

DDS launches country's first consumer- farmer compact

Together Towards Diversity - Connecting Ecological Farmers with Enlightened Consumers

With profound sadness all of us realize that agriculture in India is in deep crisis. Our farmers are in misery. Our soil is degraded. We are feeding poison to our children. But the intention behind knowing this is not to feel threatened but to start thinking for collective solutions.

What makes agriculture unsustainable and destructive is its transformed nature from biodiverse to monoculture and from organic to chemical ways of farming. The word ecological goes beyond 'organic' something that all of us are in blind pursuit of today. While 'organic food' just emphasizes on absence of chemical substance, 'ecological produce' puts together the vitalities of life for a healthy existence and most importantly it upholds the law of nature which is biodiversity. Biodiversity contributes to soil health which essentially transforms to healthy, nutritious dietary diversity.

Realizing this, DDS has come into association with Disha, a consumer group based in Hyderabad to initiate discussions with consumers through a forum titled 'Confarm' consumer-farmer compact. Confarm encourages consumers partner with farmers to produce food.

To the best of our knowledge this is unique for the fact that this is probably the first time in India [and perhaps in the world] where a group of consumers have decided to look beyond organized markets for their organic food and are prepared to partner peasant women in the very production process of such foods by directly establishing a compact with them by financially supporting their agriculture thereby lowering farmers dependency on state sops and market lending. According to this compact, each consumer will support a group of farmers up to Rs.10,000 per acre for their farming needs. In return the farmers will sell Rs.10000 worth of their produce after the harvest. This association between consumers and farmers is expected to continue season after season.

On Saturday, June 16, 2019, in a celebratory event the consumers from Hyderabad arrived at Pastapur, the DDS headquarters in Zaheerabad Mandal of Sangareddy District of Telangana, a distance of 100 kms from Hyderabad, and participated with farmers in sowing their fields and then sign a formal agreement

with farmers to seal their COMPACT.

The initiative intends that as an enlightened consumer he/she will not approach this partnership as someone who is greedy after good organic food for our family. They will rather move beyond their requirement for their organic food and would engage in a partnership with the daughters of the soil (small women farmers) for an ecological future. While urban consumers expect from farmers a continuous supply chain of safe food, farmers who toil day in and out expect consumers support.

Hence 'Confarm' is a holistic and dynamic partnership between ecological food producers and enlightened consumers. This ecological movement aims to address the current day's critical issues in agriculture, food, market and sociological systems.

This initiative is to reward farmers' labor with a fair compensation both in monetary terms as well as in terms of our appreciation. This heralds a new movement of consumers and farmers said PV Satheesh, Director, Deccan Development Society, the three decade old NGO in Telangana working with more than 5000 women farmers practicing millet based biodiverse agriculture in Zaheerabad region.

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RAISING VOICES

Are we losing our fight to the recognition of Organic?

Millions of farmers in India may lose their right to call what they grow as organic, when a new government law comes into operation. This might be as soon as tomorrow. Alarmed by this development, the PGS Organic Council, [an all India body that represents millions of peasant farmers] has, in anguish, reminded the government that these farmers constitute **“more than 75% of the farming community In India. These are the very people, who have symbolized organic farming”**

In a letter addressed to the Prime Minister of India, the PGSOC which has a direct membership of over 10000 organic farmers in 14 Indian states, reminds the government that The PGS is a system that enables farmers, the actual growers to certify the organic nature of their produce. Thus PGS not only saves money for the small and marginal peasant farmers but also produces dignity for them and helps them retain their self worth.

PGSOC has the distinction of sensitizing the Government of India to the democratic, people-centred character of PGS, says the letter to the PM and says “This has given India the rare international recognition of being the only country in the world that allows a civil society PGS to

precede and coexist with the Government's own PGS”.

But all this may become a thing of the past once the new notification from the FSSAI comes into operation. “FSSAI [Food Safety and Standards Association of India] set up in the year 2008 which has announced that it will come up with a notification that will decide who can call their produce organic Through this action, knowingly or unknowingly the peasant farmers, the sole inheritors of the concept of organic in this country have been totally disempowered and this will impact negatively on the very people-centered democratic basis of the Indian constitution” agonises the PGSOC.

