India officially recognises
PGS organic certification

India is the first nation in the world to officially recognise the Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) for organic certification. For this, the government of India must be warmly applauded.

The PGS under the government set-up will have its secretariat with the National Centre of Organic Farming in Ghaziabad, UP. The system will eventually be administered by NCOF’s chain of regional centres.

PGS is the organic certification system that farmers need most. It is designed to work especially with small and marginal organic farmers, is based on group monitoring, costs almost nothing (except the costs of record keeping), has its own unique label and permits organic farmers who are members of Local Groups to market their produce on their own or as part of larger groups.

Hitherto, organic certification under PGS has been carried out under the auspices of the PGS Organic Council (PGSOC). The Council was registered at Goa as a society under the Societies Registration Act in April 2011. However, the PGS scheme has already been in operation with more than 5000 organic farmers registered with more than 400 local groups all over India even before the Council was formally registered. Many of these local groups have already successfully marketed their organic produce using the PGS label.

The PGSOC comprises mainstream organic farming associations and groups including OFAI, IIRD, Keystone Foundation, Deccan Development Society, Timbaktu Collective, Green Foundation and several others. At present, some 12 associations manage the PGS as part of their routine duties.

The Managing Committee of the PGSOC is headed by Joy Daniel (IIRD), Secretary of the Society is Claude Alvares (OFAI) and Treasurer is Mathew John (Keystone Foundation).

At present, Regional or Facilitation Councils can register under the NCOF set up or with the PGS Organic Council or even both.

The government has said that it is sympathetic to such a system so that the independence and autonomy of the voluntary sector can be maintained.

Thousands of organic farmers will benefit from government recognition since the PGS reverts the decisions of who is an organic farmer to the local groups alone.

M Balasubramaniam
honoured with Annasaheb Sahasrabudhe 2012 Prize

The Annasaheb Sahasrabuddhe 2012 Award was presented to Mr M. Balasubramanian of Madurai, Tamil Nadu on 27 March 2012. The award was presented by Justice C.S. Dharmadhikari at the National Conference on Sanitation and Environment at Delhi.

M Balasubramanian is the coordinator of OFAI’s Tamilnadu State Secretariat. The country wide OFAI community takes pride in this recognition and extends its hearty congratulations to him.

The award carries a citation and a cash prize of Rs. 25,000.

M. Balasubramanian has been working with grassroots communities for the past 20 years, particularly in organic farming, minor millet promotion, organic cotton processing and natural dye making. He practices organic farming on his farm near Madurai. He has written many books and articles in leading Tamil dailies and magazines and edits the agriculture magazine – Thalaanmai.

This award was created in the name of Annasaheb Sahasrabuddhe from Maharashtra. He was a respected Gandhian worker and a participant in the freedom movement. Annasaheb Sahasrabuddhe was Secretary of the Sewagram Trust at Wardha and in 1960 Chairman, Standing Committee of Rural Industries of the Planning Commission, Government of India. In his time, he developed many agro based industries for the poor.

Balasubramanian’s contact details:
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Members of the PGS Organic Council discuss PGS problems with members of Local Groups working under the Deccan Development Society
OFAI plays host to Iranian farmers

Eleven Iranian organic farmers and promoters were in India on a week long study tour from the 17th to the 23rd of October 2011 to study integrated pest management practices in organic food production and micro scale processing and marketing of organic produce. FAO and the Iranian Government facilitated the official procedures while OFAI chalked out the entire itinerary for their tour programme within India.

They visited organic farms, processing and warehousing units for organic foods and learned about the marketing trends for organic foods in India.

The objective of the tour was to:

- Visit organic farmers in India
- Visit local activities in marketing and interact with farmers, traders, consumer organisations and others
- Visit warehouses to learn how grading, packaging, storing agricultural products is done in India
- Learn about the capacity building of Farmer Field Schools at the promoter and government level in India.

- Create networking and knowledge sharing platforms for continued interaction.

The tour was a consequence of the visit of OFAI’s Director to Iran in 2010 (on the sidelines of a conference that he was attending on higher education), where he had then met with some of the members of the Regional Integrated Pest Management team. The idea of learning from India and the possibility of a study tour had been discussed then.

While in India, Ashish Gupta of OFAI’s Delhi/Himachal Pradesh secretariat and Dr. T.A.V.S. Raghuv Nath of the Centre of Sustainable Agriculture, Secunderbad took care of our guests from Iran.

The Iranians sent the following report for inclusion in The Living Field:

Day 1: 17 October, late afternoon. Ranikhet, Uttarakhand.

