OFAI elected a new Managing Committee to run the association at its Annual General Body Meeting held in Bangalore in March 2013.

A record number of representatives including organic farmers from various states attended the meeting and participated in the AGM which concluded with the election of the Managing Committee.

For the first time since the founding of the association, delegates arrived from as far as Assam to participate.

As per procedures, the General Body first finalised the members of the National Steering Committee (NSC) and thereafter the new NSC elected the new Managing Committee by secret ballot. It took on board those nominations that had come in from constitutive meetings in various states, but also stepped in to nominate ad-hoc delegates from states unrepresented at the meeting.

The full list of the new NSC members is given in column 3 and includes persons from almost every state. The list includes a large number of organic farmers, including the President and the Treasurer.

The tenure of the new Managing Committee and the newly constituted NSC is for 3 years, from 2013-16. Shortly after the Managing Committee was constituted, it took a decision to retain Claude Alvares as Director of the Central Secretariat in Goa even though he had expressed a desire to be relieved of the job.

Besides the elections to the MC, several other decisions were taken at the meeting. The first was to nominate Ashish Gupta, MC member, as OFAI representative to the IFOAM-Asia which is being set up with its secretariat based in South Korea.

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Sarvdaman Patel explaining his biodynamic farm to keen organic farmers

New Office-Bearers of OFAI

President
Mr. Sarvdaman Patel
Secretary
Mr. Kapil Shah
Treasurer
Mr. Raghava

Executive Committee Members
Ms Pompy Ghosh, Assam
Mr. Ashish Gupta, Delhi
Ms Anuradha Sarang, Kerala
Mr Arun Dike, Madhya Pradesh
Mr Shrinivas Bagal, Maharashtra
Mr Debjeeet Sarangi, Odisha
Mr P.B. Murali, Tamilnadu
Mr Prem Singh, Uttar Pradesh

Members of the NSC (including the above)
Mr. Mahan Barah, Assam
Mr. Tenzing Bodosa, Assam
Dr. Debal Deb, Odisha/West Bengal
Ms. Clea Chandmal, Goa
Ms. Yogita Mehra, Goa
Mr. Sonaji Chouhan, Gujarat
Mr. Rajinder Chaudary, Haryana
Mr. Tej Singh, Haryana
Mr. Uday Bhan, Haryana
Mr. Diljeet Singh Ghuman, Himachal
Mr. B.K. Naganna, Karnataka
Mr. K.P. Phyyara Mallesh, Karnataka
Ms. Sunitha Goudara, Karnataka
Mr. K.V. Kannan, Kerala
Mr. V.K. Rajan Nair, Kerala
Mr. Jayprakash Patil, Maharashtra
Ms. Shubhada Pandhare, Maharashtra
Mr. Natabar Sarangi, Odisha
Dr. Madhu Sudar Acharya, Rajasthan
Mr. Rohit Jain, Rajasthan
Mr. M. Sethuraman, Tamilnadu
Ms. A. Kalaiyani, Tamilnadu
Ms. Vikram Singh Rawat, HP
Dr. G.S. Kaushal, MP
Mr. Sanjoy Singha, M.P.
Mr. Gaurav Sahai, Punjab
Mr. Umendra Dutt, Punjab
Mrs. Indu Jyani, Punjab
Dr. Ramashray Mishra, UP
Mr. Ashok Sirohi, UP
Mr. Siddharth Jaiswal, Panna, Bihar
PGS ORGANIC COUNCIL RE-CONSTITUTES MANAGING COMMITTEE

The PGS Organic Council (PGSOC) held its AGM in the office of Timbaktu Collective on June 25, 2013. As per its rules and regulations, the Council’s Managing Committee can only hold term for two years, subject to one more extension.

The AGM held the elections as scheduled. The following were unanimously elected to be the new office-bearers of the Council:

- **President:** Joy Daniel (IIRD)
- **Secretary:** Ashish Gupta (OFAI)
- **Treasurer:** Mathew John (Keystone Foundation)

**Executive Members:**
- Sureshkumar – Deccan Development Society
- C K Ganguly – Timbaktu Collective
- Niranjana Maru – Chetana Vikas
- Shivkumar – Green Foundation
- Babu – ICRA
- Kalyan Paul – Pan Himalayan

**ASHISH GUPTA FOR LIAISON WORK WITH INTERNATIONAL ORGANIC FARMING ASSOCIATIONS**

OFAI's AGM took a major decision to nominated Ashish Gupta to represent the association at IFOAM-ASIA, the new IFOAM entity set up to serve exclusively the needs of Asian farmers based in Seoul, Korea.

