

Talk with Siddamma

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- Sanjeev Ranganathan

Resource Center:

The staff from the center went for training to Namalwar for 10 days to learn about his work with the farmers. There was also a convention of organic farmers and they decided to form an association there. They also elected their office bearers. There were no women in the association or the office bearers and they added me as one of the office bearers.

What we realized is that we really needed some people with more experience at the resource center itself for an extended period of time. We realized that we need someone to come and help us on a voluntary basis. Shanmugavelan is an chemical engineer who turned to organic farming and helped his entire village in organic farming. Shanmuga came to our resource center to help us set it up, he also trained us in vermin-culture compost. Namalwar also suggested that we needed someone who is fulltime with experience and he spent around 15 days here. He also helped organize our first meeting with the big and small local farmers.

In our first meeting, 60 farmers came from the local level. We had discussions about their farming and the Panchayat president and the local head master were also there. The village school is next to the center. The headmaster has created an organic (agriculture) club. I explained about the resource center so they could use it. I also met the children and some children were very keen and 15 came to the center immediately after I met them.

The forest officer was also there. Many of the farmers were not interested in a philosophical discussion and wanted something practical they could use. They wanted to know about the manure, organic tonic, etc. When are we going to experiment so they could observe different aspects of it. We followed the meeting with a detailed meeting and planning with the full time staff at the center.

We had invited about 100 farmers, but there was a confusion about whether the resource center belonged to the owner. We realized that there was some politics with the farmers and the previous owner and clarified that the center is established by Bharathi Trust and available for everyone in the village. Of the farmers who came, 5 farmers have come forward to wanting to do organic farming on their land. Namalwar was very happy and this is excellent progress. A newspaper and local TV covered the organic farmers meeting.

We believe that in order to be able to prove that it is indeed possible for families to survive off one acre of land we will allocate one acre for each family of staff on the resource center to work on sustaining themselves. Four of the eight staff are released bonded laborers and we will look to them to utilize this opportunity.