

ENCOURAGING SUSTAINABLE
FARMING

AKSHAYASREE
AWARDS

A study conducted by Kerala Agricultural University



**SAROJINI DAMODARAN
FOUNDATION**

Since 1999

"To forget how to dig the earth and
tend the soil is to forget ourselves"

-Mahatma Gandhi

OUR VISION



KUMARI SHIBULAL
CHIEF PATRON



SD SHIBULAL
TRUSTEE

To transform lives of the Underprivileged through focused, impactful, & systematic interventions

EDUCATION

HEALTHCARE

ORGANIC FARMING

SOCIAL WELFARE



Kumari Shibulal

"I hail from a farming background. I have seen from close quarters, how my parents tried to live in harmony with nature, even while struggling with financial challenges. It is this passion that made me create the Akshayasree Awards in 2009, to promote and encourage organic farmers.

Since then, I have had the opportunity to meet with and learn from some amazing human beings. It gives me tremendous satisfaction to learn that many of the award winners have continue to win more awards in there field after receiving the Akshayasree award.

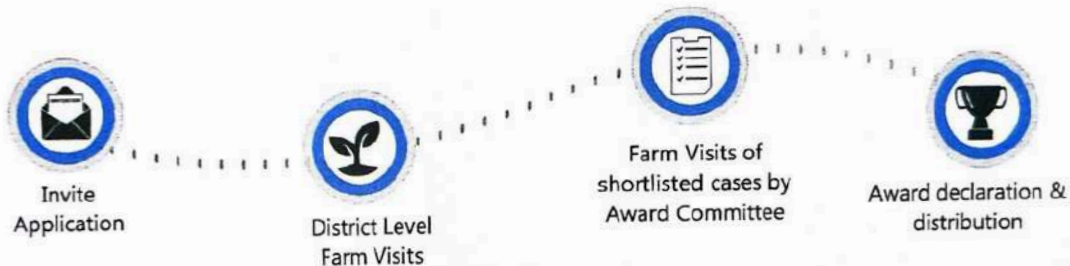
Over the course of a long journey, it is prudent to pause, look back, and take course corrections for the path ahead. It is with this intent, that we engaged the Kerala Agricultural University to do an impact analysis of the award. I am very pleased to share the findings of the study with you & thus reinforce the benefits of organic farming."



Dr. Shashi Tharoor

"Unprecedented drought and water shortages are today the reality of life in Kerala, affecting the lives and livelihoods of all of us but in particular, our farming communities. Add to this an excessive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and what we confront is poor health of farms and farm products, jeopardizing the agricultural economy itself. It is therefore reassuring to learn about the success of the Akshayasree award winners who have embraced organic farming for the sustainability of agriculture while also preserving profitability and future prospects.

The Impact Study of the Kerala Agricultural University confirms that organic farming is being adopted enthusiastically by younger generations, flourishing in rural as well as urban areas of our state. It gives me tremendous hope for the future of agriculture in Kerala, and I would like to commend the Sarojini Damodaran Foundation on instituting this award, and commissioning the report, as a step in the right direction to protect and preserve the sustainability of what is one of Kerala's most significant economic sectors."



- 1 Eligibility Criteria For application: Farmers practicing 100% organic farming for a minimum of three years. Akshayasree State Award Winner can reapply only after three years.
- 2 Evaluation Criteria: Innovation, adherence to Organic farming principles, level of integrated farming and demonstrable benefits.
- 3 The award is presented to the winners in a public function in the presence of dignitaries, community and fellow farmers

AKSHAYASREE AWARDS

Estabalised in 2009 to encourage & reward sustainable organic farming

**All kerala - Best Organic
Farmer Award**

₹ 1 LAKH

**Individual Districts - Best
Organic Farmer**

₹ 25,000 Each
Consolation prizes
₹ 10,000 Each

**Youth, women, veterans,
schools, medicinals crops
farm, terrace farm**

₹ 15,000 Each

IMPACT ANALYSIS TEAM



Dr. Jayasree Krishnankutty

(Research, Analysis & Reporting)

Dr. Jayasree Krishnankutty, (Professor - Agricultural Extension, Kerala Agricultural University) has over 25 years of experience in the field of agriculture. She has represented India in global conferences on small holder marketing in The Netherlands, South Africa, Ghana and Vietnam. She has published over 25 research papers in the area of sustainable agriculture.



Meera Rajeevan

(Project Management)

Meera Rajeevan (Program Director, Sarojini Damodaran Foundation) has over 22 years experience in IT with a successful track record in technical and leadership roles. She has traveled extensively across the world managing global clients. After her successful stint in IT industry, Meera moved to the social sector where she hopes to leverage her experience to impact & benefit the lesser privileged.

Kerala Agriculture University, Thrissur was chartered to study the impact of Akshayasree with three objectives



Profiling:

To understand the personal and farming profiles of organic farmers in the state of Kerala



Benefits:

To understand the perception of the award winners, on the benefits of organic farming



Impact:

To assess the impact of the Akshayasree Award in motivating organic farmers

SAMPLE & RESPONSE COLLECTION

- 1 Sample Size: 32
- 2 Randomly selected at least 3 farmers per district from the 10 districts under consideration
- 3 Data Collection through personal interviews and farm visits by Prof. Jayasree



KEY FINDINGS

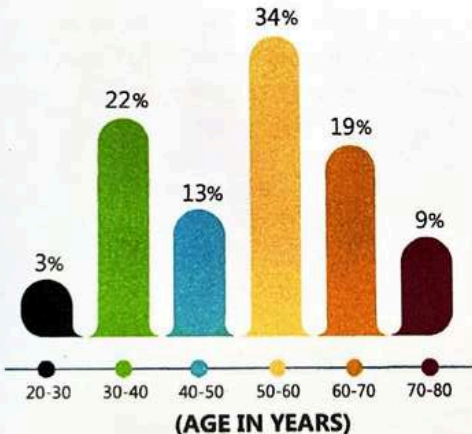
Profiling Successful Organic Farmers

"Agriculture is the most healthful,
most useful and most noble
employment of man"

