Organic Farmers and Farms in Goa

CAESER GOMES

78 Guirdolim, P.O Chandor, Salcete, Goa. Ph.: 0832 2784787

Caeser Gomes lives with his wife and daughter in the village of Guirdolim, about four kilometres away from Chandor (South Goa). The following is his account of his experiences with organic farming:

I have been doing organic farming from the year 1976. Prior to that from the year 1952 I was doing chemical farming. However, as years went by, I learnt to my dismay that synthetic fertilizers were ruining my soil and plants, infesting them with plenty of unknown diseases.

From 1952 to 1976 I used chemicals and the yield did go up fantastically. So much so that I was awarded a gold medal from the Portuguese Government for the highest paddy yield in Goa in 1956. By 1967, my paddy field became the most visited field in the area. With 15 kilos seed I produced 4000 kilos paddy per acre – an all India record!

But then, the yield started falling gradually despite higher doses of fertilizers. That was when I realised that chemical fertilizers were killing the micro-organisms which enrich the soil. I then switched on to horticultural crops, and decided to stop once and for all chemical fertilizers and go organic.

In the old days labour was cheap, so I grew paddy. Now labour is expensive, and so I have taken up to growing cash crops viz. coconut, pepper and arecanut. The pepper plants grow around the trunks of the coconut trees. I use preroria as a cover crop. It gives nitrogen to the soil as well as prevents unwanted weeds. The fallen leaves act as mulch. I have no workers on the farm and therefore hire casual labour. I had brought California earthworms, but they seem to have disappeared. I now have local earthworms and their castings have made the soil soft and porous. After the rains I get water from the irrigation canal which comes from the Paroda lake/dam.

My four principles in organic farming are:

1. No Cultivation: No ploughing or turning the soil. For centuries farmers have thought that the plough is essential for growing crops. However, non-cultivation is fundamental to organic farming. The soil cultivates itself naturally by means of penetration of plant roots and the activity of micro-organisms, small animals, and above all, the lowly earthworms and termites – both farmers' friends. If earthworms go 10 feet up and down in the soil, where is the need of cultivating? There is no plough in the world that goes 10 feet into soil.

When the soil is cultivated, the natural environment is altered beyond recognition. The repercussions of such acts have caused the farmer nightmares for countless generations. For example, when a natural area is brought under the plough very strong unnecessary weeds come to dominate the vegetation. When these weeds take hold, the farmer is faced with the nearly impossible task of weeding each year.

The usual way to control weeds is to plough the soil. But when you plough soil, seeds lying deep in the soil, which would never have germinated otherwise, are brought up and given a chance to sprout. Furthermore, the quick sprouting fast growing varieties are given the advantage under these conditions. So you might say that the farmer, who tries to control weeds by cultivating the soil, is quite literally, sowing the seeds of his own misfortune.

Thus, the only sensible approach is to discontinue the unnatural practices, which have brought about the situation in the first place. Cultivation of the soil should be discontinued.

2. No Chemical Fertilizers: Farmers interfere with nature, and try as they may, they cannot heal the resulting wounds. Their careless farming practices drain the soil of essential nutrients and yearly deplete the soil. Left to itself, the soil maintains its fertility naturally, in accordance with the orderly cycle of plant and animal life.

Organic remains of plants and animals accumulate and are decomposed on the surface by bacteria and fungi. With the movement of rainwater, the nutrients are taken deep down into the soil to become food for micro organisms, earthworms and other small animals. Plant roots reach to the lower soil strata and draw the nutrients back to the surface. If you take a walk in the wilderness and see the giant trees that grow without fertilizers and without cultivation you will understand why the fertility of nature is beyond the reach of our imagination. Our farm soil should be like that of the forest floor.

3. No Weeding by Tillage or Herbicides: As weeds play their part in building soil fertility and in balancing the biological community, they should be controlled and not eliminated. A good legume ground cover interplanted with crops like coconut, arecanut, banana, nutmeg, cinnamon, cloves, pepper will effectively control weeds.

If measures like mulching (recycling farm wastes), sowing legumes like Preroria, are practised instead of using man-made chemicals and machinery, then the environment will move back towards its natural balance and even the most troublesome weeds can be brought under control.

