

Report on Brainstorming on Organic Farming Held at Organic Research Farm of CIKS, Sukkankollai on 25th March 2008

Centre for Indian Knowledge Systems (CIKS) has been working with farmers in the field of conservation of traditional variety of seeds as well as organic farming for more than a decade. CIKS has observed that organic farming has not spread as a movement as it should have, although there has been growth in the sector. In this regard it planned to conduct a brainstorming workshop with participants consisting of farmers, farm scientists, NGOs, government department staff, CIKS staff and organic farming scientists. It was planned to conduct four brains storming sessions across Tamilnadu to get the impressions and ideas of cross section of representatives from related fields of agriculture. The first brain storming session was held in CIKS Organic Research Farm in Sukkankollai on 25th March 2008.

Program Schedule:

WELCOMING

Mr. AP.Gnanasekar, Field Supervisor of CIKS welcomed the gathering.

Introduction to CIKS

Mr.AV,Balasubramanian, Director of CIKS, introduced the participants to the objectives and activities of CIKS, particularly in the field of organic farming.

Introduction to the program

Mr. S.Arumugasamy, Program Coordinator of CIKS briefed about the brain storming session. He said that there are different approaches to organic farming viz., natural farming, bio-dynamic farming, zero-budget farming do-nothing farming etc. All these approaches aim for organic farming methods which are sustainable and protect the livelihood of farmers. Generally there has been an increase in interest in organic farming and there are many farmers who are converting their farm to organic methods. Nevertheless, the rate of conversion has been slow. For example even if a farmer has been successfully practicing organic framing for ten years, it has not provoked interest in the neighbouring farmer. The underlying hesitation/constraint of the farmer has to be understood first. In India there is less than 1% of farm lands that have adopted organic production methods although organic farming has been in vogue for more than a decade. . This scenario is the starting point for this brain storming session.

Group discussion

The 20 participants (list of participants annexed) were split into groups of three and were asked to brain storm on eight topic/ideas/questions with one moderator who also noted down the proceedings and presented it to the group. The participants were taken for a field visit to the organic farm of CIKS. The meeting ended with a vote of thanks.

The questions/ideas/topics brainstormed by the group and the outcome are presented in the following pages.

I. Although there are advantages in organic farming many farmers do not come forward to adopt it. Why?

1. There is not enough awareness among farmers on organic farming. Also the agricultural labourers lack awareness and hence it is difficult to get their cooperation to implement organic methods.
2. Farmers perceive that income and productivity from organic farming is less and this deters them from switching over to organic farming.
3. Farmyard manure is an important input in organic farming. Grazing lands and cattle population has reduced significantly and hence it becomes difficult to produce/get sufficient farmyard manure.
4. It is difficult to market organic products.
5. Organic farming requires relatively more physical effort than chemical farming. For example preparation of organic inputs like Vermicompost, Panchagavya takes some effort on the part of the farmer unlike application of a bag of chemical fertilizer. In chemical farming the farm inputs are available off the shelf, unlike organic farming, as most of it has to be produced within the farm.
6. The cost of getting the farm certified as organic is expensive.
7. Government supports chemical farming through subsidies and loans. Government provides chemical fertilizer at subsidized cost. Some credit institutions insist on providing a part of the farm loan as inputs like chemical fertilizer.
8. Farmers have become used to chemical farming for around 40 years. This habit would take time to change.
9. The government has not officially recognized organic farming.
10. The market should provide special price for organic products.
11. There is lack of separate selling yards in the government managed regulated markets for organic products.
12. It is difficult to get rapid results on growth (of plants) and productivity in organic farming.
13. It is difficult to procure organic seeds as well as traditional varieties of seeds. Use of high yielding varieties of seeds is not suited for organic farming.
14. Rural youth are generally less interested in agriculture and specifically less in organic farming.
15. There are not any outlets for organic products in rural areas. Most of the available outlets are present in urban areas.
16. It is difficult to source organic inputs as it is not easily available. Moreover it is priced higher and the quality is suspect.

17. It is difficult to get the support of the family when switching over to organic farming. Family members discourage the initiative and it is difficult to get their support in the initial period.
18. The role of media is not supportive of organic farming. Rarely there are programs that promote the benefits of organic farming and which could attract more farmers.

