

Second batch of AMEF Fellowship programme commences



AMEF Fellowship programme for the year 2006 commenced in May. The second batch of 14 students completed 23 days of classroom orientation on Sustainable Agriculture. They are now placed in AMEF's Area Units in Dharmapuri, Tiruchi, Bellary and Bijapur to gain field experience.

Visitors

Sixty-two agricultural graduates from College of Agriculture, Raichur visited Puchaladinni, a cluster village in Raichur. They interacted with the farmers and understood the various SA practices and their importance in improving the livelihood of small and marginal farmers in dry land.

A three-member team from MANAGE, Hyderabad; Mr. Vamsi Krishna, Agricultural Specialist, AFPRO, Hyderabad and Mrs. Maheshwari, Mandal Agriculture Officer, Kondurg visited FFS in Parvathapur at Mahabubnagar.

Dr. Mallikarjun, Senior Research Officer, from the Central Sericulture Research and Training Institute, Mysore visited the project area in Tiruchi Unit, to learn about the FFS methodology to be adopted in sericulture by the CSR&TI.

A team of 'Grama Swaraj Andolana' consisting of experts from various regions across the State visited Jeerankalagi, a cluster village in Bijapur Unit.

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Documentation

B. Vijayalakshmi (Tiruchi), a Case Study on *Collective efforts - a step towards strengthening farmers in the maize marketing chain.*

Extracts of the paper on *Nutrient Quantity or nutrient access?* by Rolland Bunch, was brought out as Selected Readings-5

LEISA India

The issue on *Towards Policy Change* was brought out.

In the Media

A total of 11 episodes of the Farm School on AIR programme on SA in drylands were aired by AIR, Tiruchi as part of the collaborative programme. Around 1100 farmers from 22 districts registered for the programme. Farmers, especially women, shared their experiences with enthusiasm in the AIR programme, which has gained the appreciation of many listeners of the programme.

Mr Suresh B K, Raichur Unit, gave a radio talk on '*Indigenous Technical Knowledge with special reference to Dry land SA*'.

Street play on SA practices organised in Raichur was published in Raichur Vani and Vijaya Karnataka on 23 June 2006.

Green Festival celebration was published in local dailies - Vijaya Karnataka, Praja Vani, Raichur Vani and Suddimula on 21 June 2006.

Field day on Tomato in Mahabubnagar was covered by two local newspapers, Andhra Jyothi and Eenadu.

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AME Foundation promotes ecological agriculture among small and marginal farmers in the semi arid areas of the Deccan Plateau by generating farming alternatives, enriching farmers knowledge, linking development agencies and sharing experience.



The period marked the beginning of preparatory cultivation for the coming season. Rainwater management activities like summer ploughing, ploughing across the slope, bunding etc., were the major activities carried out followed by sowing in some areas. In several areas green manure crops were grown and incorporated in the soil before sowing the main crop.

The focus of the period was more on building the capacity of farmers and Eco Network Partners in managing the natural resources. Farmer Field Schools were organised in groundnut, tomato, brinjal etc., with impressive outcomes. A Modified Training of Facilitators was launched, with CBOs for the first time, addressing the issues of dryland farming. The second batch of AMEF Fellowship programme was initiated.

This period has been very special and will remain a memorable one for AME Foundation. Dr. M. S. Swaminathan, a doyen in agriculture development, visited the Foundation.

Field activities

In **Tiruchi**, summer ploughing and bund repair were the main activities taken up on the field followed by input assessment and mobilisation by farmer federations. Twelve sessions of the Farmer Field School (FFS) in Brinjal were completed at Nochium village of Perambalur district.

Madanapalli Unit completed four sessions of groundnut FFS in all 41 groups of the operational area. Majority of the farmers have taken up ploughing across the slope and bund formation. Farmers in Palamner area, have treated groundnut seed with neem oil and sowing is in progress.

The Tomato FFS was completed with 20 farmers from Kottur, Seerampatti and Eachampallam villages in **Dharmapuri**, with lot of new learnings on IPM. A field day was organised on 17th June 2006. An exhibition displaying studies on nutrient uptake, water-holding capacity, insect zoo etc., was organised during the field day.

Few farmers from **Bellary** area have grown green manure crops. Sunhemp was sown during the first week of June after receiving the first rains. Sunhemp grew up to 50 cm height in 28 days and weighed around 900 grams/sq.m (3.5 t/ac). The same has been incorporated in the field during the first week of July. And now, the field is ready for sowing groundnut.

The early showers received during March helped **Raichur** farmers to take up summer ploughing and land preparation. Four FFS sessions each in groundnut and cotton are completed in both cluster and ENP villages.