The PGS Organic Council which deals with PGS organic certification, also took a similar decision to nominate Ashish Gupta as its representative to IFOAM ASIA.

Subsequently, much to the delight of both the associations, Ashish Gupta -- who also manages the Delhi office OFAI -- was elected Vice-President of IFOAM-ASIA.

The President of the Association has also nominated Gupta as India Convenor of INOFO, IFOAM’s separate set-up to network all organic farming associations in the world. Gupta's nomination has been formally accepted by IFOAM, Germany.

The association has already been informed by Ashish Gupta that this nominations impose a heavy toll on his work to spread organic farming in Himachal Pradesh and other states in the north. He has asked that suitable persons be found to replace him on some of the above posts as soon as possible, but not later than a year.

All OFAI members are welcome to offer their services for some of the work that is involved in these nominations to represent Indian organic farmers at the international level. Organic farmers who are young, able to communicate in English, and have spare time to travel, should contact the Central Secretariat with nominations. These will be placed before the Managing Committee and appropriate decisions taken.

At the AGM just concluded in Bangalore, it was decided that OFAI should spend more of available time on programmes within the country, rather than on its international affiliations. This suggestion was generally endorsed as considerable work remains to be done within the Indian sub-continent and the involvement in international events is often a distraction.

Nevertheless, it was decided to work with the international organisations subject to the resources available with the organisation, since there are some advantages.
OFAI PROTESTS BRAI BILL

OFAI farmer member M.G. Sathyanarayana was one of the first to raise objections to the new BRAI Bill. Many other OFAI members join the campaign to send letters to the Rajya Sabha. You still have time till August 24, 2013 to write to the Rajya Sabha as well.

To
Shri Alokn Chatterjee,
Director, Rajya Sabha Secretariat, Room No. 205, Ground Floor, Parliament House Annex, New Delhi 110001.
Tel. No. 011-23034997; Fax No. 011-2305983.
Email: rsc-st@sansad.nic.in

Dear Sir,

RE: Feedback on BRAI Bill as per notification published on June 11, 2013

The BRAI Bill which was introduced in Parliament exists in a vacuum where the socio-economic and ecological realities of agriculture have been neglected while creating rules to "supposedly regulate" biotechnology. However, the Bill sees no role for farmers!

A technology does not stand in isolation but has to be embedded in the socio-economic context which is where GMOs have failed in the Indian context and also in other countries rich and poor. This technology is an expensive tool waiting for a market, it is not a solution for any of the agrarian or food security problems that the nation faces today.

Organic or natural farming is as old as farming itself and increasingly it is being recognized by global bodies like the United Nations (UN), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Studies from the world over have established that organic and sustainable smallholder agriculture is the way ahead to ensure food security. The IAASTD report, produced by 400 scientists from various disciplines anchored by the World Bank and other global agencies, of which India is a signatory clearly says that empowering small farmers is the way to ensure food and livelihood security and the report saw no significant role for GM crops.

In this context it is quite unacceptable that the Indian Govt is pushing through a Bill like BRAI which would make it almost impossible to carry on organic small scale farming. BRAI has a limited mandate to promote biotechnology, however rightfully it should have been protecting biosafety and regulating biotechnology so that human health, plant and animal diversity are not impacted by the products of biotechnology, specially the environmental release.

Contamination from GMOs has been rampant everywhere the crops are grown commercially and also where they have been field tested. Some infamous instances:

- In 2010, Indian organic cotton exporters faced a major crisis when it was discovered that their organic cotton was contaminated with Bt cotton. This caused serious problems as India contributes 61% of the world's organic cotton and it is one of the fastest growing industries.

The report pointed out that contamination is a serious problem with India's small farms with close proximity to each other. This issue has not been resolved and organic cotton growers are expending money and resources to prevent contamination of their seeds and products.

The BRAI Bill has no provision to ensure that liability is fixed on the contaminating agency, no provision for redressal of organic farmers and no instructions to GM farmers to maintain isolation distance so as not to impinge on trade and livelihood issues of organic farmers.

