

**AGRICULTURE** 

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GADGETS

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ENVIRONMENT

### The Tamil Nadu Women's Collective, a network of rural grassroot level women's groups working in around 20 districts

Prime objective of this programme is to ensure food security

in Tamil Nadu for the past eight years, has been successfully promoting collective model farms in several districts of the state. The prime objective of this collective farming is not only to ensure food security but also to ensure safe food through

"The present status of agriculture in the country is quite bleak. Farmers are not able to get a good income, the cultivation cost has increased, many are leaving their lands fallow.

"Several acres are being sold off to companies and real estate agencies. The few still doing farming prefer to grow cash crops instead of food crops," says Ms. Ponnuthayee, Secretary of the network.

#### For the last three years, the organization has been providing several capacity building programmes and exposures to women in rural areas to bring about awareness on the importance of reviving livelihood opportunities like agriculture

landless women, and widows.

Several programmes

Women making their own bio inputs. Photo: Special Arrangement

adoption of natural methods and encourage millet growing in drylands.

to show the income and expenditure, and decision making processes.

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work for achieving self reliance and sustainable development at the community level. With the network's support and guidance the women farmer's collectives have gained necessary skills on agriculture,

improved their decision making capacities, leadership qualities and thereby enhanced their economic and social status.

The details of the study were discussed at the Women Farmer's Sangam meetings on how to engage these landless women in agriculture activity with the available unutilized lands.

Almost 90 per cent of the members of all 13 women farmers' collectives have members consisting of single women,

## During the discussion, the idea of collective farming was put forth by the State women's collective. After a series of

What criteria?

meetings, a draft on collective farming method was worked out. The following are the criteria fixed for collective farming initiative: The farmers' collective should have a maximum of

10 members. All of them must be landless, single women, or windows, maintaining bank account, records and registers

They can take the land on lease for a period of three years or share 1/3 of the crop yield with the land owner. The decision on the size of the land holding rests with the members. Focus should be on food crops of daily use such as grains, vegetables, pulses and they should be specific to the location.

Training programmes were organized for the women in participatory planning, decision making, crop choice, and method of farming with the help of eminent resource persons.

"This taught them to make different bio inputs and our network extended financial support of Rs. 10,000 to each

explains Ms. Ponnuthayee. Emphasis One of the emphasis on this collective farming is the importance given to the members making their own manure for

farmer's collective as seed money for the purchase of seeds, bio inputs or spending for expenses like ploughing etc,"

# the crops.

she explains.

"We try to stress the importance and efficacy of these natural inputs to our members. The raw materials like cowdung, cow urine, plants and jaggery are all locally available and do not cost much compared to the fertilizers sold at the shops,"

With regards to the division of labour, all the members are equally responsible for each and every activity right from seed sowing, transplanting, weeding, manuring, irrigation, harvesting etc., The allotment of the work would be decided in the weekly meeting during the cultivation period.

All the farm works are shared equally by all members using a revolving system of labour so that all the members are engaged in all types of farm activities.

This collective farming is presently being practised by 15 farmers' groups in eight districts of Toothukudi, Virudhu Nagar, Madurai, Salem, Thiruvannamalai, Vellore, Kancheepuram, and Tiruvallur districts of Tamil Nadu

Family needs

"The focus of collective farming is primarily for the family food needs. Right now, they are not marketing their products outside to the village.

"They are only supplying their products to their own village people. Thus, the production of crop yield from the collective farming gives food for their family for at least 15 days in a month," says Ponnuthayee

in weeding work and thus it reduces their time and energy which they usually spend in the search for fodder and greens.

Apart from that they are also able to harvest a considerable amount of fodder for their livestock while they are involved

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