II. What are the social, economic and political reasons for less adoption of organic farming?

1. For those agricultural land located close to the urban area, conversion of agricultural land for other uses like industry and real estate is becoming more attractive to the farmer as the land fetches very high price. An acre of agricultural land has been sold for Rs. 1 crore also. The question then in a farmer's mind would be, "Can an acre of agricultural land give a return of Rs. 1 crore even after 50 years?" This economic factor discourages farmers from adopting organic farming or other innovation.
2. Farmers are not united under a separate political system and hence their voice is not properly heard by those with political and administrative clout. If farmers were properly united their interest in organic farming would have been properly heard and policy measures to support the same formulated. Simply put, farmers are not a force to reckon with in the political system.
3. An organic farmer by practicing organic farming saves the exchequer in the following way; the government subsidizes the price of fertilizer by paying a part of the cost to fertilizer companies. An organic farmer who does not use chemical fertilizer does not benefit from the indirect subsidy. There should be a way for the organic farmer to be compensated for not receiving the subsidy.
4. Agricultural universities and research institutions are not showing interest in organic farming as they have shown for chemical farming. Hence research outputs and technical support are not available.
5. Organic farmers are not in the board of agricultural universities and research institutions and hence they could not influence research areas needed for organic farming.
6. Government supports plantation crop (Coffee, Tea etc.) sector through procurement price subsidy due to the foreign exchange earned. This interest of the government is not evident on the organic farming sector although it can provoke tremendous response from farmers on organic farming.
7. Politicians and administrators are not aware of organic farming.
8. The government is not supporting organic farming as it thinks that if there is a large scale conversion from chemical farming then food production would come down.
9. The government has not stated its long term policy on organic farming. The policy would have paved the way for resurgence of organic farming.

10. Rural people mostly do not encourage initiatives like organic farming and this peer discouragement is a dampener on the spirit of the enterprising organic farmer.
11. Farmers perceive that venturing into a new activity like organic farming would increase their debt burden further (through lower yields and lesser returns).
12. Credit institutions do not have a program to provide support for organic farming

III. What are the problems in organic farming?

1. Scarcity of labour in rural areas has been a constraint in recent times. This affects agriculture in general and organic farming in particular as it is perceived that organic farming is labour intensive.
2. Entertainment through watching cable television has gained importance in rural areas also. This has affected the work culture of farm labourers and farmers as well. There is generally a lesser interest in initiatives like organic farming because of this factor.
3. It is perceived that organic farming is labour intensive and net returns are lower.
4. The average age group of farm labourers is between 40-60 years. Younger men and women are less interested in agriculture and move to other occupations and hence there is scarcity of young labourers who are relatively having better stamina.
5. It is difficult to source organic inputs like seeds, biofertilizers etc unlike chemical inputs.
6. It is difficult to get training in principles and methods of organic farming.
7. Separate market like the one that exist for conventionally grown food crops (e.g. regulated market) does not exist for organical food and hence there is lack of differentiating price structure between conventional and organic food products.
8. There is lack of awareness among consumers about the benefit of organic foods that would increase demand.

IV. For which problem there is solution and for which there is not?

1. Management of pest and diseases in vegetables is difficult and this problem has not been adequately addressed. Agricultural universities and research institutions should take up research projects and address the problem.
2. Availability of organic seeds is inadequate and this problem can be addressed if organic farmer groups are trained to produce it. Also the government and NGOs have a crucial role in organic seed production and thereby the scarcity can be reduced.
3. Interest of youth in organic farming is less and this problem can be addressed through awareness programs and capacity building programs on organic farming targeted on youth.

4. Currently the market for organic products is in urban areas and accessing the market is a challenge. Creation of cold storage facilities in rural areas and transport facilities is a solution.
5. Accessing the market for organic products is a problem particularly when there is an expectation for higher price than conventional products. Use of Information and Communication Technology in rural areas that gives price information and buyers database could be a solution.
6. To create awareness and build confidence on organic farming, cooperative farms should be established and managed by farmers which would give the required confidence. NGOs could demonstrate organic farming in a contiguous piece of land (say around 25 acres) for this purpose.

V. What kind of support do small farmers need to adopt organic farming?

1. Creation of sales outlets for organic products and assurance of relatively higher price than conventional products are the marketing support required.
2. During the conversion period (which is normally three years) financial support from the government for in-conversion farms would be a supportive factor.
3. Provision of farm implements like sprayers, minor machinery etc. as an incentive for organic farmers, by the government.
4. Provision of interest free credit through banks for organic farmers.
5. Capacity building for small farmers on the various techniques of organic farming.
6. Arranging exposure visits to organic farms so as to gain confidence.
7. Cattle are an essential component of organic farming whose population has substantially dwindled in the rural areas. The government should provide cattle to small farmers at subsidized cost. The cattle (two per farmer) should preferably be of traditional breeds.
8. Common godowns for storing organic products at village level.