- Contamination - a huge threat: cases from India: India's first and only public sector Bt cotton (Bikaner Narma Bt cotton) had to be withdrawn due to contamination, in the enquiry it came to light that there are no testing mechanisms and no competency at any level to deal with this. The enquiry instituted by ICAR provides the full details of problems.

- Contamination - a huge threat: Cases from US /Canada: Contamination in the United States and Canada has been rampant. Contamination of canola by GM canola in Canada is so widespread that no organic or conventional canola is grown Canada anymore.

- In the US there have been three infamous contamination incidents with their three major crops (corn, rice, wheat). In the case of wheat and rice, contamination happened despite both being self pollinated crops and should have been difficult to contaminate. The source of contamination was from field trials, years after the trials were stopped, showing how risky field trials are for all farmers. The corn contamination occurred when a GM corn meant for animal feed, got mixed up in human food resulting in illness and death. All three incidents had enormous trade impact and caused economic devastation for farmers!

- No avenues for farmers to get justice: Under BRAI there is no avenue for getting compensation/justice for affected consumers, farmers and others. The appellate authority has a limited window to address these issues and in addition the affected people are restricted from going to Court. Therefore, BRAI violates our fundamental rights as citizens. There is no system for recall of dangerous GM crops that contaminate, there is no system for checking /testing for contamination regularly. In short, BRAI has no mechanism to protect biosafety and to protect the interests of farmers from the impacts of this technology and its open air releases.

- Restrictions to be removed: There should be no time period limit into when people can approach the appellate tribunal, people should have the right to approach local courts for relief, approaching a centralized tribunal is impossible for small farmers in far flung areas of the country.

Therefore, in view of the above, we suggest that the Committee seek extensive public feedback through consultations if different parts of the country to formulate a comprehensive biosafety regulation which ensures human and animal health safety, conservation of the environment and protection of biosafety from the use of this irreversible and unpredictable technology.

Yours faithfully
Mr. M.G. Sathyanarayana.
Magosan Farms, Organic farmer.
Kukkijadaka Post.
Sullia - 574 212.
Karnataka State.
Cell: 99731 8550 28
ID: mgsathya7728@gmail.com

Monsanto Quit India!

OFAI members join protests on August 8, 2013 at Delhi

More than 100 organic farmers from Gujarat alone travel to the capital

Farmers and sustainable agriculture activists descended on Delhi for a major public protest against the BRAI Bill and Monsanto’s interference with our food growing traditions.

They are all decided to get Monsanto to pack its bags and go back home. A detailed report of the campaign will appear in the next issue of The Living Field.
As I am sitting in the OFAI office in Goa, the phone rings. 

"Is this the Organic Farming Association of India?" 

"Yes it is." 

"I am an organic farmer and a member of your organisation. I wanted to know where I can get some traditional cotton seeds which haven’t been genetically modified. Our markets are full of different varieties of BT cotton seeds and there are simply no alternatives for farmers like us who would prefer native GM-free organic seeds over hybrid BT seeds. Every year I force myself to grow the same BT cotton variety due to a lack of any alternatives. Could you please let me know where I can get sturdy cotton seeds to cultivate on my farm this year?"

I had absolutely no answer to his earnest request! And I was working in the office of an organic farming association! 

With OFAI support, I started searching for documentation on the available diversity of the heirloom varieties of crops across the country. I knew only a handful of seed savers to begin with, who have been saving plethora of organic seeds over generations in isolated pockets of the country. I was not aware of any documentation of this community of seed savers. It is in this context that OFAI initiated a seed catalogue project with seed savers working on traditional folk seed varieties, primarily aimed to provide organic farmers with easy access to such seed.

Seed breeding as we know it today all began in the 19th century, when agricultural scientists through their observation found that cereals breed ‘true to type’ and each plant conserves its individual traits from one generation to the next.

So when they discovered an interesting, naturally isolated plant they reproduced and multiplied it. If they found a clone really promising they would cultivate it year after year. The same people who saved the seed also planted it.

In the course of the 20th century, seed selection was dominated by the phenomenon of hybridization. Interestingly these heterozygote clones do not conserve their characteristic traits from one generation to next. In this way the seed breeders and seed companies achieved their goal of separating ‘production’ and ‘reproduction.’ Production then remained in the hands of the farmers whereas reproduction became the business and monopoly of companies.

