

## Spot Light

problems do not arise," he adds. When asked about bringing life back on 300+ years barren land by growing 150 different types of plants, Mr. Snehal shares, "Initially to begin with we used lot of native cow based compost. Later to which we started getting sufficient organic matter on the farm itself and then it became a continuous process. Being all natural farming inputs the water required for irrigation is less and nutrients are plenty."

In future Mr. Snehal wants to create a library of living medicinal plants and trees. "Many vital forest varieties are extinct not but to safeguard what we have with us we want to protect it in our library. We are collecting different kind of nuts and berries to develop into sapling and when grown as tree it will be home for many creatures. We want to be one stop for the distinctive plant varieties that plays a

vital role in life regeneration. We shall also sell these plants in a complete package to like-minded farmers so that 10 years after the sale they would have thriving forest." He concludes saying, "Farming is the most satisfying profession but first generation farmers must be prepared not to expect any commercial gain from the farm for minimum first three years. Also start farming only when sure of 100% commitment for bringing life on the farm without any returns same as Mother brings up her child. Lastly work to create a system that is feasible to be operational forever on its own!"

**Our Correspondent**

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## Siddhagiri Satvyk

**Assists farmers to earn better and consumers to eat better**

Choudhary, Co-Founder, MBA graduate who moved out of 3-generation family run textile business. Farm produce was directly sourced from the identified farmers in bulk, processed and packed by women self-help groups and sold to the consumers at Siddhagiri Satvyk store. The first store was started in February 2016 and within a year eight more stores were launched in different cities. "There are no middlemen involved in our procurement model thus farmers are able to earn 60-75% more. Thus our operations are growing rapidly."

**S**iddhagiri Satvyk is one-stop store to offer more than 160 products produced naturally using age-old traditional farming practices where there was no role of chemicals. The store not only gives access to healthy food to consumer but plays a vital role in increasing farmers' earning by 60-75%. It is result of enormous hard work and commitment of two friends, Mr. Akshay Agarwal and Mr. Gajendra Choudhary, based at Kolhapur, Maharashtra.

"These days, in the food more than 60% nutrients are replaced with harmful residues that are immensely injurious for the living body! The quantum of adulteration in the majority of food items has crossed all the danger lines! Seeing at this alarming situation, myself and Gajendra decided to help farmers grow and sell plus provide consumers the real healthy food. Thus Siddhagiri Satvyk was born," shares Mr. Akshay Agarwal, Co-Founder, the drive behind leaving his job as CA and CFA.

"Initially we attended many workshops on natural and organic farming as well as interacted with many experts to be well-informed on the food cultivation process. Next, began the search for the farmers who grew food naturally without using chemicals. I had good contacts in Rajasthan that helped a lot to locate these farmers. Also through Siddhagiri Gurukul Foundation we were able to connect with 4000 farmers from 10 states in the span of 3-4 months. They were mix of big individual farmers, farmers group and others. However we decided to keep our association with small and marginal farmers because inspite of doing good work they hardly get their deserved share of credibility," states Mr. Gajendra

There are more than 3000 farmers across 10 Indian states in the network of Siddhagiri Satvyk. The products are identified and sourced based on the state specialty, "For instance tea is brought from Assam, virgin coconut oil from Kerala, cashews from Konkan belt, pulses from Vidarbha region in Maharashtra and so on," highlights Mr. Agarwal. Many farmers are getting associated with Siddhagiri Satvyk. There are no prerequisites as such except that they must be growing food naturally. "The organic certification is not

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## Out of the Way

compulsory but preferable because we do understand the cost and tedious process involved. Many people are getting in touch with us through our facebook page. After the initial discussions farmers are associated after a thorough research, field visit and lab testing of their farm products. We are quite dependent on trust from both sides, farmers as well as consumers. Therefore it is essential to ensure the quality of food is superior as that is foundation of this venture." Once the farmers are in the procurement system they are given a complete contract for buying their farm produce in bulk.