VI. What kind of support do large farmers need to adopt organic farming?

1. Provision of credit on softer terms (lower interest rates and longer repayment period).
2. Improving availability and accessibility of organic inputs at village level.
3. Providing incentive for large farmers converting to organic production methods through reduced input cost, farm machinery etc.

VII. What kind of steps do the government, NGOs, farmers and farm scientists have to take to popularize organic farming?

Government

1. The government should state its policy on organic farming.
2. A separate department on organic farming should be created.
3. It should allot funds for promotion, research and development of organic farming.
4. Creation of awareness among farmers and public on organic farming.
5. The government should focus on creating marketing avenues for organic products across the state.
6. It should establish demonstration farms on organic farming in each district.
7. It should extend crop insurance scheme to organic farms also.

NGOs

1. Focus on capacity building of small and marginal farmers on organic farming.
2. To nurture organic farm based enterprises like Vermicompost, Bio-pesticides etc.

Farm scientists

1. Undertake research on different aspects of organic farming and transfer it to the field for adoption.
2. Standardize quality of organic inputs sold in the market.
3. Bring farmers in the research advisory committee of universities and research institutions.
4. Recognize innovations/research findings of organic farmers.
5. Develop the mental maturity to accept failures with regard to chemical farming.

Farmers

1. Organic farmers should mobilize conventional farmers so that an organic movement develops in every village.
2. Farmers should voice their displeasure against government policies that are disruptive/discouraging of organic farming.
3. Organic farmers who are linked into a group should utilize local resources and produce organic inputs for utilizing among themselves so that input cost comes down.

Participants list

Participants name & address

No.

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Prepared by: M.Suresh Draft-1 28-3-2008

**Report on Brainstorming on Organic Farming
Held at CIKS Training Hall, Agani, Sirkzahi, Nagapattinam district on
16th April 2008**

Centre for Indian Knowledge Systems (CIKS) has been working with farmers in the field of conservation of traditional variety of seeds as well as organic farming for more than a decade. CIKS has observed that organic farming has not spread as a movement as it should have, although there has been growth in the sector. In this regard it planned to conduct a brainstorming workshop with participants consisting of farmers, farm scientists, NGOs, government department staff, CIKS staff and organic farming scientists. The major objective is to get the impressions and ideas of cross section of representatives from related fields of agriculture. The second brainstorming session was held in CIKS Training Hall, Agani in Nagapattinam district on 16th April 2008.

Program Schedule

Introductory session

Mrs. Subhashini Sridhar, Program Coordinator welcomed the gathering. Mr.M.Suresh, Senior Program Officer of CIKS gave an insight of organic farming activities of CIKS and Mr.S.Arumugaswamy, Program Coordinator of CIKS gave an overview of the brainstorming objectives.

Group discussion

The 29 participants (list of participants annexed) were split into three groups and were asked to brain storm on seven topics/ideas/questions with one moderator who also noted down the proceedings and presented it to the group. The meeting ended with a vote of thanks proposed by Ms.P.Kiruthika, Senior Research Assistant of CIKS.

To steer the discussion in the right direction the groups were first asked to deliberate on the constraints in agriculture and the results were;

1. Shortage of farm labourers
2. Uneconomical prices for farm produce
3. Reduction in productivity
4. Better prices for farmland when sold as real estate
5. Low interest of youth in agriculture
6. Diversification of cropping pattern is a challenge
7. Non-availability or untimely availability of farm credit.
8. Lack of availability of quality seeds.
9. Farmers are not adhering to cooperative principles.
10. Regulated market is not established in all parts of the state.
11. Insufficiency of drying yards and storage places in the villages.

The questions/ideas/topics brainstormed by the group and the outcome are presented in the following pages.

