

Minutes of conversation with Siddamma and Nammalvar.
June 22, 2008.

Siddamma (Bharati Trust), Nammalvar, Palani (Asha UFlorida), Shivshankar, Shrawan (AID Austin), Savitha, Gaurav, Ganesh, Bharath, Itisha, Rahul, Vinod (Asha Austin).

Siddamma gave an intro on Nammalvar. Nammalvar is very interested in working with folks who are concerned about working with society. When we decided to start the model farm at Bharati Trust, Nammalvar was very happy to be part of it, and has given a lot of direction, and has planted a lot of trees, and gives us instructions and actually works with us instead of giving theoretical inputs. He has committed to working here and is working towards making this farm a model farm. He is interested in working with very large number of groups. He communicates in a very simple and straightforward way and easily communicates with all. He's one of the very rare people we have in India and we should take care of him. He travels a lot. It would be good if he has the flexibility of resources. He won't be very worried about who supports him or not. Siddamma thinks he should be supported because providing the flexibility to him would really help. Nammalvar thinks that the center should become a university (or a learning institute) for everyone including farmers and to their children. At the same time, he wants to do the same things in other areas. He is conducting training for farmers and is happy with how it is going on in this area. He has many publications on this work as well. Murali travels with him regularly. Murali is very committed to documenting Nammalvar's knowledge. So he also has a very important role in this.

Soil is contaminated with pesticides. Immediate need is to educate the farmer to be ecological. Very few people in this country know how to do ecologically good farming. Farmers are committing suicides. Creating model farming practices. And creating publications. Through out India there is a request to develop an organic farming network. Farmers are in isolation. Creation of models are very important. Everything needs to be consolidated.

Regarding the license to sell organic materials in the market – There is a "participatory guarantee system" recognized by the IOF and UN. The farmers themselves are organizing and guaranteeing they are producing Tanjavoor, Coimbatore, Erode etc. -- farmers and consumers are coming together and creating a green shop which is guaranteed organic food. 80% of farmers in TN are small farmers under 5 acre land, so they cannot spend on larger certification. We need to appoint an inspector who can review and certify for these farmers. These inspectors don't have to be any experts. They can be farmers themselves. Kerala, Andhra, Karnataka, Pondicherry, all are part of this. They will be selling all the produce, the millets, rice, the vegetables and fruits, etc. Will get a good price for their products.

The suicides came about after the debts became too high. Solution is to not have any costly inputs from the western methods. The only way to solve the food crisis is to have local and ecologically good way -- mixture crops, crop rotations etc. are working efficiently.

Rice crop needs focus. Not enough farmers. Another area is to work on low-rainfall area where they are working on millets. Involvement will be in TN. and concentrate on low-rainfall area.

The food crisis is fueled by cash crop conversion. Every farmer wants some cash. So every farm can have a component which can provide the cash part. The ecological farm will have multiple areas with different crops.

How easily are folks changing to organic farming -- already some 10000 have converted, while some 20000 are in the transition stage. Only during the last 5 years farmers are changing over because the crisis is too hard, plus the prices of other commodity is forcing the farmers. If the farmer is committed and well trained, within 3 months he can change over. There are some 20 aspects to this transition.

How is the fight against GM seeds? Bio-diversity leads to prosperity. GM seeds are eliminating bio-diversity. Cotton is very prevalent and spreading. But the GM vegetables are being resisted (brinjal, tomato), because of health risks, while cotton won't be eaten.

How different is this different from Subhash Palekar method? Not much. He says switch to Zero-Budget natural farming. He comes from the process side. Nammalvar comes from educating the farmers side.

What is hard about asking farmers to switch to organic farming -- farmer is very worried about economy. So ask him to work out what is the income and what are the costs. Natural farming is a method which will regulate the cost of the inputs. Whatever you get in the field can be used for farm need and home need. That argument alone works really well.

Are the organic products sold at a higher price? -- we have the green shops in many cities (kumbakonam, chennai, trichy etc.). Where-ever we have green shops we sell through it. In the green shop, the wholesale market price goes to the farmer, while 20% goes to the administration of these green shops. So the farmer gets a very good deal on these.

Nammalvar is administrator for OFAI which recognizes the participatory guarantee system.

Regarding publishing: planning to publish a monthly newsletter in Tamil. It can be printed in English also for the benefit of other states once in 3 months. It would be possible to translate these manuals and booklets -- already they have some requests from Karnataka and Andhra.

The different aspects involved in converting a field from chemical fertilizers to organic farming include:

1. vermiculture -- earthworm
2. green manuring -- composting or growing in the soil
3. amrutha paani -- cowdung, cow uring and jaggery. 24 hours tonic is ready and successfully used by farmers.
4. herbal pest repellent -- cow urine based
5. panchagavya -- healthy tonic. Dr. nagarajan used it on agriculture
6. farmer's cytosum(?) -- coconut milk and buttermilk fermented and diluted with water
7. manure tea -- cowdung, leaves, jaggery, 200 litre drum of water -- 1 wk to prepare.
8. gunabasalam -- waste of any dead animal and mix with jaggery and keep for 25 days – 1% solution to be used
9. 10 eggs in a plastic container and lemon juice is added until eggs are completely submerged. add jaggery and 20 days you have egg-lemon extract.
10. Multiple cropping for greening purpose. maharashtra 4 millet, 4 rice, 4 oilseed, 4 green manure crops -- grow with the above methods.

How make vermicompost, vermiwash, importance of crop-rotation, mixed-cropping, integrated farming, relay cropping, no tilling farming by choosing coconut, banana etc. are what the farmers are taught in the workshops.

Each farmer's field may not need them all. So they follow a method of farm-specific agriculture. The aim is for the farmer to learn what is needed in their field.