“This is an extraordinary situation Mr. Prime Minister which will also result in farmers being robbed of their right to come together under an umbrella such as PGSOC and stand upright with their dignity intact and tell the market proudly that they are the genesis of the word **Organic.**” says the letter from the PGSOC

The PGSOC national council which met in Pastapur Village of Sangareddy District of Telangana to ‘analyse the current situation and articulate their deep concerns’, has come out with a **Pastapur Declaration of the PGSOC** that reminds the nation that organic farming has been the proud heritage of millions of small peasant farmers in India for several generations and passionately e their civilisational right to retain the title organic.title. These authentic organic farmers have occupied the farmscape of the vast stretch of drylands of Deccan, millions of hectares hills in the Northeast, Himalayas, Central India and the Ghats –Eastern and Western, the letter reminds the Prime Minister.

In conclusion the PGSOC has made three demands to the Prime Minister : “

- Please do not permit one single government body to appropriate for itself the right to decide who should be called organic
- Please keep in mind that small peasantfarmes cannot approach organic markets that are primarily urban middle class based and therefore need to come together under a broad umbrella of not for profit agencies such as PGSOC. This is the very raison de'tre of PGSOC.
- Therefore as the Prime Minister of the country please ensure that PGSOC is not delegitimised and deprived of its rights and responsibilities by a simplistic purely market-aimed notification.
- Finally as someone who has constantly nurtured India's liberal, democratic image abroad, please treat PGSOC as a flagship of the civil society, people-centered regulatory structure of the organic food regime and with this in view, please don't allow

the delegitimisation of PGSOC at any cost.

Umiam Declaration of Millet Sisters

Millet Sisters from across the country have demanded that Millets be acknowledged as women's heritage crops considering their 'extraordinary value for providing food, nutrition, livelihood and ecological security in our climate stressed times'.

The Millet Sisters, 'small scale women farmers who grow millet anchored biodiverse crops on their small farms', met on May 23 and 24 in Shillong, Meghalaya for the first National Convention of their All India Millet Sisters Network (AIMS-Network). It may be recalled that the network had been recently honoured by President of India by awarding them the Nari Shakti Puraskar.

'Government must offer priority support to millet based biodiverse agriculture practiced by millions of small women farmers who are custodians of India's rich lore of millet farming practices' demanded Millet Sisters.

Another major demand included in their '**Umiam Declaration of Millet Sisters**' is 'It is imperative that millets should be the centerpiece of the government's Public Distribution System (PDS) so that India can escape the ignominy of occupying 177 rank among the **malnourished** countries of the world.

As mothers and women concerned with the wellness of children across the country, the millet sisters have urged the government to accord primacy for millet foods in the ICDS and school meal programmes. This, they hope will ensure a healthy new generation.

A series of government actions demanded by the millet sisters to support the women millet farmers include

- a) Helping women collectives to set up affordable millet processing units
- b) Setting up of community based procurement centers that can be easily accessed and controlled by women farmers.
- c) Ensuring that millet farming is supported by MNREGS programme.

The network has demanded support for public research that focuses on traditional knowledge on millet cultivation particularly held by women.

The AIMS network has taken strong exception to the Indian Institute of Millet Research 'hobnobbing' with genetic engineering and have demanded that IIMR 'focus on the enormous wealth of women's knowledge on millet ecology which is a great national asset.'

The AIMS has also called upon all the agricultural research bodies to urgently work on the

economic valuation of millet ecology in their research program. Finally, while appreciating the government for bestowing awards on peasant women farmers for their signal contribution to millet farming they have also demanded that government must not stop at these awards but concede the demands by them which shall be the true honor the peasant women farmers of millets.

Millet Sisters symbolize Nari Shakti !

With great pleasure we inform you that **All India Millet Sisters Network (AIMS) has been awarded the Nari Shakti Puraskar, 2017** by the Government of India for outstanding contribution to women's empowerment. The award was presented by the President of India in a prestigious ceremony at Rashtrapati Bhawan, New Delhi on the 8th March 2018 on the occasion of International Women's Day.