I. Although there are advantages in organic farming many farmers do not come forward to adopt it. Why?

1. Lack of government support
2. Government apparatus does not have sufficient awareness on organic farming.
3. Most farmers are not having awareness about the benefits of organic farming.
4. The input cost for organic and chemical farming is the same.
5. Credit institutions do not have separate scheme of finance for organic farming.
6. The population of cattle has reduced in rural areas.
7. The yield obtained is less in organic farming.
8. The labour requirement is more in organic farming.
9. Farmers have become lazy unlike days when they also contributed farm labour. .
10. The conversion period to an organic farm is long (2-3 years).
11. The economic loss due to the loss of productivity in conversion period is difficult to bear.
12. Discouragement by neighboring farmers on those who practice organic farming.
13. The rural society in general discourages organic farmers.
14. Organic farming is mostly popularized through the efforts of NGOs rather than government agencies.
15. Farmers are yet to believe that organic farming is viable.
16. Organic farming requires more direct involvement of farmer which is not the case with chemical farming.
17. Weed management is perceived as a major constraint in organic farming.
18. Government has not openly supported organic farming.
19. High-yielding varieties require higher levels of nutrients and whether organic farming can provide the nutrient status is a doubt.
20. Farmers are oriented in looking at higher yields in farming rather than higher net returns (which can be ensured by organic farming).
21. Farm labourers are discouraged by the smell of organic inputs and are hesitant to work in organic farms.

II. What are the social, economic, policy and technological reasons for less adoption of organic farming?

Social

1. Lack of recognition by members of society on those who practice organic farming.

Economic aspects

1. There is mis-conception of some farmers that organic farming is not economically viable.

Policy aspects

1. The government is not openly supporting/encouraging organic farming.

Technological aspects

1. Organic farming package is not fully standardized as in the case of chemical farming. This is because farmers are oriented to adopting package of practices that are propagated by government agencies.
2. Extension agencies are not supporting organic farming.

III. What are the problems in organic farming?

1. In organic farming as there is dependency on organic nutrients there would arise a shortage of availability of organic inputs if more farmers adopt it.
2. Organic farming is labour intensive and hence the support of family members is necessary which is difficult to get as they would not be sufficiently convinced.
3. Management of weeds is a major challenge as application of farmyard manure and other organic inputs increase the growth of weeds that become difficult to manage.
4. Management of rodents becomes difficult in organic farms as there are not any proven organic measures for rodent management.
5. The yield is low in organic farming.
6. Marketing of organic products is difficult as it is a new field and there are no established marketing avenues.
7. The price for organic produce is not attractive so as to venture into organic farming.
8. Awareness of consumers about organic farming is low.
9. Management of pests and diseases is difficult through organic means.
10. It is difficult to get certification for organic farms.
11. Reduced yield during the conversion period.

IV. For which problem there is solution and for which there is not?

Solution not available

1. For weed management through organic means there is no solution.
2. To get better price for organic products there is no solution in the near future.
3. Government support for organic farming sector does not have a solution.
4. Management of all types of pest and diseases through organic means is possible only after intensive research by universities, research Institutions and farmers together, which is a difficult management initiative.
5. Management of rodent through organic means is impossible. .

Solution available

1. Tackling the yield reduction during the conversion period is possible.
2. Getting the support of family members for converting the farm into organic is also possible. The training programme for organic farming should include some of the family members of the farmer also as they will be also convinced and provide support to the farmer who is in transition stage.
3. Shortage of organic inputs can be addressed through concerted effort by farmers, government and private agencies.

V. What kind of support do small farmers need to adopt organic farming?

1. Government should give minimum support price for organic products (as output subsidy).
2. Input subsidy for organic inputs like vermicompost, bio-fertilizer etc. should be given by government.
3. Government should distribute green manure seeds on a free basis to farmers.
4. Government, instead of distributing free TVs and subsidized rice for Rs. 2/kilo should give one cow per household on a free basis as an incentive to support organic farming.
5. Provide capacity building of farmers on organic farming.

6. Government and NGOs should distribute Neem, Pungam tree saplings free to farmers.
7. Provide higher procurement price for organic products.
8. Make availability of organic inputs at the village level.

VI. What kind of support do large farmers need to adopt organic farming?

1. Provide institutional credit on soft terms
2. Provide insurance cover to organic farms and the premium expense should be borne by government.
3. Provide on a free basis farm implements to organic farmers groups that can be used for transplantation, harvester etc.
4. Free distribution of bio-control agents by government.
5. Government should appoint more agricultural extension workers to train farmers.
6. Help in getting organic certification on a free basis for farmer groups

VII. What kind of steps do the government, NGOs, farmers and farm scientists have to take to popularize organic farming?

Government

1. Government should ban sale of pesticide and put an end to fertilizer subsidy slowly and this measure will make the farming community look at alternatives. The money saved from the subsidy bill should be used for subsidizing organic inputs.
2. The government should simplify certification process.
3. Government should announce its policy on organic farming—a white paper on organic farming should be bought out. What is the government strategy for the next 20 years?
4. Government should give subsidy to all farmers to set-up bio-gas units in the households so that the slurry can be used as organic manure.
5. Organize result demonstration on organic farming practices.
6. Appoint more extension workers for training on organic farming practices.
7. Utilize Public Distribution System for sale of organic products.
8. Make budgetary allocation for organic farming sector.