-George Washington

AGE OF FARMERS

The study affirms that younger people are turning to organic farming



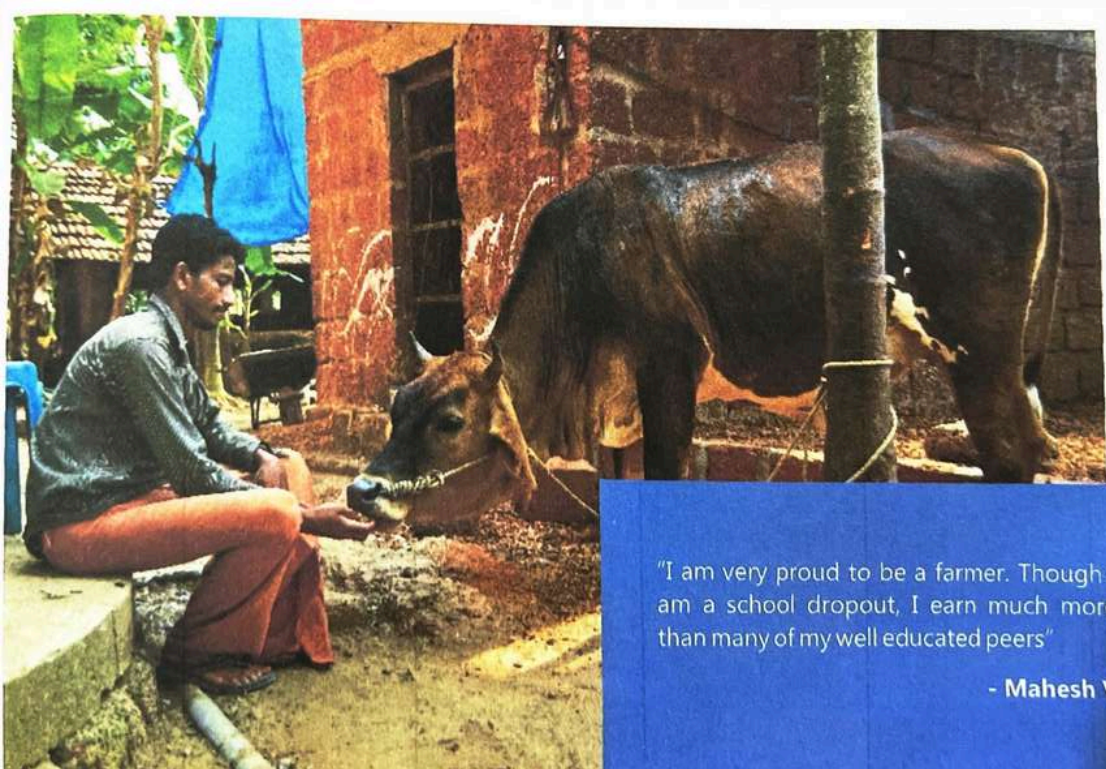
22% of the organic farmers were in the age group of 30-40 years, a much higher percentage compared to that of the traditional Kerala farmers.

The enthusiasm for organic farming was uniform and evident.

Many also held additional occupations, other than farming.

Mahesh V Pinarayi is a young, enthusiastic farmer from Kannur district. In addition to one-and-half acres of family property, he leases out nearly 16 acres of land, where he cultivates all possible crops. He also breeds ducks and provides ducklings under the Kerala State Veterinary Departments scheme, to all beneficiaries in his district.

He works full time in his farm and has yearlong produce to sell from his farming activities. He employs direct selling and organic farming outlets for the same. His young wife extends full support to him. Though Mahesh has received several awards, he values Akshayasree award the most, as it is the first recognition given to a young, unknown, and hardworking farmer.



"I am very proud to be a farmer. Though I am a school dropout, I earn much more than many of my well educated peers"

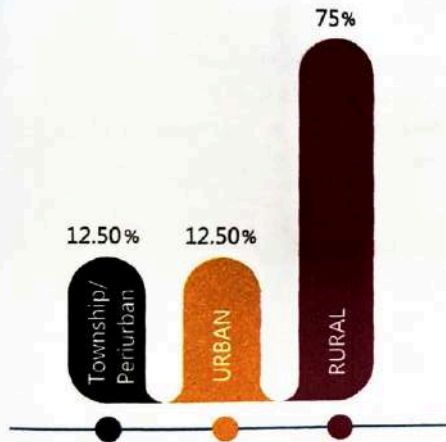
- Mahesh V

"Urban farming is not only possible,
it is crucial. But it can't be like the
farming techniques of yore"

-Homaro Cantu

LOCATION OF THE RESPONDANT

The interest in organic farming in urban and peri urban area augurs well for Kerala which has the highest urbanization rate in India.



The Majority (75%) of award winners were from rural areas.

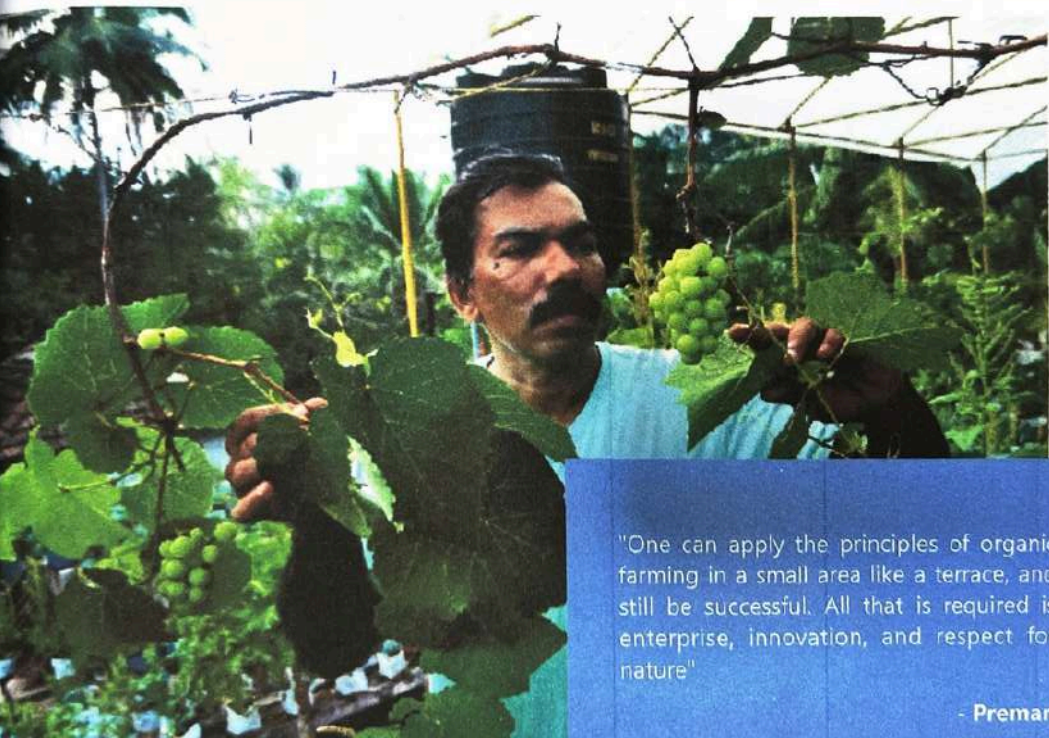
25% of the farmers, with small sized farms were from urban or peri urban areas.

Some do terrace cultivations, while others have small holdings.

Organic farming has tremendous scope across the geography of Kerala.