4. No Dependence on Pesticides: From the time that weak plants develop as a result of such unnatural practices as ploughing and chemical fertilising, disease and insect imbalance become a great problem in agriculture.

Nature, left alone, is in perfect harmony with all things. Pests are present but do not occur in nature to an extent which requires the use of expensive poisonous chemicals. Instead cheap biological pest control can be adopted. Neem, curry leaves and tulsi are insect repellents. Cow urine and soap solution also keep pests away, especially on roses.

For paddy, a plant protection measure for diseases like bacterial leaf blight of rice is the spraying of cowdung slurry. Seed treatment with cowdung also reduces diseases of rice. Dipping of vegetable seeds and seedlings in haldi and hing powder reduces wilt diseases.

Similar low cost technologies are available for all crops under different farming situations.

These four principles of organic farming – no cultivation, no chemical fertilizers, no weeding and no pesticides, comply with natural order and lead to replenishment of nature's goodness and bounty.

(Source: Communication with OIP)

STEPHEN PEREIRA

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Stephen Pereira has two organic farms separated by a distance of one km. The horticulture farm is in the village Bhirondem admeasuring 19 acres and situated on the banks of the Mahadei River and the rubber plantation admeasuring 51 acres situated in Village Copordem. The rubber plantation was started in 1983 and the horticulture farm in 1984. Both are organic farms and are yielding rubber and mixed horticultural products.

Over the years the farms have gone through major changes.These changes have contributed to the farms doing well culturally and financially. It would be pertinent to look into these changes which have contributed to the overall performance of the farms.

Stephen came to know of the benefits of organic farming from Claude Alvares and after due deliberation decided to convert both the farms to organic. Mandovi Farms which grows fruits, spices , coconuts and areca nuts went through the procedures of converting into an organic farm over a period of 4 years. First the application of chemical fertilisers was discontinued and only fertilisers such as cowdung, poultry manure were used. In order to make cowdung available a few cows were purchased. However when the dairy project meant a new area of knowledge to be learnt and used, it was discontinued and only two buffaloes were maintained for making cowdung available. In order to meet the need for organic fertilisers cowdung, steremeal, bone meal and other such fertilisers are used. Later on the sprinkler system was adopted as a response to shortage of local labour. Over the years many practices were introduced to make the farm truly organic and to make the operation profitable.

In order to get large quantity of manure a way had to be found to have inhouse production of fertiliser. For this purpose vermicomposting was adopted and now the farm produces 10 tonnes of vermicompost per year. The farm also uses EM a very effective micro organism which multiplies bacteria in the soil and is a very effective soil enhancer. Apart from these, the liquid fertiliser preparation 'Panchagavya' is also used effectively. One of the biggest drawbacks in farming is the non availability of trained personnel and now even untrained workers are not available. The farm is now operating profitably but not highly profitable as it should have been as there are many areas where govt. help would make the operation even more profitable.

The rubber plantation is faring well under organic farming methods. Every year poultry manure and cowdung are used to enable the trees to yield better harvest. But what is most astounding is the fact that local worms have proliferated due to non application of chemical fertilisers. Their castings are all over the farm and a rough estimate of these castings should be about 10 tons per year. There were no worms when chemical fertilisers were used. In fact the soil was unfertile and every year more fertiliser was used than the previous year. The birds and other fauna are abundant in both the farms since turning to organic methods.

(Source: Communication with OIP)

FRANCIS X BORGES

47-2, Gongurem, Assagao – 403 507, Goa. Phone: 0832-2268822.

The organic farm of Mr. Francis Borges, a teacher, is now actively being tended by his wife, Philomena and daughter, Christabella, who he says have the time. He pitches in only after work hours and during holidays.

It is located at the above address and is about 1500 sq. meters in size. Flowers, ornamental plants, chickoos, lemon, bananas, papayas, coconuts, bale fruit and passion fruit are grown. Vegetables grown are ridge gourd, bitter gourd, bread fruit, brinjal. Spices grown are turmeric, black pepper, nutmeg and cinnamon.

They converted to organic and natural methods in 1987, prior to which synthetic fertilisers were used. Having switched over and, tasted the goodness in quality, flavour and keeping time (shelf-life), nothing has induced them away from this practise. They get enough produce from the farm, sufficient for their everyday family needs. Lemon which grows in surplus is processed into pickles and sold.

