

Save our Rice Campaign



**Traditional Seed Conservation, Training
and Multiplication Centre
Aadhirengam**

**CREATE Trust, Tamilnadu
November 2011**

Save our Rice – Campaign

Rice is Life

Rice is the most important food crop of Asia and it feeds 50% of the world population. It is cultivated in 112 countries covering an area of 165 million hectares and producing 720 million tones of paddy as on 2011. Out of this 90 % is being produced and consumed in Asia. Thus rice assures food security of half of the world population. Not only that it provides livelihood security to lakhs of people in Asia. Rice is linked very much to the life , culture and ecology in Asia.

Even while this is the truth , rice as a crop and paddy farmers as a community is facing lot of threats . Although paddy farmers cater to the food security of many nations they face a lot of problems in terms of economic sustainability. Climate change, loss of soil health due to unscientific cultivation practices (just to increase production), pest outbreaks and labour shortage , conversion of rice paddies for urban expansion and industrial purposes , low price of paddy etc have made the rice culture difficult to sustain.

In India south and eastern states are more dependent on paddy as a livelihood activity. These states also have a food culture based on rice. And the farmers and paddy ecosystems face similar problems as in other parts of Asia for a long time. The problems intensified in the 1990s and a number of organizations working with paddy farmers started to work towards sustaining paddy culture . While this is happening many experts and farmers themselves realised that they have lost many of their rice heritage , especially seeds.

The year 2004 had a significance to rice culture. FAO had declared this as the Second International Year of Rice (First International year of Rice was in 1966). They had their inaugural meeting in Switzerland ! The significance of having such a meeting in an alien land was that Syngenta , the agri chemical and seed company had an eye on gaining patent rights over the genome of the rice seeds, and this company is based in Switzerland. And it was celebrated by FAO along with governments and industry. To counter this, a campaign was launched in India in the same year , called Save Our Rice (SOR) campaign.. It was launched with a workshop in Kumbalangi, Kochi, Kerala which was coordinated by Thanal , a voluntary public interest research organization based in Kerala. This had the support of the Asian Rice campaign coordinated by PANAP(Pesticide Action Network-Asia and the Pacific). About 110 people working with 50 organisations in 10 rice growing states participated in this two day workshop and they deliberated on various issues pertaining to rice culture. Members from FEDCOT and CREATE from Tamilnadu participated in this workshop and later joined the Campaign. The Campaign is presently active in five states – Kerala, Tamilnadu, Karnataka, Orissa and West Bengal.

The Campaign is founded on five objectives

- Conserving Rice Ecosystems
- Sustaining Rice Culture and Diversity
- Protecting Traditional Wisdom

- Preventing GMOs and Toxics
- Ensuring Safe and Nutritious Food

Seed Conservation

CREATE in association with the Save our Rice Campaign started to work on traditional seeds since 2005. While working with rice farmers it was realized that reviving traditional seeds is important if we have to revive rice culture. Only by reviving rice culture we can achieve food safety and food sovereignty. It was also realised that achieving seed sovereignty is a must to achieve food security. So members of CREATE started to collect indigenous paddy seeds of Tamilnadu and started cultivating them in its Centre at Adirengam village in Thiruvarur district. In the first year we got only 3 varieties of paddy seeds and later it increased and now we have a collection of 63 different varieties of Tamilnadu. Every year we cultivate all these varieties and produce seeds. We had thousands of paddy varieties before green revolution was started, but unfortunately we have lost most of them. This is a simple effort to revive the lost seed culture of Tamilnadu.

Aadhirengam Village near Thiruthiraipoondi, Thiruvaroor District is today an important landmark in this region, with the Organic Farming Training and Research Centre, established by CREATE Trust functioning since 2005.

This village now witnesses one of the major events of this region – the Annual State level Paddy Festival (Nellu Thiruvizha). Thousands of farmers congregate here every year during the two-day festival (usually conducted in the last week of May) to collect different varieties of seeds and also to give their seeds to the Centre which is also again shared.

Traditional Paddy - Aadhirengam Seed Festival

CREATE hosts the Paddy festival every year during the last week of May, at its Organic Research and Training farm at Aadhirengam under the aegis of “SAVE OUR RICE” campaign and with the support of various organisations, banks and farmers groups.

During the first year, sixteen traditional paddy varieties were identified for Conservation, multiplication and sharing among farmers. In the first year the festival was attended by 425 farmers. All of them were given 2 kg of seeds and were asked to cultivate and return back 4 kgs of the same seed for further multiplication and conservation. The Seed Festival has over the years become a discussion forum for the Organic Farming Practices, farmer issues and traditional paddy cultivation. In to the 6th year of the Festival , over 2800 farmers have been getting seeds directly from CREATE , this year over 3000 farmers are expected to directly get the seeds.