Preman lives in Kolathara, a thickly populated, suburban area of Kozhikode. He maintains a home terrace where he grows all kinds of vegetables in sacks filled with sand-soil-cowdung mixture. The mixture is periodically replenished. He experiments with crops like tapioca, papaya, and banana in his terrace farm.

He diligently monitors the crops for pest attack or disease incidence. He uses his own indigenously made plant protection measures. The farm meets his family's needs fully and he sells the surplus produce locally. It is a great example of how a very limited space such as the terrace of a 1400 sq feet house, can serve as an organic farm.



"One can apply the principles of organic farming in a small area like a terrace, and still be successful. All that is required is enterprise, innovation, and respect for nature"

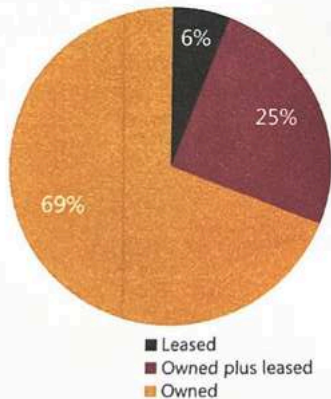
- Preman

"Agricultural science has enormous potential to increase the yields of small farmers and lift them out of hunger and poverty"

-Bill Gates

OWNERSHIP OF LAND/FARMS

OWNERSHIP



The majority of organic farmers (69%) operated their own farms.

They were early settlers in fertile areas, traditional farmers, Gulf returned, retired persons, and relatively older in age.

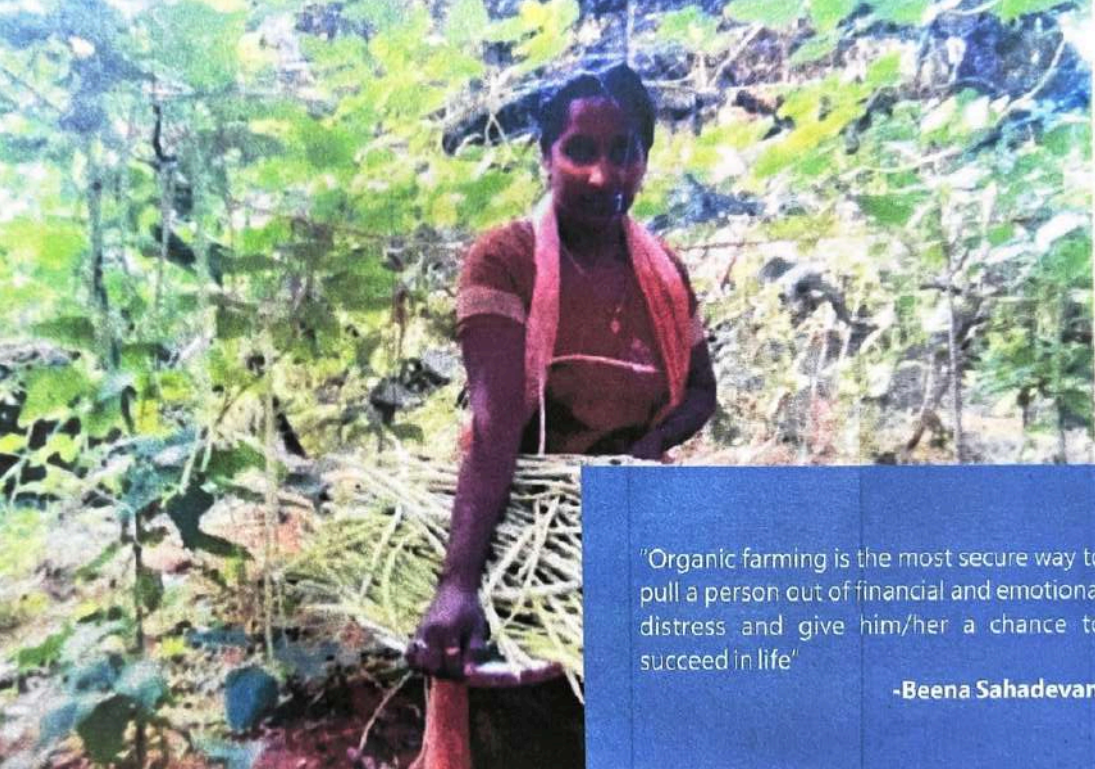
The six percent who leased land were younger & full-time farmers who were hardworking and enterprising.

25% of the farmers held a combination of owned and leased land for specific cultivations.

Beena Sahadevan's world fell apart when her husband returned from the Gulf with paralysis. From being a homemaker, she had to become the breadwinner for the family in order to take care of her husband, ailing parents, and two young children.

She started organic farming with little capital but yielded quick results and created enough income to take care of her family. She started with a meagre 35 cents of land in Thrissur district but expanded to two acres in the neighbouring land without having to pay lease. Her day stretches from 3 a.m. in the morning to late in the night. With her indomitable spirit, hard work and keen mind, she has evolved into a successful agriculture entrepreneur who also provides value added services like catering, nursery products, etc.

There isn't an area of farming that she has not tried: vegetables, fish, terrace farming, aquaponics, dairy, poultry, etc. She also owned a catering service that provides food to over 600 people. The fact that she uses poison free organic products gives huge credibility to her catering service.



"Organic farming is the most secure way to pull a person out of financial and emotional distress and give him/her a chance to succeed in life"

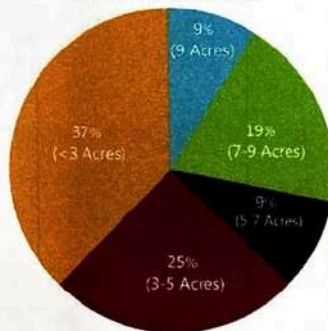
-Beena Sahadevan

"For of all gainful professions, nothing is better, nothing more pleasing, nothing more delightful, nothing better becomes a well-bred man than agriculture"

-Marcus Tullius Cicero

A 7 acre, integrated organic farm can provide a good quality life for a family, as the sole source of livelihood, in Kerala.