The Borges family finds this method to be natural, sustainable and of great interest. Vermicomposting was started on the farm in 1991 and continues to date. Bio fertilizers such as neem cake, cow dung, soil, bone meal, EM are purchased locally. No special pest control is used to protect the farm from pests. It is left to the wise ways of nature.

The farm faces certain difficulties. Since this method of farming requires plenty of water, with well water levels receding, watering is reduced to the minimum during summer. Rodent attack (burrows) causes some damage to the

roots of even well growing plants.

The best thing they feel is, organic foods can be consumed without fear and now the neighbours too are slowly beginning to go organic in phases.

(Source: Teleinterview with OIP)

DR ARUN GOPAL RAO LOKARE

Bhata Band, Maina, Quepem – 403 708, Goa. Ph.:0832-2659926

Lokare is a middle aged doctor who gave up medical practice to work on a farm. When he started farming he used both organic and inorganic inputs. But later he came across Fukuoka's One Straw Revolution and realized that he had to change his ways since as he says, 'Fifteen years of chemical farming is enough to completely destroy the soil. The only alternative was to give up chemical farming and bring the soil back to life.'

The changeover reduced the yield initially by 50 per cent, since it takes time for the soil to recoup. Now the yield is 75 per cent of what it was before the transition.

Lokare's farm is situated in a hilly area deep in the village of Maina, Quepem. Lokare does farming on about 16 acres of land.

Cropping pattern:

Plot I – 3 acres, banana, arecanut, coconut.

Plot II (self-irrigated) – 1 1/2 acre, banana, and areca nut.

Plot III – 2 1/2 acres, banana, arecanut;

Plot IV – 8 acres, cashew.

First he planted banana. When the banana trees grew he planted arecanut and coconut saplings, since these saplings need shade for their growth. He has many varieties of bananas viz. Saldhati (duration of season – 12 months), Mysore mittala (13 months), Sona keli (22 months) and Bonda bali (12 months).

The yield of bananas is around 2000 bunches per year. He finds that organically grown bananas are tastier than those grown chemically. Organic farming has also reduced bunchy top disease substantially. Fungal disease which attacks areca-nut, coleraga, is very negligible. No fungicides are used as it is not necessary in organic farming.

His other crops include sapota, mango (30 grafts) and cashew. He also grows cow pea (alsande), Fezaon (another variety of cowpea) and chillies. On plot III he also grows tur dal.

When making the switch over to organic farming, Lokare got labourers to collect 3000 local earthworms from the surrounding area and bring them to his farm. 200 labour hours were spent to do this. He covers the land with dried leaves, some of which are collected from the surrounding area, grass and cowdung. Seven to eight kilos of cowdung are used per tree (for arecanut). The leaves from the river bed are also collected and strewn on the farm. No ploughing is done except in the chilly plot where he uses a power drill. Weeds are cut down and left as mulch. It is observed that, as the soil of coastal area contains no potash, organic potash needs to be used to get better crops.

Lokare has developed a few homemade recipes for pest control. He prepares neem based pesticide by mixing 75 per cent neem oil with 25 per cent alcohol (available in any medical store). He recommends 2 cc of this solution with 1 litre of water to be sprayed on the plants. Other pesticides that he uses are cow urine (50 ml in 10 lts of water) and Achook – a neem-based powder. He also uses a light trap. For this he places a lamp under which he keeps water with kerosene. The insects attracted by the lamp fall into the water and die of suffocation under the layer of kerosene.

He uses amrut pani (a bacterial activator) which is prepared by diluting two kilos cowdung in 10 litres of water and adding 20 grams of honey and 10 grams of homemade ghee. The mixture is left out in the open for 24 hours and the activator is ready to use. This is also sold commercially under the name Cowng Tea (cowdung tea).

Water is no problem since there is a spring on one side of the plot and a river on the other. However for efficient farming, the watering is done by sprinklers. Lokare has 96 sprinklers on his farm (90 fixed and six moving) spaced at 12 x 18 m. He uses a 10 HP two stage pump and it takes him four hours a day to irrigate the farm. For his chilli plot he uses a horizontally fixed pipe perforated with holes of one millimetre diameter. Plot II is self irrigated with a maze of channels dug around the plants. The water from a spring flowing from the upper portion of the land is stopped by a bund and channelised into the maze on plot II thereby irrigating the plants. During the rainy season the same channels serve as a drain which keeps the plants from drowning.