The 21st century is marked by the onset of Genetically Modified (GM) crops. They are also clones. The only thing that has now changed in the past two centuries is the introduction of an unpredictable technology by which a gene from a completely unrelated organism is introduced into the genetic composition of a crop so as to make it insect-resistant. Like the earlier generation of hybrid clones, these genetically modified ones did not conserve their characteristic traits from one generation to another, thus maintaining the separation of production and reproduction. This ensured that the multinational companies (MNCs) retained monopoly of the seed industry.

Considering the profound number of varieties that our government seed banks hold, it appears that the necessary systems needed to conserve seeds are in place. However, the model of such commercial breeding and seed banks is very simplistic. One major flaw is that whenever modern varieties have failed, these seed banks have not necessarily been able to step in. Their seed stocks may be genetically degraded, non-viable, or simply insufficient due to many factors including the refrigeration during storage. Seeds are not just packets of genetic diversity but require farming, culinary and medicinal knowledge which is lacking in most of these seed bank collections. This aspect of seed conservation is broadly overlooked and explains much of why in situ (in the field) conservation is underappreciated.

Until the recent past, farmers in India used to grow and preserve the traditional varieties every year without calling them ‘in situ conservation’ or ‘in situ gene banks.’ Maintaining the purity of seeds being an important aspect in seed conservation, farmers commonly practiced the technique of ‘rouging’ through which they would identify and remove off-types. Sadly, due to the erosion of traditional knowledge, the practice is now followed by only a handful of farmers and seed conservators.

Documentation from Odisha helped us understand that there are varied ways by which farmers and seed conservators maintain purity of seeds.

Dr. Deb Deb, an extraordinarily gifted and committed rice seed conservator from Odisha, has managed to maintain the purity of around 900 varieties of rice in a mere 1.1 acres of land. According to him, the floral biology of rice is very important in maintaining varietal purity.

Typically, the short style and stigma, short anthers, limited availability of pollen, rapid decline of its viability and a brief period of time -- between 30 seconds to 9 minutes -- between the opening of florets and the release of pollen physically, all these factors reduce the frequency of cross pollination.

Furthermore, rice flowers remain open only during the day for periods of less than three hours which further limits the scope of cross pollination.

Although the cultivated rice is predominately self pollinated, wind-assisted pollen dispersal distances have been measured up to 110m. Despite a very low frequency (<1%) of out crossing, the cultivated Indian rice continues to hybridise in nature with wild races as well as other hybrids.

Other than the technique of rouging Dr. Deb practices a unique method that involves flowering asynchrony. Varieties with similar flowering dates are never sown adjacent to each other. Complex maps are generated for all 900 rice varieties every year, only to avoid less than 1% cross pollination. (If cross pollination occurs, it takes place exponentially and will eventually replace the original variety.)

Mr. Natabar Sarangi, another well-known organic farmer and seed conservator from Odisha, maintains the purity of his 420 rice seed varieties by practicing the same age-old technique of rouging.

After the harvest, while collecting grains for seed, he looks out for mixed varieties and removes them from the collection. While cleaning, the lighter grains come to the surface of the pan and are removed as they are not strong enough to germinate. Only the bold grains are collected for seeds. It is usually the skilled women farmers who select the grains for seed.

University scientists recommend a minimum distance to be maintained between different seed varieties to avoid cross pollination. However, since the land available to farmers is limited, this distance wastes land. So Sarangi collects grains from the middle of the plot to preserve seeds. When he collects a panicle with 3-4 stalks, he will choose 1-2 mother panicle stalks. These will be the ones with long, bold and strong grains which he selects for seeds.

Paddy on the border of the field is used for rice consumption. Grains from the mother panicle from the centre of the field are only kept for seed conservation work. Sarangi proudly claims that women farmers are experts in this area and can challenge any seed scientist around the globe.

These two examples of seed conservators within the same state have given us an idea of the varied methodologies that can be implemented, not only for maintaining the purity of seeds but also the diversity in seed savers across the country.

After Odisha, I have been travelling in South India pursuing indigenous seeds. North Indian states are there to visit before I complete the survey. Hopefully, by mid-2014, OFAI will produce its first indigenous seed catalogue which should

A Debt to Our Traditional Folk Seed Savers
By Shamika Mone, OFAI researcher
OFAI conducted a unique training for those keen on becoming rice seed conservationists.

