farmers through "Rythu Clubs". There is possibility of getting subsidies and loans from NABARD through the farmers groups.

Mr. Kiran, Hyderabad explained about the "Farmers Manifesto". He opined that farmers should get the opportunity to demand their rights so that the politicians respond to farmers. Efforts are being made to put forth the farmers' demands before the Government.

Finally Mr. Gangi Reddy and Mr. Narayana Swamy put forth the policy recommendation to the farmers one by one and took the consent of the farmers for the recommendations. The recommendations are summarized and as follows.

Policy Recommendations

Development of institutional infrastructure for Sustainable Agriculture.

- ◆ Appoint a “Commission on Sustainable Agriculture and Farmers Welfare” to study the local agro-climatic conditions and recommend appropriate policies, institutions, practices and incentives for Sustainable Agriculture in Anantapur District, with adequate emphasis on rainfed agriculture.
- ◆ Establish a University of Sustainable Agriculture in order to develop appropriate local specific technologies and practices; and accordingly train human resources for research, development and extension of sustainable agriculture.
- ◆ Establish an effective local specific and farmer centric extension service system including farmers extension institutions for propagating and nurturing Sustainable Agriculture.

Development of local ecology and environment in the District, suitable for Sustainable Agriculture.

- ◆ Implement an integrated bio-mass intensive micro-watershed development covering the whole District with emphasis on in-situ soil and water conservation, farm forestry, development of CPRS, (water bodies, forests, commons etc), fodder development, rainfed horticulture etc.
- ◆ Promote intensively cattle and livestock development for the benefit of rainfed farmers with suitable Indian varieties of cows, buffalos, sheeps, goat etc which can survive and yield better under drought-prone conditions. And develop institutional infrastructure for Animal Husbandry, Processing and Marketing of Milk, Fisheries etc.

Incentives for farmers practicing Sustainable Agriculture.

- ◆ Provide a Rs.3000/- incentive per acre under Sustainable Agriculture for all LEISA farmers towards preparation and application of organic manures and non-chemical management of pests and diseases
- ◆ Provide incentives for diversified cropping systems, particularly for perennial tree crops like Mango, Tamarind, Sweet Lime, Pomegranate etc.,
- ◆ Ensure remunerative prices and marketing facilities for all crops under Sustainable Agriculture.

- ◆ Provide crop-income insurance for all crops and for all farmers. The sum assured must cover crop investment plus 50% additional, in order to compensate the value of the yield lost and thus provide income insurance to the farmer.
- ◆ Introduce locally grown millets and pulses like Jowar, Ragi, Redgram etc., in the subsidized Public Distribution System (PDS).
- ◆ Organise seed production in every panchayat and facilitate seed banks, owned & managed by farmers, with locally suitable non-hybrid and non-genetically modified varieties.
- ◆ Organise Farmers Groups of Sustainable Agriculture on the lines of women SHGs and federate them at Mandal, District and State level. These CBOs to be the instruments of transforming the conventional agriculture into Sustainable Integrated Farming Systems.
- ◆ Provide critical irrigation for all rainfed crops in case of long dry spells affecting crop prospects, using the surface water and river waters and using mobile sprinklers systems.
- ◆ Provide 100% coverage of micro irrigation facilities for efficient water use under bore wells, open wells, tanks, canals etc.
- ◆ Establish bio-gas units in all households having 3 or more cattle.