The table below shows the year on year increase in farmers coming to the festival and few interviews of the farmers are documented below

Total Number Of Farmers Who Procure Seeds Directly from CREATE and Seed Festivals :-

Year	Varieties	Total Farmers
2005-2006	16	425
2006-2007	26	1116
2007-2008	28	1629
2008-2009	47	2016
2009-2010	51	2320
2010-2011	53	2860
2011-2012(Nov 2011)	61	2000 +

Total Number Of Farmers Procured Seed From CREATE and Festival Organised in Other Districts 2011 :-

Year	Seed Festival Adhirangam	Pudukottai	Villupuram	Semangudi (Tanjai)	Tirumargal (Nagai)	Total (Till Nov 2011)
2011(Nov 2011)	707	312	215	317	456	2007

Our Projection is over 3000 people in 2011 would have procured the seeds as it crossed 2000 farmers by Nov 2011.

Below is the Map of Distribution of Number of farmers in each District, who attended the Paddy festival and directly got the seeds.

Out Of 61 Varieties conserved , 19 varieties are the popular varieties among the farmers. Below is the table which says about the Paddy variety obtained by the farmers who participated in the festival in Adhirangam. The distribution variety wise.

Name Of Variety	Total
Seeraga Sambha	42

Mappillai Sambha	238
Poongar	39
Kambanj Sambha	23
Garudanj Sambha	28
Kattu Ponni	64
Kattu Yanam	15
Sambha Mosanam	46
Aruvatham Kuruvai	18
Panangattu Kudavazhai	28
Kar Nel	21
Sivapu Kuruvikar	58
Karuppu Kavuni	4
Kavuni	5
Sivappu Kavuni	26
Karung Kuruvai	19
Soorak Kuruvai	24
Thanganj Sambha	4
Kosuva Kuthalai	5

The Seed Farmers speak...

Excerpts from the interview of a few farmers who are part of the network and have been conserving traditional varieties of Paddy.

"I have been coming to this festival from 2007, i have introduced Illupai sambha which is salt water tolerant. I have cultivated Kavuni, Mappilai Sambha, Vellai ponni and Illupa sambha. The main fascination of Traditional varieties are they need least work load in terms of care. I use manure made from cow dung and urine. The advantage of traditional paddy over hybrid varieties is the input cost and the cost of work involved in maintenance. This almost overrides the yield supremacy of hybrid.

For Kavuni variety, the yield is 1200 kilos per acre, Mappilai sambha the average yield is 1320

kilos per acre and vellai ponna and Illupai sambha the yield is 1080 kilos per acre“ - **Parameswaran** (Nagappatinam District)

“since 2006 i am coming to this festival, i cultivate Seeraga Sambha and Vasana Seeraga Sambha, the yield of Seeraga sambha is 1200 kilos per acre and 1260 for Vasana Seeraga Sambha. I use only cow dung and I cultivate in 2 acres . “ - **Sadasivam (Thiruvarur)**

“ I am coming to this festival for last 3 years. I cultivate Kattu yanam and Kar nel ,the speciality of the Kar nel is that they can be cultivated in a specialised area called Kar Kootam, the yield of Kar nel is something the Hybrid farmers can't dream of even after using heavy pesticides and fertilizer. I get 1800 kilos average per acre by simply “sow and harvest”. Kar nel doesn't need any inputs. I have never used any input for Kar nel. We go in boats to harvest Kar nel as it grows up to 5 feet height “ - **Adal Arasan (Thiruvarur)**

“ I have cultivated Kattu yanam. I challenge any farmer using hybrid to get a yield of 1080 kilos average during floods. I got this yield during heavy floods. Kattuyanam during floods yield 1080 kilos per acre and 1800 kilos per acre during normal season“ - **Paramasivam (Thiruvarur)**

“I have been coming to the festival for seed exchange for past 5 years. I cultivate Kavuni, Seeraga Sambha, Sivappu kuruvikkar. My favorite is Sivappu kurukikar. I take an average yield of 1800 kilos per acre with no inputs, no disease or pest attacks. I use SRI method. Another important feature of this variety is that it grows up to 4 - 1/2 feet “ - **Janakiraman**