OFAI trainer, Dr. Debal Deb and Researcher, Ms. Shamika Mone conducted a national training programme for rice conservator on 22-23 June 2013 at Kerandiguda, a small village 15 kms from Muniguda in western Odisha. The training was organised by OFAI, Living Farms and Basudha. Twenty seed savers and farmer conservators from Maharashtra, Orissa, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Assam participated in the first phase of the training. The objective of the workshop was to enable farmers to create a data base of their rice varieties and ensure that these are become part of the community biodiversity registers to be maintained by various biodiversity communities under the Biodiversity Act 2004. A major requirement of the community biodiversity register (CBR) is its scientific characterisation without such scientific documentation multi-national corporations are easily able to indulge in bio piracy. The workshops are being organised in three phases and are exclusively focussed on rice. The first training already conducted was during the sowing stage in June. The second phase, which is of longer period (5 days) will be organised during 15-19 Oct. 2013 and will concentrate on the flowering stage from the initiation of panicle to the milk stage. The third phase will be organised around the harvesting stage in December to deal with the rice plant from maturity to post harvest assessment. Thus the entire three phase training will be for total of 17 days.

The principal subject to the training is to assess 52 rice morphological characteristics following biodiversity international guidelines as a result of the workshop all trainees would be able to attain full capability for rice characterisation at international level and would also qualify as trainer for other farmer conservators.

The first day began with an introductory session on types of cultivated rice and rice plant biology. Importance of maintaining purity of traditional varieties of rice was explained along with the instances where in the process of cultivation, cross pollination or mixing take place and how it can be eliminated by farmers through examining the seeds for purity. Visual examination of seed samples by farmers and removal of the “off types” — based on characteristics of grains needs to be undertaken. Six genetically fixed characters during the sowing – transplanting stage were described one by one, explaining detailed structure and function of each part. They include Lemma and palea colour (LP), Grain length (mm), Grain width (mm), Colour of awn, Apiculus colour and Lemma-palea pubescence.

Before and after lunch a thorough session on measuring grain length and width was carried out using graph papers and magnifying glasses. Simple technique to measure the grain length and width to second decimal point accuracy was demonstrated using ten grains on a simple graph paper. Every participant was under personal attention and supervision of Dr. Debal till everyone got it right. Participants were introduced to new simple instruments like a magnifying eye lenses with a Vernier-caliper scale fitted internally.

Participants were made aware at periodic intervals regarding the importance of these subtle intricate differences in fixed characters and their importance in maintaining purity of a variety before incorporation into CBRs. Good interactive session with full participation from farmers to researchers were seen during this class room indoor session. The next day was planned for the field visit to Dr. Debal’s farm where the colour related characters and field related vegetative characters had to be studied.

Each colour code and colour was correlated, seen under magnifying glasses and everyone’s perceptions were noted down according to these codes. Grains from 25 different varieties were meticulously looked under the magnifying glasses by all participants for Lemma and palea colour (LP), Apiculus colour (AC), Apiculus pubescence (AP) and Awn colour. All these characters have their specific colour codes. (refer training material attached in the end).

Follow-up of phase one was done on email by sending high quality resolution pictures for ideal colour codes for easy reference to the participants.
Manipal, a small hilltop town in Karnataka, has earned a big name in the country, thanks to its educational institutions. Since 2009, a retired doctor of this town has been silently spreading education in vegetable security. This medical doctor is involved in a different kind of practice now. He grows vegetables and fruits in his kitchen garden. On an average, he spends six hours a day in ‘treating the plants.’ Result: His family is ‘vegetable secure’. Perhaps no other Manipal family is fortunate to have such farm-fresh and pesticide free vegetables and fruits as Dr K N Pai’s does.

Kochikar Narendranath Pai, 77, is deeply influenced by this philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi: “I cannot imagine anything nobler or more national than that for, say, one hour in the day, we should all do the labour that the poor must do, and thus identify ourselves with them and through them with all mankind.”

From rose to vegetables

Though he had no farming experience earlier, Pai’s heart was green. In the last decade, he was so obsessed with rose cultivation that he had even written a book on the subject. Slowly he realised that raising vegetables and fruits for self-consumption is a noble pastime, especially for senior citizens.