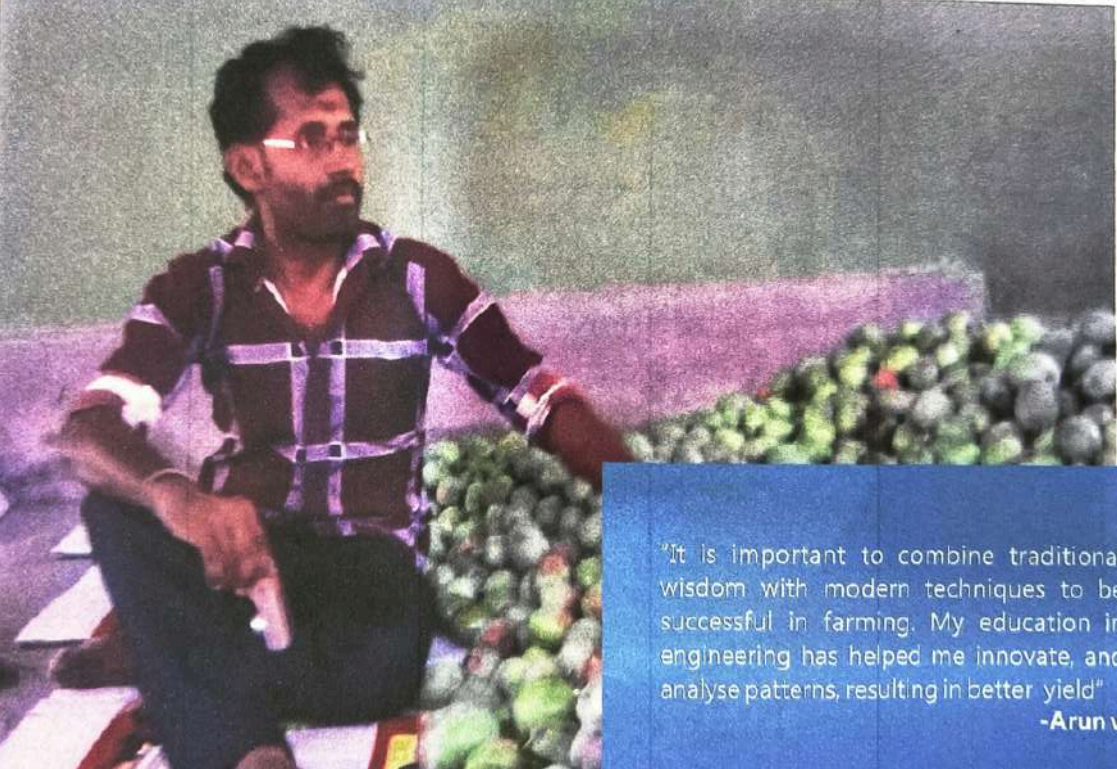
AREA OF FARMS



Area of Farms	<3 Acres		3-5 Acres		5-7 Acres		7-9 Acres		>9 Acres	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Owned	10	31	5	16	2	6	5	16	-	-
Owned+Leased	1	3	2	6	1	3	1	3	3	9
Leased	1	3	1	3	-	-	-	-	-	-

Arun V from Muthalamada in Palakkad district is an engineering graduate. He runs a farm of nearly 13 acres, using the joint property of two more family members. He has developed many innovations of his own in farm management. He has almost foolproof methods of prediction regarding pest attack, crop situation, and weather parameters.

He is an excellent communicator, disseminating knowledge, information and most importantly his optimism within the community. Arun's income from farming far exceeds his additional income as a guest lecturer. His young wife assists him in farming, and together, they form a model, that can be emulated by the educated youth of today.



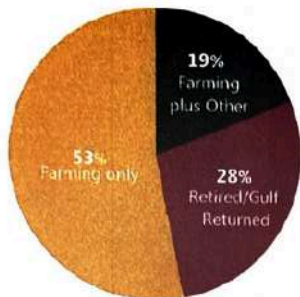
"It is important to combine traditional wisdom with modern techniques to be successful in farming. My education in engineering has helped me innovate, and analyse patterns, resulting in better yield"

-Arun v

"The ultimate goal of farming is not the growing of crops, but the cultivation and perfection of human beings"

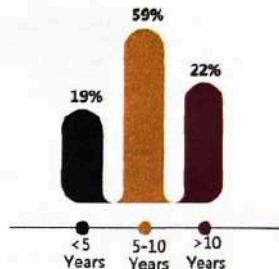
-Masanobu Fukuoka

The more experienced farmers are eager to learn and share insights.



Occupation

- 28% retired/gulf returned, a phenomenon specific to kerala and a trend on the rise
- 20% engaged in organic farming have additional occupation
- 34% of those who are solely dependent on farming have been into organic farming for 5-10 years

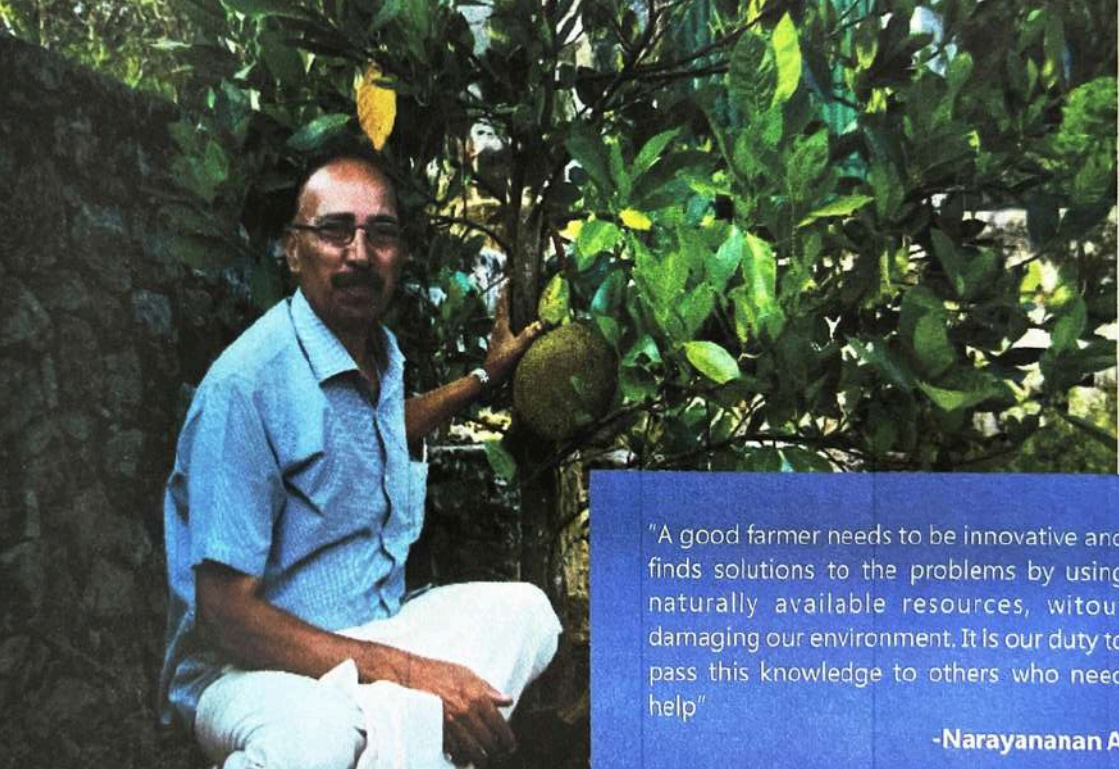


No. of years into organic farming

- 60% of farmers into organic farming for 5-10 years
- Owners of large homesteads, who believed in organic farming, kept their farms in prime condition
- The >10 years category consists of traditionally organic farmers

Narayananan A, a retired government servant from Palakkad district and a proponent of organic farming, has come up with ingenious solutions to problems that he has faced as a farmer. He identified and used specific local herbs to protect the crops from the attack of wild boar, prepared a recipe of locally available herbs to protect plantains against insect, and used rice gruel to accelerate the growth of mango trees.