“ I have been coming to the festival for the past 2 years and I have collected Aruvadham Kuruvai, Poongar, Sivappu Kuruvikkar. Aruvadham kuruvai is a highly flood resistant variety which grows up to 4 feet. I got an yield of 1260 kilos per acre for Aruvadham kuruvai and 1080 for Poongar. I use SRI farming and organic herbal pest repellents“ - **Kannazhagan (Thiruvarur)**

“I have been coming to this festival from 2009. I collected seeds of Seeraga sambha and Mappilai sambha. I get an average of 1320 kilos per acre for Seeraga Sambha and 1440 kilos for Mappilai Sambha. I use panchagavya and my method is SRI form of cultivation “ - **Uthaman (Nanilam)**

“I have been coming to CREATE Paddy festival Since 2009, i regularly cultivate Kudavazhai and i get an average of 1300 kilos on normal season once and during flood seasons i get around 1080 kilos, i have 1 acre of land and i follow “sow and Harvest” method. - **Kunjithapatham (Thiruthuraipoondi)**

Rice Varieties Yield an overview from the interviewed sample :-

Variety	Yield (Kg/acre)
Kudavazhai	1080
Seeragasambha	1200

Mappilai Sambha	1440
Kar Nel	1800
Karudan Sambha	1620
Illupai Sambha	1080
Kattu Yanam	1080
Sivappu Kruvikar	1800
Aruvatham Kuruvai	1320
Poongar	1140

Around 12 persons were interviewed and it was found that on an average each of them have shared the seeds with more than two other farmers. While a detailed survey is to be done, if we assume for the population of 2000 who obtained seeds from Adhirangam center, then the total number of spread in Tamil Nadu is around 6000 people.

Seed-farmers' right

In the last 40 years in India as well as in Asia, farmers have been losing their indigenous seeds of paddy. This happened over the years, systematically through the introduction of High Yielding Varieties (High Input varieties more correctly). Now we have reached a situation where farmers are losing control over their seeds. The price of the seeds cannot be controlled by the farmers , the seeds available in the market are not suitable to certain locations, they need more water , manures and pesticides. Also the public institutions like agriculture universities and other research stations have stopped producing enough seeds and seed companies have taken over the seed market in India.

Today there is a consistent effort from the side of seed industry to take away the rights of farmers over seeds. They do it by intelligent ways. They are developing their own seeds over which they have rights and they promote it among farmers telling them that these seeds are more productive .They also get the support of government schemes to promote their seeds. They are also bringing new laws to take away the rights of farmers over seeds (producing seeds and sharing can become completely illegal in future). So many companies are developing hybrid paddy seeds and some of them are experimenting with genetically modified paddy seeds which they claim have special qualities like pest resistance, added nutrition etc. Once the farmers start using these varieties, they will lose total control over seeds . Later they will have to depend totally on these seed companies for seeds. We can not allow this to happen .

Seed is fundamental to farming and food security. We know that. Hence as farmers we have to

get back our seeds, develop a seed culture and achieve seed security. This is important for the food security of our families, communities and the nation.

The efforts of the Save our Rice Campaign and the CREATE Aadhirengam Centre is to achieve this locally, so that the resilience of the farmer towards the threats from the markets and climate change can be improved.

Save our Rice Campaign is an attempt to build a movement towards achieving food sovereignty, reviving rice culture and sustaining rice eco-system. The Campaign was launched in 2004 in the Second International Year of Rice in Kumbalangi, Kerala. The Indian Save our Rice Campaign is coordinated by Thanal and CREATE. The Campaign is active in five states – Tamilnadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Orissa and West Bengal. The major campaign objectives are

- **Conserving Rice Ecosystems**
- **Sustaining Rice Culture and Diversity**
- **Protecting Traditional Wisdom**
- **Preventing GMOs and Toxics**
- **Ensuring Safe and Nutritious Food**

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CREATE (Consumer Research Education Action Training and empowerment) Trust

CREATE is a registered trust started in 2003 with the prime objective of serving the consumers and farmers in the state and in protecting the environment. During the last nine years CREATE has been involved in various consumer welfare and consumer protection activities, as well as agrarian issues and farmer welfare matters. CREATE strongly believes in building up a strong consumer and farmer movement to ensure quality life for all in the country. It emphasizes on the citizens capacities to ensure their rights and dedicate to motivate and sensitize the citizens.

CREATE through its Campaign empowers Farmers, consumers and general public about the importance of Organic Agriculture, traditional paddy, pesticide free food, through its research on organic farming at the Centre it runs at Adhirangam. The Centre has a continuous programme to train in organic farming and seed conservation. Till date it conserves around 63 varieties of Paddy in its seed bank and organises the annual State-level Paddy Festival.

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