

Organic farmers tap native cotton variety

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Ashok Kumar, an organic farmer, in his field in Perambalur district. | Photo Credit: M_Moorthy

These enthusiasts in Perambalur are attempting to revive 'karunganni'

A group of organic farming enthusiasts of Perambalur have launched an attempt to revive a native cotton variety of Tamil Nadu, 'karunganni.'

They have made a modest beginning this year raising the crop on about 40 acres in the district. Organised under a group, named Karunganni Cotton Cultivators Group, about 30 farmers keen on organic farming have raised the crop in small fields spread across the district.

Although Perambalur is a major cotton producing district, farmers have all but forgotten the traditional variety and BT cotton is their preferred choice.

The organic farmers hope to prove that by taking to the native variety, they can make as much profit as from BT cotton. Besides, by raising the native variety, farmers can produce their own seeds and need not buy expensive seeds every season, said Ramesh Karuppiah, an organic farm enthusiast, who has been acting as facilitator for the farmers.

The group was introduced to the native variety by Swaminathan of Sahaja Samrudha, a voluntary movement. "We brought him here to conduct workshops and explain the benefits of reviving the native variety," said Mr. Ramesh.

Cultivating the native variety would ensure "seed sovereignty" and help protect the environment from excessive use of pesticides. The karunganni variety, is pest resistant, and is not affected by the Pink Bollworm which is rampant in BT cotton now. The variety is also drought-tolerant and suitable for local weather conditions, he said.

Among the group is a young techie, S. Ashok (31) of Vadaku Madhavi village, who has raised the crop in an acre. After having worked with a BPO in Chennai for four years, the M.Sc (IT) graduate returned to his family vocation of agriculture in 2015 due to his love for organic farming.

He had a tough time persuading his family to allow him pursue his passion in part of the family holding.

"I wanted to do organic farming. I persuaded my family with much difficulty to allow me to do organic farming in one acre this year," he says.

His family has raised a variety of crop, including BT cotton, and use chemical fertilizers and pesticides extensively, which Mr. Ashok abhors.

"I had raised the karunganni variety on a much smaller area last year, but due to drought, the crop did not come up well. Anyway, I got the required seeds to raise the crop on an acre this year," he says.

Members of the group have raised the variety in villages such as Olaipadi, Elambalur and Alampadi. The group plans to pool in the harvest of the short staple yarn variety and market the produce after value addition to make products such lamp wicks, organic cotton garments and pillows and cushions. If some government support was forthcoming, a manufacturing unit can also be set up in the district, the group members said.

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