Currently he is in the process of developing a large organic farm, where the elderly and ailing can rejuvenate themselves. He acts as a satellite farmer, disseminating information, extending help in the management of the farm, and even in marketing of produce.



"A good farmer needs to be innovative and finds solutions to the problems by using naturally available resources, without damaging our environment. It is our duty to pass this knowledge to others who need help"

-Narayananan A

"The appeal of organic farming is
boundless; this mountain has no top, this
river has no end"

-Eliot Coleman



KEY FINDINGS

Benefits of organic farming:
Winners perception

"Agriculture is our wisest
pursuit, because it will in the end
contribute most to real wealth, good
morals, and happiness"

-Thomas Jefferson

ORGANIC FARMING: MYTH AND REALITY

MYTH

- Organic farming is not practical and costs more
- Very high quality of organic fertilizer is required to provide the same quantity of nutrients as inorganic fertilizers
- There is no premium pricing for organic products and they are difficult to market

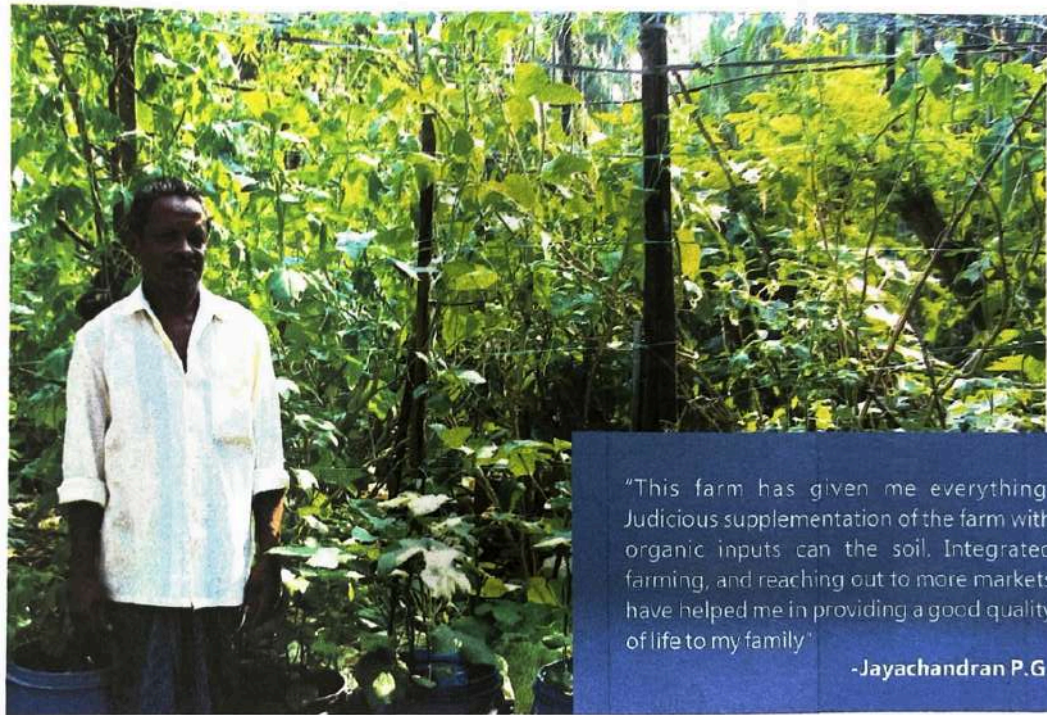
REALITY

- Organic farming is sustainable, profitable, and feasible
- An organic farm of 7 acres, or more, will suffice to provide for a family
- Younger farmers vouched that using organic inputs are not expensive or cumbersome
- Healthy, productive plants are testimony of the effectiveness of the same
- 87% of the farmers reported a price increment of 20-40% over in organic produce
- All farmers (except one) said marketing is not a problem)

Jayachandran P.G. from Thrissur district has been farming on his ancestral farm of 8 acres since his teens. His family of four depend solely on the farm for their living. He has raised his girls well and given them a good education. The elder daughter is now working as a lecturer in a college and the younger one is pursuing an engineering degree.

His farm is a very good example of integrated farming - with cows, goats, chicken, and fish rearing. He has a state of the art biogas plant, a good example of biproduct utilization.

He markets products from his farm year round. He sells directly to distant markets and is able to claim premium prices. The soil in this farm, is a testimony to how judicious supplementation of the farm with organic inputs can transform the soil, as it is visibly superior in color, texture and organic content compared to the soil in neighboring areas.



"This farm has given me everything. Judicious supplementation of the farm with organic inputs can the soil. Integrated farming, and reaching out to more markets have helped me in providing a good quality of life to my family"

-Jayachandran P.G.

"Being a farmer means shaking hands
with nature"
-Anonymous

ASSESSMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS OF ORGANIC FARMS

- 1 The majority of the farms (69%) fared very well, scoring an index above 6/10 the four variables used.
- 2 The high index confirms that Akshayasree awards have been given to outstanding organic farmers, who contribute positively to sustaining the ecosystem.

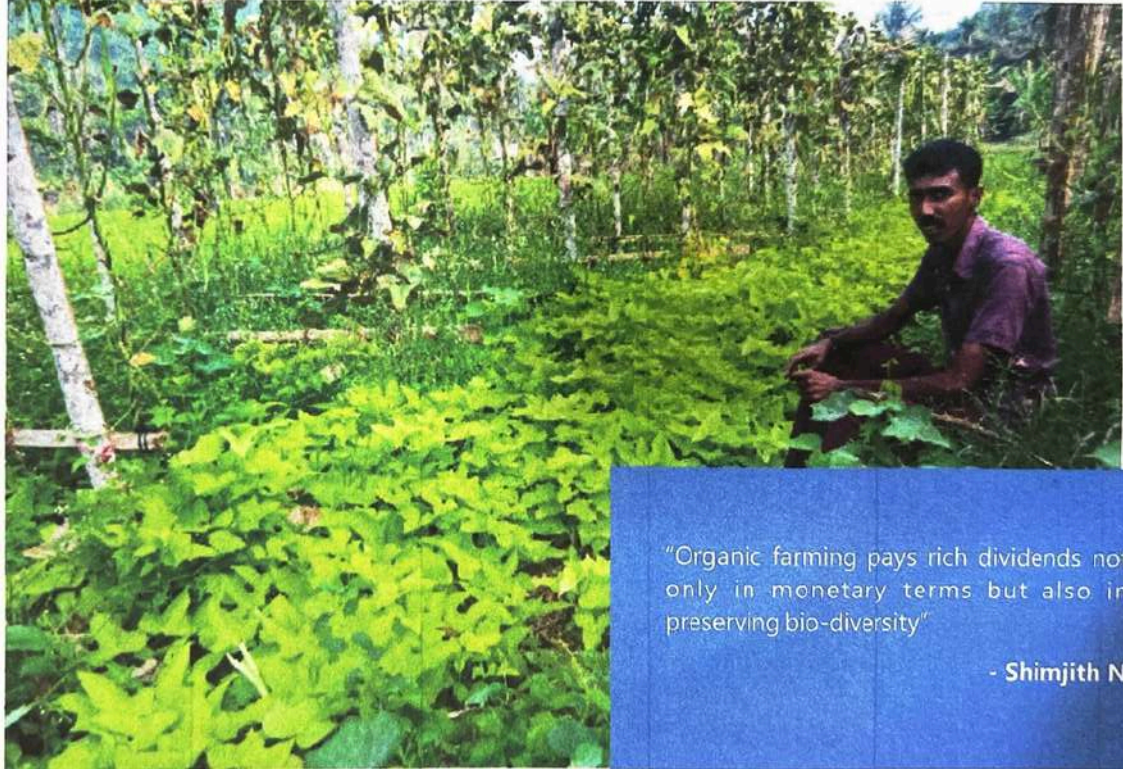
Variable	Correlation Coefficient
RRR (Reduce-Recycle-Reuse)	0.546**
Mixed farming	0.723**
Sale of organic inputs	0.330
Satellite effect	0.374*