In his triangular land, there is no open space that has not been cultivated. His one-storey house is sandwiched between two green belts, one of vegetables, the other of fruit trees. The garden is not crowded or haphazard. Pai has put a board in front of each plant. Neat layout in the sloping land facilitates visitors to take a round easily.

The vegetable patch has almost all those veggies that are grown in this Malnad belt - amaranthus, brinjal, yam, ladies finger, bitter-gourd, cucumber, chilly, colocasia, drum-stick, cow pea, little gourd, ridge gourd ... the list goes on. The garden also includes most of the local fruits like banana, papaya, mango, cashew, sapota, pine apple, wax apple, guava, cherry, bilimbi, lime, and pomegranate.

“I don’t know much about vegetable and fruit growing”, Pai keeps saying, though his plants really don’t seem to mind the fact. Years ago, to equip himself with farming knowledge, he applied for a postal education course on organic farming by University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore. The University had an age limit to admit students for this course. However, sensing the doctor’s zeal, they waived this for him.

Fully Organic

Common sense and reading habit has enriched his basic knowledge further. Whenever he finds anything of educational interest, he cuts the newspapers and makes a file. He has a big heap of clips on water, manure management, fruit cultivation, soil etc.

Pai has a helping hand, Puttu Naik, who works part-time with him. He collects dry leaves and cow-dung from the nearby areas where a herd of cattle visit at night for resting. All the biomass available in the compound like old banana leaves and inputs from the neighborhood are stored in a biomass chamber. This is added to kitchen waste and composted in another smaller bed. Once a while Puttu Naik brings some wood ash from his home. “Except this, we don’t buy any chemicals, either fertilizers or pesticides,” Pai points out.

Aren’t pests and diseases a headache? “No. In fact good sunlight, air and soil and nutrients ensure healthy plants. Not that we don’t get pests or diseases at all. But it is negligible. Neem-based ready-made spray Nimbidin and the age-old fungicide bordo mixture are two plant protection solutions we use very rarely.”

Pai’s wife Manorama is a good cook. Every day she uses ample quantities of vegetables. “But how much can two people finish? We never sell the excess. We select one neighbour or the other to present our excess vegetables. Sometimes we give it to our old neighbours in the nearby apartment, where we lived for five years before coming here,” says Manorama.

Pai has a hobby of reading and writing. He has written many educational articles on health and gardening. He had been practicing medicine at Sagar, a taluka town in Shimoga district for 37 years. Prior to retirement, he had developed a back-ache that bothered him very often. “After I started this kitchen-garden and manual work for that, the ache vanished slowly,” he recalls “because my life earlier was sedentary. Now I had to bend my body, squat and exert myself physically.” He is of the opinion that gardening is a better physical exercise than walking. One of his pet quotations is this: “Gardening requires lots of water and most of it in the form of perspiration.”

This green doctor has displayed small boards in his garden carrying a few golden edicts that he believes in. Some of the picks:

“Don’t throw out any bio-mass. Rather, convert it into rich organic manure by composting.”

“Grow food only organically. No to fertilizers and pesticides.” “Utilise every inch of land at your disposal.”

“Man is a born Gardener.”

“Rainwater harvesting is the need of the hour. Try to do this to your best.”

Rainwater Harvesting

Ten years ago, after buying this land, the first thing Pai did was to dig an open well. People in the neighbourhood discouraged him saying that only a borewell would give him water. But Dr Pai knew what he was doing: he took the open well to a depth of 75 feet, where he finally got water.

But it would go down during the end of summer though there was hardly any water usage. After the house was con-
structed, this proved to be a source of anxiety. Without delay, he resorted to rainwater harvesting, about which he had acquired good knowledge by reading. The roof water was diverted to a 10,000-liter cement tank. Two holes in the bottom ensured that the water percolates down. In addition, he dug two rain-pits nearby.

“the soil here, laterite, is very porous. So, what you are doing, unfortunately, is a futile exercise,” a good number of visitors warned him, hinting that the water stored would simply go off elsewhere. However, the doctor has statistics to show that whatever others may have said, he benefited well from the measures. Now, every day, they pump a thousand litres for the kitchen garden use only. Despite this, the late summer levels remain six to seven feet. “If I get success, others too should,” he quips smilingly. A board near his rain-pit, says: “Both thief and rainwater have to be arrested.”