The produce of his farm is sold to the Goa Bhagyatdar Society leaving some for home consumption. However, it is sold along with other produce of other farmers that may be chemically grown. So there really is no way that consumers will know whether what they are buying is organically or chemically grown.

Goa is yet to have a farmer's collective that specially markets organic produce. Many farmers in Goa are shifting to organic farming for their horticulture crops. However, when it comes to paddy most are reluctant to do so as they consider it a great risk.

(Source: Communication with OIP)

GOVIND MORESHWAR PARSEKAR

Mandrem - 403 527, Goa. Phone: 0832 2247281, 2247 223, Email: sourabhanant@hotmail.com

Parsekar has been farming for over three decades now. In 1975 he planted few seedlings of coconuts on a barren piece of land situated 2.5 kms from his residence. Despite use of chemical fertilisers the result was not good due to shortage of water.

In 1989 he came across an article on organic farming written by a well known agronomist, late Prof Shripad Dabholkar. After reading the article he decided to experiment. Till then he did not know anything about 'Do nothing' theory of Masanabu Fukuoka but unknowingly he followed him. He bought some cow dung manure from a dairy unit, dug small pits in open space between coconut trees, filled them with cow dung manure and planted banana suckers. The banana trees provided lots of agricultural waste which was used for mulching. Although no additional water was given to existing coconut trees but because of banana plantation their health improved and they started giving nuts. Today he uses all the waste of coconut and banana trees for mulching. It retains moisture in the soil, protects earthworms from their natural enemies and in due course is converted to powder which mixes with the soil.

Parsekar's farm is today organic and sustainable. Today he does not purchase any manure from outside. His two cows provide sufficient quantity of bio-gas to cook food for 6 persons. The slurry that comes out from the bio-gas plant is directly used to decompose agricultural waste.

Coconuts and mangoes are the main crops. The total area under these crops is 15,000 sq. m. The whole area is under drip irrigation. Black pepper vines are grown on coconut trees. Between coconut trees he has planted chikoo, banana, areca nut, pineapple, lemon, guava, papaya, drum sticks, nutmeg and breadfruit. All these trees are giving fruits. Open space between mango trees is used to grow seasonal vegetables like ridge gourd, cucumber, pumpkin, okra, spices like turmeric, ginger and chili. Since chillies and ginger are grown in partial shade of coconut and mango trees, whose large roots impede penetration of chili and ginger roots, Mr. Parsekar has found it beneficial to grow them in polybags. The polybags are filled with a mixture of vermicast, cow dung and soil. He gets a good crop of chilies and ginger all the year round. He also grows turmeric and banana for sale and maize and cow pea for fodder.

The farm produces about 10,000 coconuts per year. They are sold in retail after dehusking. The husk is used for mulching. It retains moisture in the soil and stops soil erosion during heavy rain. Within two years the husk is converted into fine powder which is absorbed by the root of the trees.

Since he does not use any pesticide there are numerous ants in the soil. They make the soil porous but they also cause problems while raising vegetable seedlings like cabbage, cauliflower, chilies, onion etc. So he has made some tin sheet trays and keeps these trays on iron stands with their legs in coconut shell filled with water. The trays are filled with mixture of soil and organic manure. The ants cannot reach the trays because of water in the coconut shells. Once the seeds have germinated the trays are kept on the ground. There are red weaver ants on the trees which are also put to use. They are picked from a tree and then spread on other trees. Soon they colonise the tree and defend the crop from other pests. He says, 'The lemon trees are protected from pests by these red weaver ants. White ants are also useful in organic farming. They convert organic waste into soil. They never eat live roots.' He has white ants hills on which there are coconut trees and black pepper vines and both give good produce.

To get rid of fruit flies he makes use of empty bottles of mineral water to trap these insects. Two holes are made on the upper side of empty mineral water bottles. The lower part of the bottle is filled with water containing few drops of insecticides. Little cotton is made wet with few drops of methyl eugenol and kept in a small plastic bag which hangs from the lid of the bottle. Methyl eugenol attracts the male fruit flies which enter into the bottles through the holes made on the upper side of the bottle and fall into the insecticide solution kept in the lower part of the bottle. Thus all male fruit flies die and breeding is curtailed. This way without damaging the environment these harmful insect are eradicated. Such bottles are hung in different parts of the farm.