** Significant at the 0.01 level

* Significant at the 0.05 level

Shimjith N from Kannur district , has 7 ½ acres of land, in a naturally well endowed area ending in a small hillock. He loves the flora and fauna and other natural resources of the area. His organically run farm attracts many types of birds, and provides a good nesting area for them. He cultivates many different crops, and his farm is a repository of agro bio-diversity, with its rich soil, perennial water availability, and moderate temperature owing to the hilly terrain.

Shimjith works full time in his farm, has a good network with fellow farmers, and sells seeds and planting materials. He maintains that such a farm is sufficient for a young man to earn a decent livelihood.



"Organic farming pays rich dividends not only in monetary terms but also in preserving bio-diversity"

- Shimjith N

"If conservation of natural
resources go wrong, everything will"
-MS Swaminathan

The award winners farms are ideal examples of rich agro biodiversity.

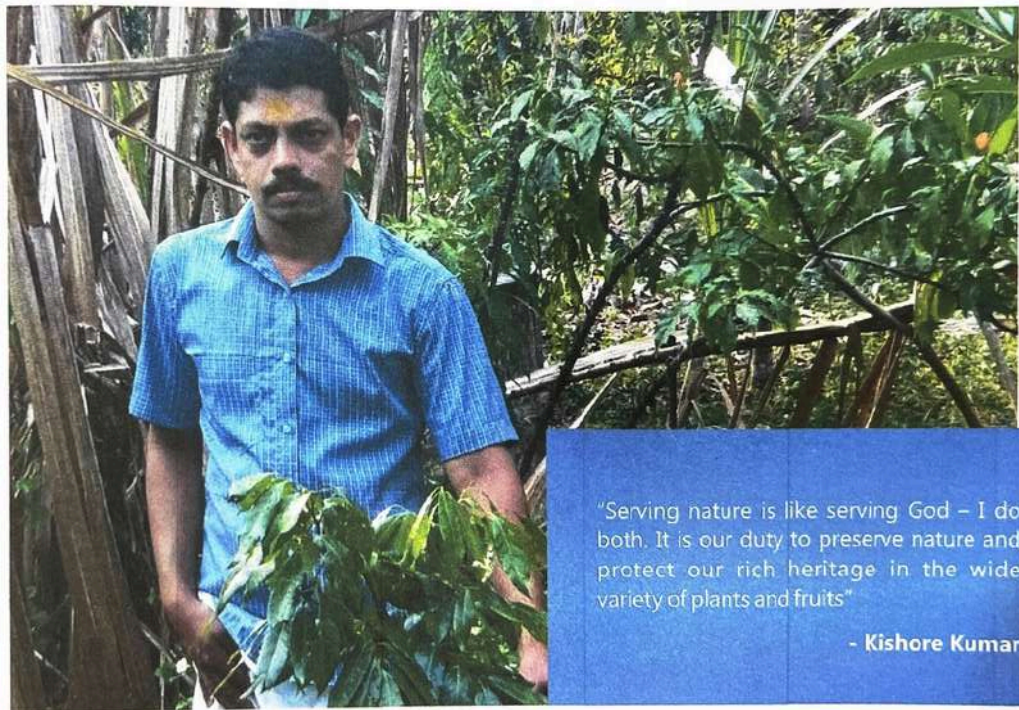
- 1 Each farm is a rich repository of rare crops, indigenous herbs, shrubs and trees along with birds and household animals
- 2 They are guardians of biodiversity for future generations, and advocates of sustainability of homestead farms.
- 3 Small holder organic farming including terrace farming and hydraionics which are ideal for nutritional security of the family and food safety.

Kishore Kumar from Alappuzha district is a priest in a local temple and also tends to a farm of 93 cents, jointly owned with his brother.

The soil is sandy, but by encouraging natural vegetation in the crop interspaces, adding organic inputs and manure, it is now greatly enriched.

In addition to regular vegetables, he has a collection of more than 70 indigenous fruit species, some of them rare and not available in that part of the state.

A simple, enterprising person with love of nature and dedication towards agriculture, Kishore is a role model for the youth.



"Serving nature is like serving God – I do both. It is our duty to preserve nature and protect our rich heritage in the wide variety of plants and fruits"

- Kishore Kumar

"Agriculture not only gives riches to a nation, but the only riches she can call her own"

-Samuel Johnson



KEY FINDINGS

Impact of award in motivating farmers

"Farming is a profession of hope"
-**Brain Brett**

ASSESSMENT OF IMPACT OF AKSHAYASREE AWARDS: METHODS

Open Ended Questions



What personal impact did the award have on you?

What is your opinion about the process of selection, presentation, & follow up to the award?

What suggestions do you have for future award presentations?