Millet Sisters Network is a celebration of very small women farmers who have infused life into the 'concept' of millets by cultivating, on serving and consuming millets, the great civilisational contribution to the humankind. All India Millet Sisters Network which was launched in November 2016 has about 5000 women farmers membership from across the country.

Deccan Development Society which was the earliest NGO in India to have thought and articulated the primacy of women as farmers is the "home" to Millet Sisters. At a time when the developmental world in India still thought of women 'in agriculture' Deccan Development Society had started developing the articulation of 'Women are agriculture'. In eighties and nineties this understanding of how women were the soul of agriculture was developed by DDS through its daily interaction with women farmers where they began to articulate the multiple dimensions of millets and contributed hugely to this concept.

Millets in our understanding are **Miracle Grains** that have held together food, farming and life itself across the three southern continents of South America, Africa and Asia and present a profound meaning for Agricultural civilisations.

While more than 50 countries cultivate and consume millets in various forms across the globe, its political importance especially in India has always been severely undermined. This might be partly due to the fact that millets do not need external industrial inputs such as hybrid and high yielding seeds, chemical fertilizers, irrigated water etc. Being no **external input** crops, millets run against the high input=high output market logic. Therefore it defies the dominant corporate economic model. Probably these very sterling values of millets might be the reason why it does not attract government attention..

Millet Sisters bases itself on these amazing principles of millets:

- They are resilient
- They are life infusing

- They are life sustaining
- They are life generating

Millet Sisters in league with Millet Network of India a network established eight years ago by the Deccan Development Society provide a strong platform to advance the strong traditional ecological knowledge that women retain in agriculture

While Millet Sisters celebrate the Nari Puraskar recognition by the Government of India , they are not ready to deviate from their concerns expressed in the pledge they made early this year to welcome the decision of the Government of India in requesting the UNO to declare this year as the INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF MILLETS. In a clear voice they have said that what they want are not symbolisms but strong and concrete action.

They have clearly said:

"Millets are our heritage crops. These ancestral crops have been providing us food for our homes, fodder for cattle and strength for our soils and are supporting our health.

Our millet based agriculture possess strength to sustain without irrigation and electricity.

We don't need chemical fertilizers to cultivate our millets. We don't use a drop of chemical pesticide.

We have abundant knowledge needed for this cultivation. Because of this we have been able to carry forward our self sustaining and sovereign agriculture for many generations. This is our heritage.

We are very happy to know that our Indian government is now marking efforts to make this a global heritage.

However we want to remind the government its responsibility to ensure that this **International Year of Millets** doesn't take away the control of this farming system from small and women farmers like us.

Big businesses and corporates have already hijacked organic farming which we have been nourishing for many generations. In the same way, if millets also are transformed into corporate farming, it will be a vicious blow on our long earned heritage. In such a scenario, we feel it is better we celebrate this as a Chiru Raitula Samvastram (year of small farmers) instead of Chirudhanyala Samvastram (year of millets). Government should recognize, take all measures and declare millets as a possession of small farmers."

We at the Millet Sisters and the DDS reiterate this resounding pledge to celebrate the NARI PURASKAR.

India Biodiversity Award

DDS women bag another National Award! India Biodiversity Award-2018

The International Day for Biodiversity 2018 was celebrated all over the country by different States and various organisations on 22 May 2018. The national level celebrations of the Day were held at the Auditorium, Prof. Jayashankar Telangana State Agricultural University (PJ TSAU) in Hyderabad with enthusiastic participation of all stakeholders. Organised by the Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change, Government of India in coordination with the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA), and with the cooperation of the Telangana State Biodiversity Board.

The Hon'ble Governor of Andhra Pradesh & Telangana in his address highlighted that India has been conserving our rich biodiversity for ages. We worship trees, animals and rivers because we want to protect them. 'The celebration today reminds us to go back to our roots to conserve nature in our traditional ways. For us in India it is not the 25th year of conservation, as we should be celebrating thousands of years of conserving nature and living in harmony. He also cautioned that environment protection is of utmost importance today, as the only inheritance our children seek from us is clean environment for good health. We need to protect the nature, if we want nature to protect us.