Green manure crops like *daincha* and green gram are becoming popular among farmers in **Mahabubnagar**. Twenty seven farmers have taken up *daincha* on 61 acres and 17 farmers are growing green gram on nine acres. *Daincha* has already been incorporated. The impact of green manuring is clearly visible and many farmers are showing interest in this activity.

In **Bijapur**, with the receipt of early rains, about 108 farmers from cluster villages have taken up bund plantation for generating bio-mass. They have planted 14036 plants belonging to 13 different species.

Dr. M.S. Swaminathan visits AME Foundation

Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, Chairman, National Commission on Farmers, Govt. of India, visited AME Foundation on 25th June 2006. Dr. R. Dwarakinath, Chairman, AMEF shared the Foundation's vision in addressing dryland farming issues. Dr. Arun Balamatti, Executive Director, AMEF outlined AMEF's activities. Mr. KVS Prasad shared information on LEISA India programme. Dr. Swaminathan appreciated the meaningful work of AMEF in promoting LEISA. He was impressed with AMEF's Fellowship programme in training young graduates in Sustainable Agriculture which would play an important role in spreading LEISA.



Working with farmers

Mahabubnagar Unit trained farmers on nursery techniques in Vegetables. Around 12 trained farmers from Minigonapalli have taken up improved nursery management practices in their farms.

Around 70 farmers of Marata village in Raichur were trained on soil and moisture conservation at BIRD K Tiptur. Some of the trained farmers have adopted certain practices like preparation of field bunds, trenches and digging pits for planting trees, to conserve rainwater.

Fifty farmers from Mahabubnagar were trained on Azolla cultivation of which 10 members have started growing Azolla.

Study tours

Tiruchi unit organised a study tour to 39 farmers to BIRD-K watershed project at S.Lakkiahalli, Tiptur in Karnataka. The purpose was to expose farmers to tree based farming system and other livelihood activities.

Representatives from ENPs in Mahabubnagar went on a study tour on 8th May 2006 to know more about organic agriculture as a part of Sustainable Agriculture (SA). They interacted with the farmers on the extent of use of neem products for pest management in Red gram and cotton. The participants visited Mulkanur Cooperative Society and got oriented on the federation concept. Following the visit, the

participants decided to promote organic cultivation with few farmers and in a limited area in the coming Kharif season. Two ENPs prepared plans to set up Neem Crusher unit in their working villages.

Around 75 groundnut farmers of cluster and ENP villages in Raichur were taken on a study tour to BIRD K, Surshettykoppa, to understand the tree based framing systems for SA.

Working with Eco Network Partners (ENP)

In Mahabubnagar, two pre-seasonal conferences were organised, one in Palem and another in Nawabpet. The purpose was to bring together various actors in promoting SA, before the commencement of the season, for mutual benefit. The second one conducted at Nawabpet was organised jointly with WDS, an ENP. More than 180 farmers attended the event and actively participated. The Mandal Agriculture Officer (MAO) was the Chief Guest and explained about the selection of good quality seeds and their availability. An interesting outcome of the event was that the MAO gifted an NPV unit to Pallegadda group because of the higher usage of botanicals and bio-pesticides. Dharpalli group farmers received a seed treatment drum and SRI marker and weeder for their active involvement in promoting SA.

Raichur Unit trained ENP staff on FFS concept and its implementation in the field during 7-8 June 2006.

Farmer Field School in Tomato

AMEF Mahabubnagar Unit in partnership with Eco Club, an ENP, organised FFS for the tomato growers of Parvathapur of Kondurg mandal in Mahabubnagar. High levels of chemical use, lack of knowledge on eco friendly alternatives and high incidence of pests and diseases like Damping off in the nursery stage, Helicoverpa, Early blight, Whiteflies, Leaf curl and Powdery mildew, were found to be the major problems. FFS was conducted for promoting ecofriendly practices and to realise better production potential in tomato with special emphasis on the soil fertility improvement and modified cropping practices.

Around 24 farmers participated in the programme. Lot of enthusiasm was shown by participants in learning through FFS. The FFS participants shared their experience and learning with others in the village during the field day organised on 20 May 2006. Intensive interaction between FFS farmers and other farmers was observed. The non-FFS farmers were very much motivated with the learnings of FFS farmers. Following were the important outcomes of FFS.

- ◆ Other crops like cowpea, marigold etc., are being included as border crop, trap crop or pollen-yielding crops in tomato.
- ◆ FFS farmers are adopting improved nursery raising techniques and are saving 50 % of the seed cost, accounting to Rs. 250 per acre.
- ◆ The usage of botanicals has become more popular among the FFS farmers.
- ◆ The fungicides are being replaced by Bordeaux Mixture.
- ◆ FFS farmers are assisting other farmers in better crop management, thus helping scaling up.