One magnificent gesture of this elderly couple is that they welcome visitors to see their kitchen garden. Pai knows grafting. In fact, on a few occasions, he has visited nearby schools and taken sessions to teach young students grafting and encouraged them to do kitchen gardening. Now, on weekend evenings, a good number of students come here as do citizens from nearby areas, who are attracted by his magazine articles on gardening.

Spreading the message

Pai has a seed bank storing all the vegetable seeds he grows. He happily shares a few sample seeds with interested visitors. In a small shed, he keeps seedlings of fruit and vegetable plants ready for distribution. “Pick your own seedlings, it’s free”, a nearby board assures visitors.

A good number of people now come asking for seeds or plants. “Since they come on their own,” hopes this master gardener, “they must be giving good attention and raising a few plants. He also gives a print-out to those who show a keen interest in kitchen gardening. Apart from the principles he follows, he hands out valuable advice: “Retired persons should develop a good kitchen garden in available ground area. That brings good physical health, mental peace and spiritual progress.”

Doesn’t this family part with any money for vegetable shops at all? “It is not like that,” Manorama explains, “Once in a while, we do buy tomato, potato or carrots. Earlier our weekly spending on vegetables and fruits was Rs.200. Now, the maximum amount we spend would be a hundred rupees a month, for the ones we aren’t able to grow here.”

However, it is not financial savings that is the concern of this retired couple. Says Pai, “Kitchen gardening drives away the feeling of being alone. At this age, we need a good pastime. I don’t like gossiping at all. As such, we find great pleasure in farming.”

“That’s not entirely true,” teases Manorama, “he spends good time gossiping with his plants.”

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**Zaheerabad to be recognised as biodiversity heritage site soon - Work of DDS women recognised at last**

The crop fields of the women of Deccan Development Society (DDS), an NGO working for the last 25 years in Medak district, and a member of OFAI since its inception, would be soon recognised as biodiversity heritage sites by the Government of India.

This was announced by none other than Dr. P. Balakrishna, chairman, National Biodiversity Authority (NBA), after formally launching the 14th mobile biodiversity festival at Ippapally village in Zaheerabad mandal of Medak district. This would be the first such heritage site in India. The site would cover about 50 villages spread across three mandals in Medak district. He also said that to recognise this area as a biodiversity heritage site would be a matter of pride.

He has also full of praise for the uniqueness of the localised Public Distribution System (PDS) based on jowar pioneered by DDS for the last 15 years. This model of the PDS, which was a by-product of the rich biodiversity being practiced by the farmers of the DDS, would be propagated by the NBA all over the world as one of the best practices based on biodiversity, he added. Dr. Balakrishna explained that the Government of India was about to announce a new policy wherein about 5 per cent of all productivity in agriculture would be based on the biodiversity.

Dr. Hampiah, chairman, AP State Biodiversity Board, said that the efforts made by the Sangham women were being recognised by the Board. The festival would be held for one month.

OFAI congratulates DDS and the women of Zaheerabad on this great achievement and distinction. Hard and dedicated work over several years has now paid dividends.

The award is a major boost to all those in the NGO sector who strike out in unique directions, to meet specific needs of their societies.

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**Basmati exports plunge**

By Madhvi Sally, ET Bureau | 1 Jul, 2013, 04:09AM IST

NEW DELHI: Basmati rice exports to the US have plunged because many Indian firms are under an import alert by the US authorities, leading to a detailed scrutiny for pesticide residue in every grain being shipped out. This has raised costs, upset schedules and obstructed sales, prompting exporters to seek government intervention.

In the first quarter of calendar year 2013, exports were down to 19,63 tonne. With 31 Indian rice firms under US FDA import alert amid 100% scrutiny, the rice export lobby feels that the US is employing a virtual zero-tolerance policy on Indian pesticides that have been used around the world for years and raised no health concerns. US diplomatic officials say they have discovered residues of chemicals not approved for use in the US in Indian basmati rice and such shipments have been rejected.

Indian companies see the US market as a strong branded market which sets benchmark prices and want the government to take up the issue with its US counterpart. “Exporters are very concerned about the US law and policy on the presence of residues of particular pesticides in rice,” said Rajan Sundaresan, president, All India Rice Exporters Association.