NGOs

1. Conduct awareness camps
2. Conduct capacity building to farmers groups.
3. Provide revolving fund to farmers groups that have taken up organic farming.
4. Act as a catalyst between farmers and farm scientists in development of organic farming technologies.
5. Undertake confirmatory on-farm trials

Farm scientists

1. Establish research farms/KVKs for organic farming.
2. Undertake long-term research trials on organic farming.
3. Undertake participatory research activities with farmers and scientists as partners.
4. Reveal the scientific basis of organic practices through research.
5. Undertake research to bring out high-yielding varieties that respond to organic farming packages.

Farmers

1. Have belief on the benefits of organic farming.
2. Produce surplus organic inputs.
3. Neglect the criticism of non-believers of organic farming and pursue organic farming earnestly.
4. Take up small scale trial of organic farming before converting the whole farm.
5. Maintain farm records which will be a pre-cursor for organic farming.
6. Form organic farming interest groups in the villages so that challenges like marketing and input distribution can be addressed easily.

List of participants

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Created by M.Suresh. Second draft on 19th April 2008

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Report on Brainstorming on Organic Farming Held at Hotel Anand, Dindigul on 26th April 2008

Centre for Indian Knowledge Systems (CIKS) has been working with farmers in the field of conservation of traditional variety of seeds as well as organic farming for more than a decade. CIKS has observed that organic farming has not spread as a movement as it should have, although there has been growth in the sector. In this regard it planned to conduct a brainstorming workshop with participants consisting of farmers, farm scientists, NGOs, government department staff, CIKS staff and organic farming scientists. The major objective is to get the impressions and ideas of cross section of representatives from related fields of agriculture. The third brainstorming session was held in Hotel Anand on 25th April 2008.

Program Schedule

Introductory session

Mr.M.Suresh, Senior Program Officer of CIKS welcomed the gathering and gave an insight of organic farming activities of CIKS and Mr.S.Arumugaswamy, Program Coordinator of CIKS gave an overview of the brainstorming objectives.

Group discussion

The 14 participants (list of participants annexed) were split into three groups and were asked to brain storm on seven topics/ideas/questions with one moderator who also noted down the proceedings and presented it to the group. The meeting ended with a vote of thanks proposed by Mr. S.Arumugasamy.

To steer the discussion in the right direction the groups were first asked to deliberate on the constraints in agriculture and the results were;

1. It is difficult to source labourers for farm work as they prefer other avocation.
2. Skill training in agriculture technology is not easily available for farmers and farm labour
3. Farmers have less interest in agriculture, these days.
4. Due to shortage of cattle in villages there is demand of farmyard manure
5. There is irregular and scarce supply of electricity for agricultural operations.
6. Water management is neglected by farmers.
7. Fertilizers are not stocked in adequate quantities and are not available in time in cooperative societies.
8. The vagaries of monsoon and the general change in rainfall pattern are discouraging agriculturists.
9. The quality of agricultural land has degraded due to over-exploitation and non-replenishment of essential nutrients.
10. Prices of agricultural inputs like fertilizers and pesticides have risen.
11. There is only a marginal increase in prices of agricultural produce.
12. Inadequate storage places in rural areas.

The questions/ideas/topics brainstormed by the group and the outcome are presented in the following pages.

I. What are the social, economic, political and technological reasons for less adoption of organic farming?

Social aspects

1. Some members of the society give better recognition to chemical farmers rather than organic farmers. In some villages, a farmer is given weightage based on the number of fertilizer bags purchased by him/her.
2. Consumers are unaware about the benefits of organically grown produce.
3. Consumers are unaware about the ill effects of pesticide laden food.
4. Organic farmers are yet to gain recognition from society.

Economic aspects

1. There is almost nil economic support through financial institutions for organic farming.
2. Market forces are unfavourable for organic products—be it better price or access.
3. The yield loss in the early years would be difficult to bear.
4. Shortage of labour coupled with increased requirement for labourers in organic farming are unattractive economic features.
5. Organic inputs are not easily available in the market unlike chemical inputs.
6. Organic inputs are sold to farmers only when they purchase chemical fertilizers. Agricultural Department tends to “push” organic inputs to meet targets set by their policy makers. Many times, organic inputs that have crossed the expiry date are sold to farmers.

