

Market in Chennai area helps organic farmers



Chennai: Despite the sky-rocketing popularity of organic farming and the benefits it brings, the farmer community continues to be sidelined when it comes to fixing prices, so to say.

In this juncture, a non-profit organisation named Organic Farmers Market (OFM) has come up with the idea of setting up a modern day sandhai at Mahalingapuram at Kodambakkam in the city.

"The market that was started on 12 November is put up every Sunday from 10 am to 1 pm, and sells only organic items. 'Initially, the agriculturalists did not want to bring in their wares to organic marketing and were hesitant. But later they gave in'," said Anand, a member of the organisation.

Organic Farmers Market is a collective initiative by a group of organic farming enthusiasts with the aim to protect the livelihoods of those who grow our food. The group's prime focus is to bridge the urban-rural, demand-supply gap.

Speaking more about this, he noted, "A farmer's livelihood is affected when not even 30 per cent of the value that is usually sold reaches him. OFM decided to concentrate on small and marginal farmers. They are the ones who have lands of about 1-2 acres and do traditional farming. The small farmers (with less than two acres), inspite of failing monsoons, inadequate support from family, lack of welfare schemes, are still passionate and rooted to traditional food production'."

When asked about how the market came to be set up, Anand said, "In Mahalingapuram, the residents came forward to help us in this process. An association in the area gave us the space to set up the market in a car-shed. The market will sell, rice, millets, oil etc. We used to have one in Bazulla Road, but due to rains, we could not continue with it. So we later set up here."

"Consumers belonging to middle-class and lower middle-class are our target. We are spreading awareness through word-of-mouth'," he added.

On the investment required, he said that it mostly depended on logistics.

"As there is no outside funding, we as people come together and contribute to procure the products. We cannot earn much, but since this is a service-oriented activity, money does not matter'," he said.

"When this organic farming becomes affordable, a farmer can directly come and sell. This makes the market better. In order to make that happen, we have to educate people," Anand concludes.

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