He added that without having conducted a risk assessment, the US was raising questions on pesticides that have been tested recently by other WTO members and the Codex Alimentarius (established by FAO and WHO, the agency develops international food standards), leading them to adopt minimum residue limits (MRLs) that are considerably higher than the US limit.

Four pesticides, namely Buprofezin, Carbendazim, Isoprothiolane and Tricyclazole that are commonly used by Indian farmers, have been found to be present at extremely low levels in the shipments, said Sundaresan.

“Many of the US’ trading partners like Japan and the EU and Codex have conducted risk assessments and set MRLs for these pesticides. The levels set by those MRLs do not act as a barrier to trade because the residues are comfortably below them. Meanwhile, the levels of pesticides the US authorities have detected have been far, far below these thresholds,” said Sundaresan. India annually exports 2.5-3 million tonne basmati rice, with Iran and the West Asia the biggest market.

Basmati rice exports from India to the United States have increased from $5762 tonne in 2009 to a record 104,400 tonne in 2012. “In the previous year, Indian rice exports to the United States hit an all-time record of $140 million.
**Attention All OFAI Members**

All individual members of OFAI who have not yet renewed their membership up to 2013 are requested to deposit their contribution in favour of “Organic Farming Association of India” payable in SB A/c No.180010100029917 at Mapusa-Goa branch of AXIS Bank @ Rs.100 per year up to a maximum of 10 years. OFAI prefers a 10-year subscription.

Do not forget to intimate OFAI-Central Secretariat by letter or email to myofai@gmail.com or call 0832-2255913 during normal office hours. Please send information as per proforma below.

| Name: | _____________________________ |
| OFAI ID No.: | _____________________________ |
| Postal Address: | _____________________________ |
| | _____________________________ |
| | _____________________________ |
| State: | _____________________________ |
| PIN: | _____________________________ |
| Phone: | _____________________________ |
| Email Address: | _____________________________ |
| Total Farm Area (Ha/Ac): | _____________________________ |
| Crops Grown: | _____________________________ |

Contribution for ________ Years

Signature: _____________________________

The expenses in printing and posting *The Living Field* are quite high and we would appreciate some support in the form of contributions. Thank you!

Members are also invited to donate small sums to support the work of the association.

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**OFAI: “REVIEWING AND REFRESHING” THE ORGANIC MOVEMENT**

OFAI’s AGM and Managing Committee took a decision during the last AGM to conduct a Review and Refresh exercise of the organic farming movement in the country and the role of the association in the movement.

The meeting -- in which around 30 persons have been invited to attend on the basis of their long association with OFAI and organic farming -- is scheduled for August 23-24, 2013 at the farm of OFAI President, Sarvdaman Patel.

The meeting will discuss a note prepared by P. Babu and Bharatendu Prakash, two of the founder members of the association. Other people who have contributed notes for discussion on the association and what it ought to do in the coming years include Juli Cariappa. More notes from farmers are expected.

The Review/Refresh meeting will be followed by a meeting of the Managing Committee which is expected to take forward the decisions arrived at during the review meeting.

One of the first priorities of Kapil Shah, the new OFAI Secretary, was to push for the meeting, in order to re-examine the goals, objectives and vision of the association since the original association was launched in 2002 and now a decade had elapsed, demanding a fresh focus for association activities.

Kapil Shah suggested that OFAI invite all senior persons -- especially founding members associated with OFAI and other supporters of the association -- for the meeting which would also discuss a new vision for the association.

The organic farm of Sarvdaman Patel, OFAI President, has been fixed as the venue for the meeting. Most of the senior members of OFAI -- including Bernard and Deepika from Auroville and former OFAI President, D D Bharamgoudra -- have accepted the invitation to attend.

A detailed report of the meeting will be published in the next issue of *The Living Field* for the benefit of all the members.

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**New Organic Farming Sourcebook (5th edition)**

The Organic Farming Sourcebook is written and edited by Claude Alvares with the assistance of Nyla Coelho. The book contains almost everything connected with organic farming in India, including a vast directory of organic farmers. Packed with pictures, the book now includes new chapters on GM seeds, farm animals, especially indigenous cows, and a comprehensive list of green or organic stores from all the different states.

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