During the event, individuals and communities such as DDS working at the grassroots level for conservation of biodiversity were recognized to be upholding the conservation practices of the nature and their environment. 'India Naturally!' a publication narrating the stories of these Champions of biodiversity and some knowledge products and communication materials were also released on the occasion.

DDS Sangham women Farmers Chandamma and Vinoda received the award on behalf of Deccan Development Society, Zaheerabad region for 'Sustainable use of Biological Resources' and for their efforts in traditional and organic methods of seed processing and Hon'ble Governor of Andhra Pradesh & Telangana, Shri E.S.L. Narasimhan presented the award and cheque of rupees 1 lakh to the winners. S has been awarded with India biodiversity award on.

EVENTS

Burra Katha - Biocultural Campaign

Biocultural campaigns with title 'Ma Pandugalu Ma Sampradayalu' which translates to 'Our festivals and our culture' were successfully organised in 22 villages where more than 700 people participated with great enthusiasm especially because it invoked a nostalgia about their festivals and cultures that are on the verge of dying. Burra Katha is one of the ancient forms of storytelling and has been a great medium of entertainment for villagers after day's work. Burra Kathas organised as part of Seeds, Soil and Culture project focused on recalling the traditional festivals that occur chronological throughout the agriculture season through a musical story.

For example, the story starts with explaining villagers about Mirgam.

For the rain starved Deccan, the arrival of Mirgam, the first rain-bearing star of the year is of huge importance. This is literally its lifeline. Hearts jump a beat or two if this is delayed. When rains are on time, it is reaffirmation of life for farmers.

With Mirgam comes time for sowing. As women open the seed baskets they had sealed at the end of the last harvest an amazing variety of seeds tumble out magically. Every woman is a seed bank in this region. Alongside rain, they offer life to soil.

Erokka heralds the string of Farmers' Festivals in Deccan. This is the day of the Bullock. They are painted, fed with festival goodies and worshipped reverentially. Bullocks which play a key role in farming, have the status of Gods for farmers.

In the Zaheerabad region, as the kharif agricultural season begins, by May the bullock-ploughing to prepare the land sets-off, which coincides with Erokka Punnam, when worship and celebration of plough bullocks is ritualized. After the first ploughing, sorghum stalks are removed. Some fields are ploughed three or four times. Then manure is transported to cultivated lands by bullock cart and spread on the fields, which are ploughed one more time to integrate the manure into the soil. Sowing is the next major task, and is done after the onset of the first rains, in the first week of June, a period known as Mirgum according to the local calendar. This coincides with Peerla Panduga, when the blessing of the saints are asked for and Ugadi, the New Year festival when reading of Panchangam, predictions for the coming year are solicited. For crops like sorghum and pearl millet, labour-intensive weeding is done in July and August. The average growth period for kharif crops is 90 days, but some crops like foxtail millet mature in 60 days while others, like pigeon pea, have a growing period of approximately 150 days.

Elders in the village thanked DDS women and organisers for making efforts to revive the fading cultures with onset of televisions and urban culture creeping into villages through media and market.

MILLET WAY

Foxtail Millet Banana Cake Recipe

Now you can serve your sweet cravings with free of guilt!

Ingredients

- Foxtail millet flour : 200g
- Cocoa powder : 50g
- Eggs : 2no
- Butter : 200ml
- Mashed banana : 2 bananas
- Baking powder : 1/4th tsp
- Vanilla essence : 1 tbsp

Preparation Method:

- Pre-heat the oven at 180 degree C.
- Combine all the dry ingredients in a bowl and mix together. In a separate bowl mash the bananas and add all the other wet ingredients into it.
- Pour the wet ingredient into the dry and mix till combined. Do not over mix. This batter will be not really being very liquidy. Pour it into a greased pan and even out the surface with a spatula.
- Bake for 40 to 45 minutes or till the toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean.
- Wait for it to cool down completely before you cut into it.

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