Participants observing tomato plants during AESA

Discovery Learning in Dryland Farming- a Modified Training of Facilitators

Modified Training of Facilitators (MToF), an abridged version of ToF is a collaborative programme of AMEF Dharmapuri Unit, FAO and MYRADA. MToF was inaugurated on the 07th June 2006 at the MYRADA Training Centre at Achettipalli, Hosur. **The MToF is the first of its kind in the country for training facilitators in FFS methodology by involving Community Based Organisations (CBOs).** A total of 33 Community Resource Persons from MYRADA's Community Managed Resource Centers (CMRC) are participating in the programme. Facilitators are the FAO trained and experienced Master Facilitators mobilised from the State Departments of Agriculture in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

For the first time, an attempt was made to address the issues of dryland farming through FFS. Deliberate efforts are made to shift the focus of the programme to dryland agriculture from IPM. AME Foundation, with its vast experience on dryland agriculture, provided the necessary technical support in developing curriculum to suit the needs of farmers in promoting sustainable agriculture in drylands. Practice FFS is being conducted in nearly 50 villages, 3 days a week, followed by 3 days of residential training. About 2700 farmers from Self-help Affinity Groups are involved in the programme and majority of them are women.

Being unique, both in terms of methodology as well as the content, the programme is generating a lot of new experience and learnings. These are being captured by way of documentation and shared to a wider audience in the form of a newsletter.

Fostering LEISA initiatives

Tiruchi Unit trained ten SHG leaders from federations on *in situ* soil and water management and soil fertility management. These leaders will be facilitating similar trainings to 100 SHG groups reaching a total of 2000 women.

Madanapalli Unit trained volunteers from all the ENP areas and the mandals of cluster villages. The participants included community coordinators, Sangamitras of Velugu programme, field staff of Myrada-Kadiri project and some lead farmers. Imparting skills on some of the sustainable agricultural practices like compost making, preparation of EFYM, azolla production etc., was a part of the training. The volunteers were taken on a study tour to working areas of AMEF and other organizations to motivate them to adopt SA practices. 257 volunteers who were trained on SA practices have shared the information in 358 groups reaching around 4284 farmers.

Two rallies were organised in Molakalmuru and Kanahosahalli in Bellary working area. SAGs, ENPs, line departments, progressive farmers and others were involved in the event. These events attracted many people and succeeded in

creating awareness on sustainable agriculture. Nearly 5000 people have witnessed the programme.

Building Linkages

In collaboration with Veterinary Department, Raichur Unit and its ENP, SMGAS, organised a animal health improvement and vaccination programme at Hunched village. Around 145 farmers participated in the programme and more than 150 animals were vaccinated to prevent "Foot and Mouth" and "Black Quarter" diseases. The farmers were also trained on dealing with different diseases and their preventive measures.

Dharmapuri Unit has established linkages with RRS-Vridhachalam, Agricultural Engineering College and Research Institute, Tiruchi and Krishnagiri KVK for mobilising technologies and inputs for the MToF programme.

Participation in Workshops

Dr. Dwarakinath, Dr. Arun, Mr. Prasad and Ms. Radha attended the *National Workshop on Priorities in Watershed Development*, organised by Sujala, the World Bank supported watershed project in Karnataka at Hotel Ramee Guestline, Hosur on 22-23 May. Various stakeholders in Sujala Project, UAS Bangalore and Dharwad and selected NGOs attended the programme. The workshop was focussed on understanding the externalities in watershed project and means of addressing them.

Dr. Arun Balamatti was invited to the *Regional Workshop on Strategy for Improving the Performance of Farming Systems in Rainfed Areas* at MANAGE, Hyderabad. The regional workshop was organised for sharing ideas and suggestions for the formation of National Rainfed Area Authority (NRAA). Dr. Arun made a presentation on the status, issues and strategies for improving dry farming in Karnataka. CRIDA, line departments from AP, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Maharashtra, UAS, Bangalore, PDBC, Bangalore, CICR, Nagpur, NGOs etc attended the programme.

Mr. KVS Prasad was invited as a Resource Person to a workshop on information sharing using ICT tools. This workshop was organised by RASTA, an NGO operating in Kerala. Participants included representatives from NGOs as well as agencies from the State Government.

AMEF Staff visit Kenya

Seven staff from AMEF visited Kenya on a study tour during 1-13 May 2006. They observed the process of FFS being carried out in Kenya in terms of methodology, the funding aspects and the networks involved. Besides farm visits, the participants had meaningful discussions with farmers, officials and other stakeholders.