Rain water harvesting is practised on the farm with pits being dug perpendicular to the slope in several places on the farm. Initially the farm had a water problem, but now because of consistent water penetration over the years, the water table has risen and the farm now has water even in May.

Parsekar has used simple innovation, improvisation and practicality to his advantage.

(Source: Communication with OIP)

PEACEFUL SOCIETY

At Honsowada, Post Kundai – 403 115, Goa. Ph.: 0832 2392236, Fax: 0832 2392382 Email: peaceful_goa@bsnl.in, peacefulsociety@gmail.com, Web: www.peacefulsociety.org

Contact: Kumar Kalanand Mani, Executive Secretary

Peaceful Society is an initiative whose work is directed by Gandhian principles. The organisation is experimenting with natural farming on its 4 and ½ acre campus since 1990 by improving the quality of soil and enhancing plant diversity. The population of on farm earthworms has been maintained. Mulching and applying compost to the entire

area are regular practices. The farm mostly depends on organic manure generated on the campus, thus not disturbing nature by way of bringing in organic manure from outside. It has achieved self-sufficiency in water through harvesting it during the monsoons, minimising use for irrigation and taken appropriate steps towards preventing its evaporation especially during the summer months. It grows mango, cashew, areca nut, spices, vanilla, banana and vegetables.

The campus is a venue for regular local, regional and national level trainings and meetings. Peaceful Society organized the first meeting in Goa on organic farming.

(Source: Communication with OIP)

DR. H. R. PRABHUDESAI

Training Associate (Agronomy) ICAR, Ela Old Goa. Phone: 0832 2285475 (O), 2423135 (R), Email: hrdpnet@rediffmail.com

Dr. Prabhudesai has been a propagator of organic farming practices at the ICAR Research Complex, Ela, Old Goa, since 1988. He has conducted several training sessions, workshops, seminars on INM, IPM, standardisation of vermiculture units/structures to suit local situations and recent frontier areas like effective micro organisms which he has been propagating since 1999. Till date, he has imparted hands-on training sessions to over 400 farmers, entrepreneurs, youth, self help groups, NGOs and interested people on the concept of organic ways of food production.

He believes that the organic farming sustainability of farm encompasses various aspects which include crop diversification based on available natural resources, use of eco friendly techniques like green manuring, mulching, crop rotation and harnessing locally available flora and fauna for the benefit of producing safe and healthy food.

(Source: Communication with OIP)

V.V. BHATE

M/s Bhate Farm, Near Saptakoteshwar Temple, Narva Bicholim – 403 505, Goa. Phone:0832-2462763

Grows arecanut, cashew, pineapple, pepper and betel leaf.

(Source: Miguel Braganza)

NEVIL ALPHONSO

Baga – Cotombi, Quepem, Goa. Phone: 2857320/ 2759132

Works with the dept. of Agriculture. His expertise is available to individuals and groups who wish to set up organic farms, switch to organic farming or improve farming practises.

(Source: Communication with OIP)

AMBROSIA ORGANIC FARM

House No. 116/A, A.P. Kolaindre, Chandgad Taluka, Kolhapur, Maharashtra. Cell: 09822139967, Email:saladbaba@yahoo.co.in

(Ambrosia farm though located in Maharashtra has most of its clientele in Goa.)

Baby Phimister and David Grower's Ambrosia Organic Farm is an excellent example of what can be achieved on marginal land given enough time, money and water.

Situated atop the Western Ghats, half way between Amboli and Belgaum at Chandgad, the farm enjoys a cool climate and adequate rainfall. They started thirteen years ago to develop a stony hillside that barely supported grass, by cutting terraces and making bunds to prevent the soil being washed away by the monsoon rains. They planted the bunds with banana, cashew, neem, bhendi and glyricidia. They began making compost from anything they could lay their hands on – sawdust, leaves, fish scrap, farm waste, restaurant garbage, poultry litter and even sea-weed from Anjuna beach. For the first two years nothing much grew and the rice that did was yellow and stunted. The entire yield from one hectare was just one sack of rice.