Political aspects

1. Insufficient attention is being paid to organic farming by politicians and administrators.
2. There is an impression that large scale conversion to organic farming would lead to lower agricultural production and consequently food deficit.
3. Lack of vision on organic farming.
4. Step-motherly treatment is being given to organic farming as compared to chemical farming.

Technological aspects

1. There is a shortage of farmyard manure in rural areas and this has led to shortage of production of organic manure.
2. The organic production methods practiced by farmers traditionally has been lost (as it has been unrecognized and not properly documented).
3. There is reduced interest to learn about organic farming technologies by the farming community.
4. Organic farming technologies are not adequately disseminated as chemical farming technologies.
5. The agricultural department has insufficient extension workers who are trained in organic farming technologies.

II. What are the problems in organic farming?

1. Organic manure is not sufficiently available as the cattle population has dwindled.
2. There is a notion that there will be reduced yield in the first three—four years (conversion period) and whether farmers have the mental strength or financial capacity to bear it.
3. Although some farmers are inclined to organic farming the general population of farmers are not inclined to convert to organic farming.
4. Marketing of organic products is a challenge.

5. Pricing of organic produce has to be different from chemical farming produce. This change in price has not happened.
6. Organic inputs (bio-fertilizers, pheromone traps etc.) are yet to be easily available in rural areas.
7. Organic farming practices are yet to be standardized as it has happened in chemical farming practices.

III. For which problem there is solution and for which there is not?

Solution not available

1. If farmers do not want to bring their off springs into organic agriculture (as they feel that this profession is full of problems) then there is no solution for this scenario.

Solution available

2. Some farmers felt that all problems related to organic farming have solutions and can be addressed properly.

IV. What kind of support do small farmers need to adopt organic farming?

1. Cattle provided at subsidized price so that the need for manure is addressed.
2. Organic inputs should be available at villages regularly so that availability is not a problem.
3. Good quality organic seeds should be made available.
4. Traditional seed types (which are more suited for organic farming) should be made available.
5. Agricultural implements that are suited for organic farming should be made available through cooperative societies.
6. Farmers who form a SHG or a cooperative should be assisted in production of bio-pesticides, plant growth promoters etc. and should be also given assistance in marketing.
7. Lack of conviction about the possibility/efficacy of organic farming is a major challenge among farmers for adoption. If exposure visits are conducted to small farmers farms (who have converted to organic farming successfully) then more farmers can be convinced.

V. What kind of support do large farmers need to adopt organic farming?

1. Educational programmes on production of organic inputs.
2. Society should give proper recognition and support to organic farmers.
3. Establishment of separate market for organic produce on the lines of "Farmers Shandy".
4. Availability of manure is a major challenge in organic farming in particular and agriculture in general. Support to farmers for establishment of dairy and broiler farms would lead to availability of manure that can be used for organic farming.

VI. What kind of steps do the government, NGOs, farmers and farm scientists have to take to popularize organic farming?

Government

1. Use the media extensively (TV, Radio, Print media) to popularize organic farming.

2. The outlets of cooperative societies should be used to sell organic inputs and seeds in correct quantity, prices and time.
3. It should encourage NGOs to work the government or independently towards propagation of organic farming by undertaking demonstration projects on organic farming.
4. Steps should be undertaken to unite Agricultural Universities and Department of Agriculture so that focus can be had on organic farming.
5. Whenever important policy decisions with regard to organic farming are taken by government, then experienced organic farmers, NGOs, private companies should be consulted.
6. Government should provide uninterrupted power supply to agricultural sector.
7. Government should enact laws so that farmers can decide on the prices of agricultural produce.

NGOs

1. Should be a bridge between government and farmers in propagating organic farming by creating awareness and extending technologies.
2. NGOs should focus on district/village level projects on organic farming.
3. Ensure that the success stories of organic farming reaches many farmers.
4. The staff of NGOs should be thoroughly trained in all the aspects of organic farming.
5. NGOs should conduct result demonstrations on different aspects of organic farming.
6. NGOs should train school teachers on organic farming and their services should be used for educating/creating awareness about organic farming among school children.
7. Organic farmers should be provided with identity cards by government and provision should be made in buses for providing place for transport of organic produce to the market.
8. Utilize traditional media like folk dance, puppetry etc. to popularize organic farming.