Farmers are more than just sellers for Siddhagiri Satvyk. "It is the long term relationship with them. Thereby once in two month training camps are organized to enable them upgrade themselves in methods to improve the production, measures for crop protection, seed management etc. These sessions are taken by nationally acclaimed experts like Mr. Narayan Reddy. Besides, there is also an annual indigenous seed program organized where seeds are given free of cost to the farmers only on the condition that next year they must get back 2-3 times more quantity of the seeds they take in the first year," informs Mr. Choudhary.

All the products offered to the consumers for sale are priced reasonably. It shall be a slightly higher when compared to the in-organic food products. The slight higher price is the investment for the good health. When asked about the statement, 'organic products have poor shelf life', Mr. Agarwal clarifies, "There is threat but there are traditional solutions as well. We have identified such solutions and implement the same meticulously. Our women self help groups are having good knowledge of these preventive measures. For example in red chili powder we add very little rock salt to improve the shelf life of the spice powder. It works fabulously."

In future, plans are to launch online stores in metro cities precisely Bangalore, Chennai and Mumbai. Based on the response received the physical stores would be established. Also an app will be introduced enabling new farmers to connect for the bulk sales of their organically produce.

Mr. Agarwal and Mr. Choudhary concludes, "Farmers want to switch to chemical free farming to save their

farmland and grow poison free food provided they get better market and higher price. They want to overcome the guilt of producing harmful food. Besides they want higher price not because of greed but certainly the hard work involved in organic farming practices is much more than chemical based farming. They want to be paid well for their work. And for that assistance we are always ready to work together with them. Lastly we are get-

ting good appreciation for the quality of our products. Our consumers are finding medicinal and nutritional value in the food supplied at our store. This is the biggest reward for our efforts!"

**Our Correspondent**

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## SanLak Agro-Industries

**Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu based organization empowering farmers with millets cultivation in organic way**

|| Millets are an environment friendly crop. It is resistant to disease and drought. It can withstand high temperatures easily. Besides it takes care of public health as it is power pack of the nutrients as required by human body considering the change in our lifestyle. We do not need carbohydrates like wheat and rice. And above all millets are financially sustainable crops for the farmers if grown naturally without any chemicals," says Mr. Vikram Sankaranarayanan, founder, SanLak Agro Industries.

Company was set up in November 2015 at Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu. It provides technical assistance to farmers in growing different varieties of millets, purchases their farm produce in bulk, processes it and sells it in domestic market along with exports to South and Middle East Asia. All the products are sold under the brand name Smilyfe. "We primarily work with small and marginal farmers having landholding of less than 5 acres in drought prone regions. We are working largely with

tribes too. And our entire attention is on growing millets strictly without any chemicals using indigenous seeds," he adds. Millets grown are Finger (ragi), Pearl (bajra), Barnyard, Kodo, Sorghum (jowar), Foxtail, Proso and Little millet. Presently Mr. Vikram and his team are working with 20 thousand farmers across the villages in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and some parts of Anantapur district, Andhra Pradesh.

Mr. Vikram graduated from London School of Economics, in the program specializing in labour economics, industrial relations and public policies. "I came back to India and wanted to do something in empowering others. In our country knowledge sector does have the opportunities but limited while in agriculture although 60% of our population belongs to this industry merely 2% of it contributes to the overall GDP. Thus I decided to empower farmers. Then I started understanding the entire system and found many problems. These problems were informed to policy makers through email. Out of 50 plus emails it was only Mrs. Shantha Sheela Nair, a retired IAS officer and the former Vice Chairman of Tamil Nadu State Planning Commission who replied to my email and met me to know my plans on empowering the farmers," he adds. She introduced millet crop to Mr. Vikram and shared its salient and unique features. "She is my mentor and guide. She convinced me to motivate farmers on growing millets, the super food of tomorrow." Millet processing is a vital aspect end product sale. So far millets have been processed in rice processing mill that not only removes the husk but also the bran thereby losing all the nutrients