Then they built a 'worm house' containing five concrete beds measuring 4x1 meter and 20 cm deep at a cost of Rs 1,00,000 and with a starter of 4 kg vermiculture they embarked on vermicompost production.

Eight years on, this facility now provides with more than 30 tons of high grade fertilizer every year making the farm self-sufficient in terms of organic inputs. The vermibeds are charged with fresh gobar and partially decomposed organic matter. Vermicompost is produced in a quarter of the time that it takes to make conventional compost, involves less labour and costs about Rs. 250 per ton to make.

They keep 20 livestock, 4 bulls for ploughing, 4 buffalos and the rest being non milk yielding indigenous variety of cows to supply essential gobar to the earthworm unit and the bio gas unit for cooking and light.

Together they sought to fill a niche market, catering to foreign tourists' tastes. They experimented with many English vegetables and failed with most, chiefly because the climate is not cold enough. Fortunately however, they were successful with lettuce, the most important ingredient in the making of salad, which is a 'must' for Europeans

during summer and when traveling in hot countries. They now grow 12 varieties of lettuce from October – May, as well as radish, cherry, heritage tomatoes, parsley, basil, rucola, all of which they supply directly to many of the best restaurants in the north Goa coastal belt.

By operating a direct marketing policy, David has been able to earn enough to keep the farm solvent, although this has meant doing their own transport, storage and delivery, at considerable expense. In the short life time of this farm, diesel has risen from Rs 8 to Rs 34. Fuel and maintenance of the farm's two vehicles is the second largest expense after labour. They employ eight full time workers and bring in extra people when needed.

Ambrosia Organic Farm has linked up with other organic farmers in the neighbouring states in order to source a more comprehensive range of organic food. Ambrosia lends its label to local organic farmers produce like channa dal, moong dal, sunflower oil etc. The break up of price share going to the farmer being 50% of the marked up price, 20% to30% for the retailer inclusive of tax and less than 20% accrues to Ambrosia after considering packaging transport and delivery.

Ambrosia products are sold from five outlets in North Goa. Ambrosia believes in maximum benefit from produce going to the farmer.

One noteworthy success has been 'Kupli' wheat grown by Srinivas Bargel of Sangli district and now marketed by Ambrosia in Goa. Though laments David, 'We may not be able to continue with Kupli for long, since the buying price from the farmer is presently Rs. 35 per kg, and it may not have many takers at high rates.'

'Kupli' is traditional, high value wheat that for nutrition and taste is vastly superior to any high yielding variety wheat in the market. 'The only problem,' says David, tongue-in-cheek 'is that once you have eaten Kupli roti, you can never enjoy ordinary wheat again.' Only time will tell whether the palate will rule the pocket!

Ambrosia is committed to promoting traditional varieties of grain because they have realized that in order to achieve a reasonable 'organic premium,' food needs to be more than just organically grown, it needs to be inherently better. One example of this is the 'Dorga' rice that is grown in the monsoon season. Tri-coloured, glutenous, scented and priced at Rs. 50 kg. 'Dorga' rice has become very popular with Ambrosia's customers.

Ambrosia Organic Farm owes its survival to the foreign tourists who live for extended periods of time in Goa, and who greatly appreciate Ambrosia's existence. With demand out-stripping supply, the future looks bright for this little farm.

(Communication with OIP and tele-interview)

AJIT MALKERNEKER

P.O. Box 31, Cudchodem – 403 706, Goa. Phone: 0832-2616231

Ajit and his (German) wife, Doris have worked their 50 acre farm in south Goa without chemicals for the past twenty years. The couple have worked on the farm themselves and also used hired labour. The farm produces pepper, coconut, cashew (nuts and liquor), areca nut and banana. But there are dozens of other trees including breadfruit, passion fruit, papaya, etc. The farm in fact resembles a forest closely. Through the day one can hear the sound of birds who find the farm a haven.

(Source: Communication with OIP)

AMEET SAVANT

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Green Wealth Agro is the organic farm of Mr. Ameet Sawant. It is located at the foot of the hill at Copodem village, Valpoi. Ameet comes from a farming family and has been practicing organic agriculture on his 8 acre farm since March 2004.