Farm scientists

1. Research outputs on organic farming should be location specific or season specific.
2. The research outputs should be in a way that it is easy to adopt and replicate in the farmers field.
3. Conduct research and bring out new farm machinery that will aid organic farming.
4. Agricultural scientists should have open mind and accept research areas/topics/suggestions from organic farmers.
5. Take up the role of standardizing organic farming practices.

Farmers

1. Farmers should take interest to participate in organic farming training programmes. The “pull” should come from farmers rather than the “push” from government or NGOs.
2. Farmers should not stop with participating in organic farming training programmes but also adopt the practices in the field.
3. Should be bold enough to point out erroneous organic farming programmes or organic practices to the government.
4. Farmers should forget “ready-made solutions” in organic farming and should strive for low external input agriculture.
5. Farming sector is yet to be declared an industry and hence the benefits accrued by other industrial sectors like cinema, banking etc. has not been reaped.

List of participants

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Report on Brainstorming on Organic Farming Held at Puliyanakudi, Tirunelveli district 24th May 2008

Centre for Indian Knowledge Systems (CIKS) has been working with farmers in the field of conservation of traditional variety of seeds as well as organic farming for more than a decade. CIKS has observed that organic farming has not spread as a movement as it should have, although there has been growth in the sector. In this regard it planned to conduct a brainstorming workshop with participants consisting of farmers, farm scientists, NGOs, government department staff, CIKS staff and organic farming scientists. The major objective is to get the impressions and ideas of cross section of representatives from related fields of agriculture. The fourth brainstorming session was held in Puliyanakudi in Tirunelveli district on 24th May 2008.

Program Schedule

Introductory session

Mr.M.Suresh, Senior Program Officer of CIKS welcomed the gathering and gave an insight of organic farming activities of CIKS and Mr.S.Arumugaswamy, Program Coordinator of CIKS gave an overview of the brainstorming objectives.

Group discussion

The 19 participants (list of participants annexed) were asked to brain storm on seven topics/ideas/questions. As the group was small the participants felt that it was not required to split into groups and the brain storming was held in a single group.

To steer the discussion in the right direction the groups were first asked to deliberate on the constraints in agriculture and the results were;

General constraints faced by farmers in agriculture

1. Agriculture as a profession is not remunerative. The returns are not meeting the production costs. There is disparity in income between agriculture and other professions.
2. Farmers are not united and hence their demand is not heard.
3. The government has not fully understood the gravity of the situation (that returns from agriculture are poor). To understand the situation the following can be done by the government. The department of agriculture has seed production farms that are partially or fully uncultivated/idle. The government should raise crops in these land so as to meet the salary of the farm staff from the farm income generated. Only then they would know how difficult/impossible to get returns from farming (as returns would be poor and it would be difficult to meet the salary requirement).
4. The inputs (pesticides, seeds, fertilizers etc.) sold to farmers are not of good quality. Government is not monitoring the quality of the inputs.
5. Climate is not favourable to farming. Rainfall is unpredictable and summer is harsher.
6. Insurance sector has not really opened to farming sector despite the claim of the government.
7. There is shortage of labour for farm work.
8. Farm labourers are not finding farm work attractive for the following reason; after the introduction of farm machinery like paddy harvester the method of compensating labour in kind has reduced. Before the onset of mechanical harvesting, a farm labourer's family

would have earned on an average 20 bags of Paddy/year that would have met the food security of the entire family. The use of paddy harvester has diminished the requirement of farm labour and they are required only in the final stages of harvest and they get paid very little in kind. This is a disincentive to labourers and hence they discourage their children in pursuing work as a farm hand.

9. Farmers in general have been treating labourers badly (without giving them due respect as a fellow human being). High rates of illiteracy coupled with drudgery in farm work has made labourers not to encourage their children into farming which has led to shortage of farm hands.
10. Many farm implements have been invented by agricultural universities. Very few machinery innovations are adopted at the farm level. If farm machineries are available on a wider scale it would reduce the drudgery of farm labourers.
11. There is a fast growing tendency among rural youth who are not venturing into farming and they prefer other occupations
12. Paddy farmers should be paid at least Rs. 2000/quintal so that farming is attractive.
13. Society, does not give due respect to young men involved in farming but it gives respect to engineers and doctors. It is getting difficult to find brides for young men involved in agriculture.
14. The government regularly appoints pay commission to review salary structure of central government employees so that they are not affected by inflation. The same yard stick should be applied for farmers and a farmer's commission should be appointed to review the income levels of farmers and procurement prices modified accordingly.
15. From the last decade, agricultural lands near towns are left uncultivated as it is looked as a potential real estate asset. It is only small farmers who are involved in cultivation near urban areas and there is pressure on them also to sell the agricultural land.
16. It is difficult to move machinery/implements to farms as there is an absence of common pathway in tracts of agricultural lands. Farmers are reluctant to allot a small piece of their land so as to make pathways.
17. When farmers register the land with the registrar it takes more than one month to get the deed certified.
18. When a representation is made to VAO (Village Administrative Officer) for measurement of farmland there are large delays.
19. The forest department does not give permit to fell teak trees within a month of giving application.
20. The government should permit placing of pipes to transport water (for agricultural purpose) across roads and through government or private lands.