Perception on 10 personal variables and quantification of change



Confidence, enthusiasm, public recognition, social inclusion, networking, organizational contact, mobility, communication skills, motivation, and self esteem

Quantification of the change in variables using Cantrill's ladder technique

Identify the personal variables with highest impact

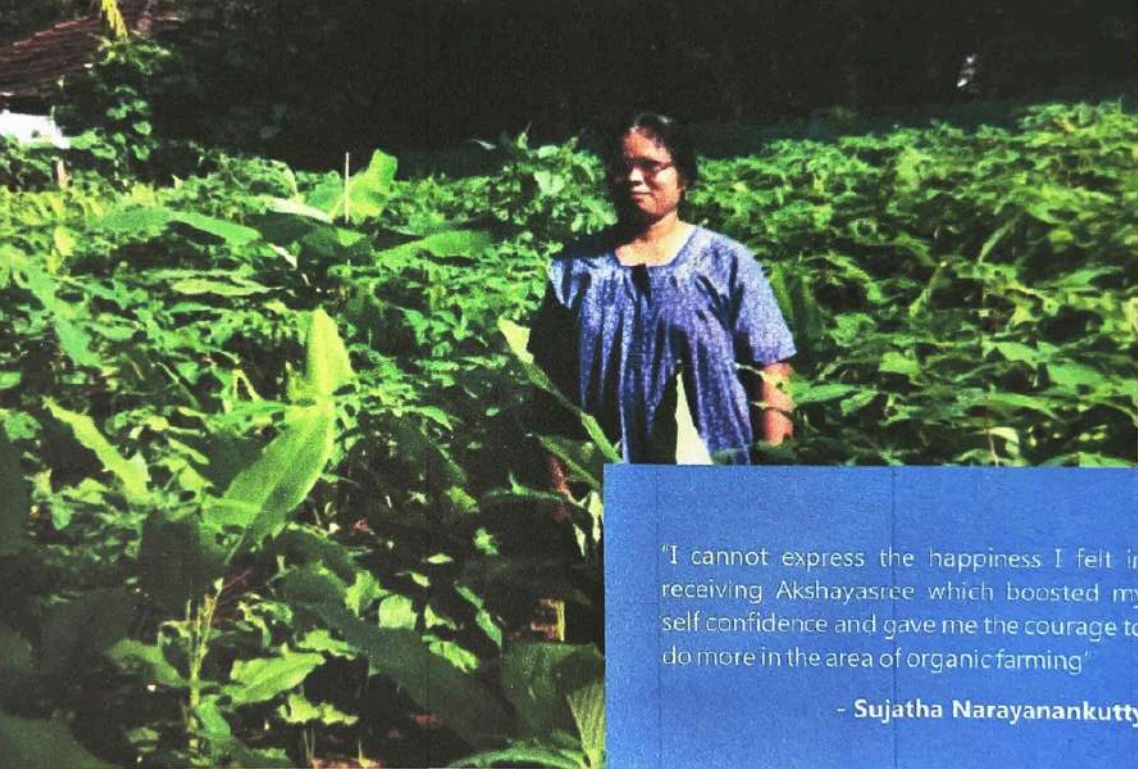
Impact Change Index calculated for each variable

Identify the variables with highest positive change impact

Sujatha Narayanankutty is short of hearing . Glaucoma in her eyes has reduced her vision substantially. Despite this, Sujatha takes the lead in raising tapioca, vegetables, banana, and ornamental plants in their homestead of 15 cents. Not an inch of soil is put to waste in her land.

Generally a dry area, this peri urban village of Palakkad town experiences early water scarcity. But in Sujatha's homestead, even the surface soil is moist, with a lot of microbial activity and humus content. It is a testimony of the richness of the soil. Her husband is a teacher in the local school and both of them love agriculture This childless couple tend to their farm like tending to their own children.

They are planning to lease some additional land offered by a neighbor for cultivation. Sujatha sets an example for everyone, by turning to agriculture as a part time enterprise.



"I cannot express the happiness I felt in receiving Akshayasree which boosted my self confidence and gave me the courage to do more in the area of organic farming"

- Sujatha Narayanankutty

"The farmer has to be an optimist or he
wouldn't still be a farmer"
-Will Rodgers

Akshayasree awards act as a stepping stone for farmers in gaining societal recognition and respect.

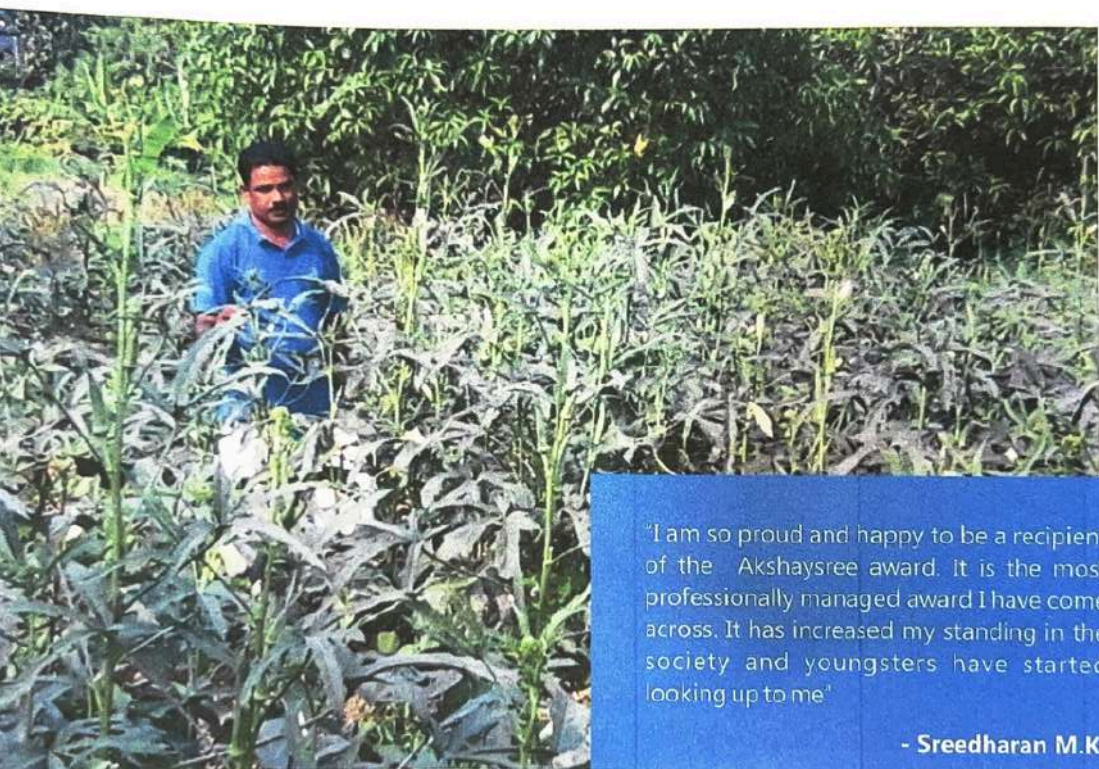
91% of the award winners got district or state level recognitions AFTER receiving the SD Foundation award.

- All farmers are highly appreciative of the award process, the award ceremony, and the respect given to them.
- 47% of the farmers produced a change index of above five indicating over 50% positive changes. Age is a key determinant of change index. There is a need to encourage the youth.
- The award helped in enhancing their confidence, enthusiasm, organizational contact, motivation, and self-esteem.