Ameet is a young man in his thirties holding a MBA degree who quit his profession to pursue his interest in farming. Vanilla plantation, coconuts, cashew, mangoes, jackfruit, black pepper and gladiolus are grown in his farm.

Since the beginning he has never used chemical fertilisers for his farm. He says, his main aim is to grow plants naturally without putting pressure on the soil. E.M. techniques & E.M. Bokashi are extensively used for natural growth and good yields. Cow dung is purchased and used to enrich the soil. He has released earthworms into the farm to enhance soil fertility and porosity. Neem cake and neem oil are used to protect the farm from pests. However, monkeys, rodents, red ants and insects need to be dealt with.

A well on his farm meets the water needs, and is supplemented in summers with water stored in a huge synthetic tank, mainly for vanilla and pepper. Income comes from the sale of cashew, mangoes, coconuts and black pepper which he sells to the 'society' at the market.

Since it is relatively a young farm, the economics are at break-even. He is presently working on enhancing farm productivity.

He plans to farm only organically as there is a good demand for organic produce which is safe for consumption, high in nutritive value and good to taste.

(Source:Afonso Travasso)

MOHAN M. TENDULKAR

Malkpan Malkarnem, Sanguem – 403704, Taluka – Quepem, Goa. Ph.: 0832 2678286, Cell: 09765185353

Mohan Tendulkar has been practising organic farming on his 18 acre farm for the past quarter century. He lives on the farm itself with his family and the entire farmland is tended by him and his wife. The home has been running on gobar gas since 1988, and sprinklers are fitted for irrigation. The water source to the farm is from an open well, which runs dry in summer months from March till the onset of monsoons. Coconut, cashew, banana, pepper are the main crops. They cultivate vegetables, corms, tubers, ginger etc. during the months of water availability. These are sold at the local markets. He claims that there is an ever ready market for all his produce and pricing is never a problem. Traders and customers have never questioned his pricing because they are assured of premium quality. He uses vermicompost, vermiwash, cowdung and cow urine on the farm. Excess vermicompost is sold.

Farmers, students and organizations interested in starting vermiculture units are trained at a small training centre on the farm. He is regularly invited by schools and local institutions as a trainer and resource person to set up composting units.

The farm has a milk collection centre. A farm produce processing unit for making papads, pickles, dehydrated vegetables, spice powders, dehydrated fries, fruit pulps etc. is run by a self help group named Suvidha that has been functioning since 1996. Tendulkar has served as president of the farmers club of Malkarnem for eight years and as chairman of Shanta Dairy Society, Malkarnem for two years.

He is very happy to be an organic farmer and the enthusiasm with which he talks about his work is sure proof of his contentment.

(Source: Personal communication with OIP)

HEERA ORGANIC FARM

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ORGANIC FARMING ASSOCIATION OF INDIA

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The Organic Farming Association of India (OFAI) is the country's only organization of grassroots organic farmers. Since Indian agriculture continues to remain a source of livelihood for mostly small farmers and peasants, OFAI membership reflects this ground reality as well.

OFAI is also committed to active involvement of women farmers in the decision-making structures of the association. Such involvement is mandatory and reflected in the organisation's bye-laws.

The association- which is registered under the Indian Societies Registration Act – was formed three years ago. Its memorandum of association was written and approved after a wide consultation with organic farmers.

The primary objective of the association is to promote organic farming within the country and to take all such means that are available to achieve this purpose. OFAI's labeling scheme is meant to provide an assurance of guarantee of organically grown produce exclusively for domestic consumers. The organisation has rejected, at the outset, any preoccupation with organic farming for export purposes.

Unlike others organic farm certification systems, OFAI farm certification is done through the agency of trained organic farmers themselves. OFAI does not accept farm inspectors who do not themselves practice organic agriculture.

As OFAI farming is based on natural principles, it is firmly opposed to the introduction of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) in agriculture and will actively campaign against such agriculture.

The ultimate objective of the association is to produce poison-free food for Indian consumers and to achieve this by maintaining the living fertility of Indian soils.

(Source: OFAI, Goa.)

THE GOA FOUNDATION

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Monitors the organic farming scene in Goa. Organises training workshops on organic farming from time to time..
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(Source: OFAI)