The questions/ideas/topics brainstormed by the group and the outcome are presented in the following pages.

I. What are the social, economic, political and technological reasons for less adoption of organic farming?

Social aspects

1. Educated families give respect to organic farming practices while uneducated/less educated families have scant respect for organic practices like preparation of panchagavyam.
2. It is difficult to get a daughter-in-law for a son who is an organic farmer as the society is mis-informed that organic farming is back breaking work.

II. What are the problems in organic farming?

1. Organic farming is labour intensive and since there is scarcity of labour it becomes more difficult. So farmers become dependent on family labour. The latter start disapproving organic farming as it requires their physical labour.
2. Yields improve only after three years in organic farming and reduction in net income in this period is difficult to bear.
3. Organic farming is successful only for horticultural crops like sugarcane and not for field crops like vegetables.
4. Organic farmers have developed organic farming techniques/practices which have been proven to be successful. Research institutes should take research programs to find out the reasons for the efficacy of these techniques so that there is a wider adoption and acceptance.
5. The government has made it easy for chemical inputs to be made available in rural areas. Like wise it has not made it easy for organic inputs availability.
6. Availability of good quality organic traditional seeds is difficult.
7. Many states have announced organic farming policy and Tamilnadu is yet to declare its policy.
8. There is a reduction in livestock population and this issue has not been addressed by the government adequately.

III. What kind of support do farmers need?

1. Capacity building on organic farming technologies and awareness programmes.
2. Motivation on the benefits of organic farming.
3. Organic farmers who do not own a cow can be given one and those who have been rearing cows should be given an incentive as cow is an integral part of organic farming.
4. Organic product outlets should be opened so that organic farmers gain the confidence that organic products are liked and demanded by organic farmers.

IV. What kind of steps do the government, NGOs, farmers and farm scientists have to take to popularize organic farming?

Government

1. The government should take steps to standardize organic farming packages.
2. Pricing policy of organic produce should be developed.
3. Organic farmers who have been practicing organic farming and have not been using chemicals and hence have been saving money for the government. Also, some farmers use bio-gas that saves money again for the government. Hence organic farmers should be compensated for saving money for the government and the subsidy not utilized should be passed on to them. Subsidy for organic farmers can be given as a cow instead of cash
4. Make movies about successful organic farmers and screen it cross rural areas to raise awareness.
5. The government should allot more funds to agriculture department to take up organic farming programs.

NGOs

1. Traditional seeds are more suitable for organic farming and its only NGOs who are capable of producing and supplying good quality.
2. Honour organic farmers.
3. In dry/resource poor areas, which is characterized by small and fragmented size of holding, the land can be pooled through a cooperative of farmers and community organic farming can be practiced. The profit can be shared among the members.
4. Organize training on organic farming for farmers.
5. Coordinate between different NGOs working in the field of organic farming so that successful practices/techniques/methods are shared for the benefit of farmers.

Farm scientists

1. Farm scientists should work on revitalizing traditional varieties which are best suited for organic farming.
2. Train farmers in organic seed production techniques so that farmers in a particular location gain expertise in production of certain traditional variety of seeds which can be exchanged among them.
3. Scientists should take steps so as not to lose the gene bank of indigenous breeds of cattle.
4. The veterinary medical shops should stock semen of traditional breeds so that farmers have easy access to indigenous breeds of cattle.

Farmers

1. Farmers should not spend their time on agitating against government inaction in promoting organic farming as it does not catch the attention of government. Rather organic farmers should put efforts in spreading the message of the benefits of organic farming among the farming community. The example of the chamber of commerce proves this as the chamber does not agitate on any issues but achieves the objective through skillful negotiation with government.

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