Sreedharan M.K. has three acres of land in close proximity to Kozhikkode town. Sreedharan's farm is a true example of agri entrepreneurship and product diversification. He grows different kinds of bananas, vegetables, tapioca, and a host of other seasonal produce apart from coconut and arecanut. This enterprising farmer runs an eco shop of his own, where his as well as other organic farmers' produce is sold.

Sreedharan regularly goes to educational institutions to talk to students and, invites them to his farm so that they can get a first hand experience of organic farming. He also helps in school projects based on agriculture.

The SDF award was one of the earliest awards he received. It led to many other recognitions for him including the State Government award. He considers the SDF award the best in terms of the selection process, awarding ceremony, and treatment of award winners.



"I am so proud and happy to be a recipient of the Akshaysree award. It is the most professionally managed award I have come across. It has increased my standing in the society and youngsters have started looking up to me"

- Sreedharan M.K.

"Most things except agriculture can wait"
-Jawaharlal Nehru

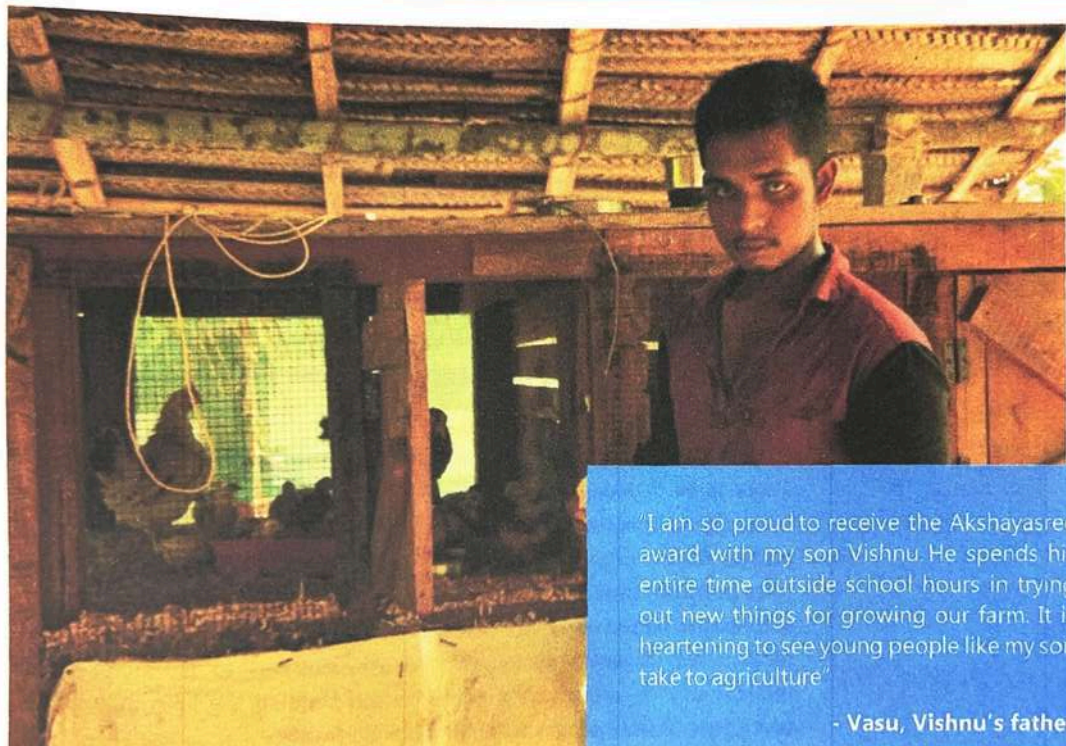
THE ROAD AHEAD

- 1 Biodiversity indices of these farms have to be worked out. It might give an answer to the allegations that agriculture is the culprit for green house gas effect, by releasing methane into the atmosphere.
- 2 The indigenous crops, their varieties and ecotypes available in these farms have to be documented. Due to the genuine interest of the farmers, all of them act as collectors and keepers of agro biodiversity.
- 3 Steps need to be taken to create awareness among the young generation about these farms and organic farming as a livelihood supplement and viable investment.
- 4 Connecting children to agriculture and farms is absolutely essential in the modern era, or we might produce a generation that is far removed from land, water bodies and the invaluable flora and fauna of this earth.

Vishnu is a senior high school student from Malappuram district. This young boy has been taking keen interest in agriculture since the time he was able to plant a sapling. His father Vasu used to do farming in the traditional style following practices handed down through generations.

As Vishnu grew up, he began to get more and more involved in organic farming. His science projects for school were always based on agriculture and he even helped friends with ideas and designs for such projects. Today, Vishnu is one of the youngest organic farmers we have, with a farm having rich agro biodiversity and several farm generated innovations.

His farm is an ideal example of mixed farming, with a variety of animals and birds being raised there. Vishnu does his own marketing, by taking the produce to the local markets on a weekly basis. He also does direct selling from the farm. On asking whether his studies get affected by all the physical work, he smiles and says that he wishes to pursue a degree in agriculture.



"I am so proud to receive the Akshayasree award with my son Vishnu. He spends his entire time outside school hours in trying out new things for growing our farm. It is heartening to see young people like my son take to agriculture"

- Vasu, Vishnu's father



Dr. Jayasree
Krishnankutty

Evaluating the impact of the Akshayasree award was one of the most interesting and fulfilling experiences for me. It gave an opportunity for an academician like myself to go out into the field and assess first hand the practices of some of the finest farmers of our state and their contributions towards sustainable agriculture.

Akshayasree is one of the most democratically implemented awards in the field of agriculture. The selection process is systematic, unbiased, practical, and credible. The awards are presented in a well organised function, where due respect and facilities are given to all participants. This was unanimously endorsed by the farmers I talked to. SDF can be very proud of this achievement.

Organic farming is practical if the farmer sets his/her mind to adhere to it. There is an increasing awareness among the general public about the necessity for promoting organic farming, which gives authenticity and respect for the organic farmer. The organic products are able to attract a price premium over conventional agro products. Organic farming is more in tune with nature and more or less resembles the rhythm of nature. Once established, it yields sustainable results, but has to be maintained meticulously by replenishing nutrients and keeping the farm healthy in every way. It also helps in preserving our biodiversity.

In Kerala, organic farming holds great promise as a subsidiary activity, for gulf returned persons, job holders, retired persons, women, youth, and children. The Government and private sponsors should design schemes for encouraging and supporting organic farms of various kinds, from full fledged large, rural farms to small, urban terrace farms.



Dr. Jayasree Krishnankutty

(Professor - Agricultural Extension,
Kerala Agricultural University)



Prof. Ramanand,
Trustee



K.V. Dayal,
Convener,
Akshayasree



Dr. K.N. Jayachandra Babu
Jt. Convener,
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B. Radhakrishnan
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P.C. Sethumadhavan
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AKSHAYASREE AWARDS

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