

Showcasing Rainfed Agricultural Technologies of Southern Tamil Nadu

September 24, 2007



Madurai Symposium

Thamukkam Ground, Madurai

The biennial Madurai Symposium has been designed by DHAN Foundation to celebrate recent developments related initiatives and innovations since 2003. The celebration acts as a platform to share, comprehend, network, learn and plan for future development interventions. All stakeholders of development - community institutions, civil societies, government organizations, NGOs, financial institutions, academicians and researchers are invited to the celebrations. This year's symposium, the third is scheduled from 24th - 29th September 2007. Like the two earlier symposiums conferences will be organized as either people conventions or development conferences. "Showcasing rainfed agricultural technologies of Southern Tamil Nadu" is one of the events planned during this Symposium.

Background

Rainfed farming is the main stay of over 800 million inhabitants of the Semi Arid Tropics (SAT). In India, out of the net sown area of 136.8 m ha, the rainfed area amounts for 93.1 m ha (68 %) falling in 177 districts. Rainfed crops account for 48 percent area under food-crops and 68 percent of the area under non-food crops. In terms of output, 80 percent of the coarse cereals, 50 percent of maize, 65 percent of pulses, 81 percent of groundnut, 88 percent of soyabean and more than half of the cotton output of the country are accounted for by the rainfed cultivation. Nearly 50 percent of the total rural workforce and 60 percent of cattle heads of the country is located in the rainfed areas. Besides being economically important, rainfed farming is also important for the nation in terms of bio diversity and nutrition. Rainfed farming systems are by nature diverse and houses wide varieties of various crops which are disappearing day by day. This is particularly so with regard to minor millets like Little millet, Kodo millet, Italian millet and

Barnyard millet. Many of the widely grown rainfed crops (besides the above mentioned minor millets) like Jowar, Bajra and Finger millet are nutritionally superior to widely consumed rice and wheat.

The context of rainfed farming is not very different in southern Tamil Nadu in terms of its importance to the economy. Many rainfed agriculture tracts of southern Tamil Nadu are known for their production of particular crops. Rainfed cotton in black soil tracts of various districts have attracted even the attention of Britishers and have resulted in establishment of cotton mills. Rainfed chillies and rice of Ramnad are well known through out the country. Rearing of large number of goats and sheep by nomadic communities in Ramnad district, who take their animals to various districts for grazing, is also well known. The saline ground water situation in various parts of Ramnad district and black soil tracts of Thirumangalam taluk makes rainfed agriculture the only option for crop cultivation.



But in the last decade rainfed areas have become fallow on a large scale in many of the southern districts. Tuticorin district is a case in point where large tracts of rainfed land have become *Prosopis juliflora* jungle. So is the case in many parts of Thirumangalam Taluk in Madurai. In the same way infestation of *Cynodon dactylon* and *Morinda tinctoria* on a large scale has been hindering rainfed cultivation in various parts of Thirumangalam. It is disheartening to see villages which were once rich through earnings from rainfed farming as indicated by large houses and cattle pens, remaining desolate and devastated now. There are many villages where most of the farmers have moved out to look for petty works in the nearby urban centres. Given this context it is important to reinstate rainfed farming in these areas to its original glory by attempting all means to enhance its viability.

One important means is that of ensuring reach of various relevant rainfed farming technologies to rainfed farmers. Southern Tamil Nadu is blessed with many agriculture research institutes that focus on rainfed farming. Regional Research Station at Aruppukottai, Agricultural Research Stations at Kovilpatti, and at Paramakkudi, Coastal Saline Research Centre at Ramnad and Cotton Research Station at Srivilliputhur are few of them. So an event is organized as part of Madurai Symposium to showcase relevant rainfed farming technologies of those research stations of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University. The event is organized with the following objectives.

Objectives

- To introduce various relevant rainfed farming technologies to farmers in a comprehensive way and make them aware of their benefits and context where they are suitable.
- To make them aware of the current opportunities for adapting the technologies that are relevant to them.

Organiser

Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, which is the umbrella organisation for the above mentioned research stations focusing on rainfed farming. The Professor and Head of the Regional Research Station, Aruppukottai is coordinating this event and scientists of other southern research stations such as ARS, Kovilpatti, ARS, Paramakkudi, CSRC, Ramnad and CRS, Srivilliputhur would present the relevant technologies to the farmers.

Participants

Around one hundred fifty farmer leaders of tankfed and rainfed farming development programmes of DHAN Foundation, NGO representatives, government officials, university scientist are participating in this event.

Expected outcomes

1. Transfer of relevant technologies to the participating farmers.
2. Feed back from the farmers to the concerned research institution regarding the utility of specific technologies.



3. Action plan for demonstrating various relevant technologies in the near future through collaboration of pertinent research institution and farmers from its working area.
4. Identification of relevant researchable issues, if possible.

Venue: Thamukkam Ground, Thallakulam, Madurai

Date: 24th September 2007, Monday

About Rainfed Farming Development Theme

DHAN Foundation has initiated an experimental project on Rainfed Farming Development Theme (RFDT) considering the importance and need for enhancing rainfed farming livelihoods, on October 2, 2002 on the occasion of its Foundation Day celebrations. RFDT was initiated with the vision

of making rainfed farming a viable livelihood to large number of poor rainfed farmers. Its specific objectives are, i) Understanding the status and issues of rainfed farming in the locations selected and identification of specific interventions and ii) Improving the total factor productivity of rainfed farming. The pilot project is in the initial phase of implementation and is going on in four different rainfed farming systems namely black soil based rainfed farming in Thirumangalam block of Madurai district, red soil based rainfed farming in Nattarampalli block of Vellore district, coastal rainfed farming in Vedaraniyam block of Nagapattinam district and mountain rainfed farming in Pudur Nadu tribal pocket in Vellore district of Tamilnadu. Currently RFDT is working with around 6000 poor rainfed farming families in these four locations.



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