He spends less to net more

M. J. Prabu

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With a mere three acres, a Kancheepuram youth has showed that a good income and minimum expense hold the key for youth to stick to farming.

At a time when many farmers are abandoning agriculture and discussions on ways to retain youths in farming dominate agriculture and food security meetings, a young farmer of Arasur in Kancheepuram district in Tamil Nadu has showed that a good income and minimum expense hold the key for youngsters to stick to farming.

A. Sakthivel, 29, who has just 2.5 acres, did not know whether he should continue farming or seek job elsewhere. “My mind was into farming since I come from a family of farmers. If I had to work in some office, I must work eight hours a day at a monthly salary of Rs.10,000-Rs.15,000. And to get a job is no easy task today, and I must get a good recommendation even for becoming peon. But if I continue farming, I can be on my own,” he says.

Initially, Mr. Sakthivel could hardly make ends meet. “I tried my best but could get only 20 bags of rice from an acre and Rs.18,000-Rs. 20,000 from selling it.

For him, the change came from an accidental meeting with the National Agro Foundation (NAF), an NGO, founded in 2000 by the late C. Subramaniam, architect of India’s first Green Revolution, to implement projects at the grass roots to improve the life of rural people with a special focus on agriculture.

He learnt the System of Rice Intensification (SRI), a technique that helps to double yield, and decided to try it out. But his friends and relations tried to talk him out of it, saying it was foolish to bet on some unheard technique.

Undeterred, he pressed ahead. Almost all material inputs and training were given by the NAF, whose experts tested his soil and well water and gave a right prescription of nutrients. And the results “were astounding,” he says. In four months, he brought in 3,375 kg (45 bags of 75 kg each) with an investment of just Rs. 11,000 an acre. He made a net profit of Rs.40,750 from an acre.

He was able to save on his investment considerably since his seed and fertilizer costs came down.
“There is nothing like a good income to sustain one’s interest in farming. Be it old or young, the desire to do and continue agriculture can be sustained only if one gets profit. Mere rhetoric on attracting youths to farming will serve no purpose until they see for themselves [the benefits] and meet others who have been able to get a good income. I am happy that with the NAF’s help, I am an example for other youths in the village...,” he says.

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