Income generation is the most important issue for a farmer today as several agriculture produces do not get a good price and marketing facilities are not always readily available. If proper technology is provided on time and implemented with the combination of market avenues it can lead to profitable farming.

In line with this finding, the Water Technology Centre, at the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU) has developed a technique called seedling production in sugarcane to help sugarcane growers.

**Separate enterprise**

This technology has been identified as a separate enterprise and promoted among many nursery growers. In this method the sugarcane buds are grown in portrays and then transplanted when 25-35 days old in the main field under wider spacing combined with sub surface drip irrigation (SSDI).

Though Tamil Nadu ranks first in cane productivity in India (production stand at 105 tonnes a hectare an average) the mills have not been paying money on time to the growers and there is no provision for interest on late payments. And a farmer can sell his cane only to a particular sugar mill and he is at the mercy of the mill owner for accepting his produce and getting some payment on time.
Apart from this there are a host of problems like labour shortage, lack of mechanical availability for planting and harvesting, water and electricity shortage.

“Though the main issue is non payment on time which is largely a government based decision as technical experts we on our part have tried to ease the financial crunch of the farmers by encouraging them to also take up seedling production. Many farmers in the state have taken this up as an additional activity and are earning a better revenue,” explains Dr. B.J. Pandian, Director, Water Technology Centre, TNAU.

Case studies

Mr. B. Jayabal, Thatchan Thottam, Cheyuar, Tiruppur District entered into this line with technology support from the University.

“Within two years, I have produced 5.50 lakh seedlings earning nearly 2.5 lakhs as income. I was advised to develop a business model by printing visiting cards and registered my nursery as a firm to participate in Government programmes on a competitive basis,” he says.

Another producer Mr. T. Marirajan, from Tiruppuvanam in Sivagangai says, “Production for one seedling is only Rs.0.80 and the selling price is Rs.1.40 per seedling. I produce 50,000 seedlings per batch and get Rs.25,000 profit in a month.”

Quite popular

The popularity of this technology is fast catching up even with professionals like Mr. R. Ramesh Kumar an engineer from Papanulam in Tiruppur District.

He runs his production unit like a factory employing 5-6 women labour daily with automated bud chippers and producing 1.00 lakh seedlings in every batch with his available two shade nets.

“In the last one year I have been able to produce more than 10 lakh seedlings earning a net profit of Rs.5 lakhs in a year. I cannot think of getting even half this amount as net income if I had been employed in some engineering firm,” he smiles.

Admitting to the fact that are grievances from farmers across the state on disbursal of money not being done on time Dr. Pandian says, “If these farmers can take up this initiative they can easily overcome their financial strain till the mills disburse the amount.”

Two advantages

This technology has twin advantages. For the farmers it helps achieve higher productivity (under normal planting 105 tonnes are harvested under SSI cultivation 105 to 110 tonnes from a hectare is harvested), better return and saving on water, electricity and labour. For the sugar factories it ensures higher recovery in increase crushing days and additional employment.
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