Visit to Pan Himalayan Grassroots Foundation (PHGF) to visit local hosts and coordinators. An informative presentation was made by Kalyan Paul and his wife, Anita Paul to introduce the Gagas river basin in the Kumaun hills of Uttarakhand. Their project area covers 100,000 farmers; the region is divided into 14 parts. PHGF works through 15 staff who are in turn connected to the farmers through 50 field representatives.

The Iranian coordinator, Hossein Heidari, spoke of the strategies of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) in Iran. Notes on practices in India were exchanged through a lively discussion. This was followed by a visit to the local PGS organic cum handicraft store. Ashish Gupta and Ajay Rastogi joined us over dinner, where certification procedures were discussed. Rasol Zare acted as interpreter whenever the situation demanded.

Day 2: 18 October

Visit to the office of Umang, which is a producer company run by PHGF. This was followed by a day visit to Malla Satina gaon village for a meeting with the local PGS members, all women. We were also given a demonstration on the working of a biogas unit. The meeting with the local farmers went well with a good exchange between the Iranian and Indian teams. We learned that the people had benefitted from joining PGS and collaborating with PHGF. There is a 50% increase in income as cost on transportation is cut and there is no expense on chemical inputs.

This was followed by a visit to the nearby watershed and a tour around the village to see the watershed based approach of land and water management - preventing flooding during heavy rains and rejuvenating natural rivers by increasing forest cover.

We also discussed strawberry problems in a farm where the runners were dried. The Iranian strawberry expert, Mohammad Mirlohi, believed that it was caused by too much animal manure and also cow urine. The shelter for animals, according to him, was too close to the strawberry runners. Farrow system and application of less animal manure was advised.

Visit to a biogas unit was also very interesting to the group. Cow dung was used to produce sufficient gas for cooking needs of one family. It was coupled with a LPG capsule for the times biogas was not sufficient and we were told that the biogas and one LPG capsule provide the fuel required for about 8 months!

Day 3: 19 October

Visit to village Chitai, district Almora

Here we met a family who run a successful family enterprise - SOS Organics. In the village, SOS Organics has provided employment to a number of local people through micro enterprises such as a mill for rice and millets, soap making, herbal tea unit, drying and packaging. At the end of the visit we had a nice cup of herbal tea kindly served by our German host, Santosh.

Santosh lives there with his Indian wife, Amrita, who helps him with all kinds of jobs in the little factory. One of the most interesting items for most of the team members was to see the super grain seeds (Amaranthus sp.)
packed in the factory. This we do not see in Iran.

We were told that the grain contains nearly 98% of the nutritional needs of the human body. Santosh kindly gifted us a little packet of these seeds to try in Iran for possible inclusion in the diet as a nutritional supplement. This only after sufficient study was carried out in the country with the help of experts from the Ministry of Agriculture.

Day 4: 20 October

The plan was to visit a local health centre and the nearby nature shop ran by NGO Aarohi in Satoli village, district Nanital. We started at 10 am on foot and reached the health centre shortly. At the health centre we learned that people receive simple to sophisticated treatment for a very low fee. The health centre was equipped with radiology, ultrasonic and surgery units.

Before leaving to take the train to Hyderabad from Kathgodam, we visited the nature store nearby where we were shown how apricot oil was extracted using a simple rotary machine. The machine works for three hours grinding the apricot kernels. The oil is released due to the joint action of heat generated and the crushing action of the machine. The store sold various prepared items and apricot oil products such as lotions and soaps at a reasonable price.

Day 5: 21 October

Hyderabad

We met Dr T.A.V.S. Raghu Nath, joint director, Centre of Sustainable Agriculture (CSA) at the hotel. After a brief round of introduc-
tions we headed to a chemical-free village 100 km away from Hyderabad. It was about a 2 hour drive in the minibus. In the village we met Ms. Narmada Inshelvi, local co-ordinator, CSA. We learned that major crops in the village were vegetables, rice, cotton and cowpea. Dr Raghu Nath explained that 52 farmers of the village send their produce solely to the local markets. We also met a distinguished and award-winning farmer, Mr. Amillard, and discussed the various methods they apply for sus-
tainable agriculture. The pests are controlled only by natural repellants made from garlic powder, sugarcane, cow dung, cow urine, etc. We also learned that various viruses could be controlled using repellant plant extracts against their sucking vectors such as white flies and aphids. We visited a vermi compost unit before concluding the trip to the village.

Day 7: 23 October

New Delhi

On the last day of our stay in India, after a second meeting with Mr Ashish Gupta we applied for the lifetime membership of Iranian IPM group to the Organic Farming Association of Iran.

OFAI: You can read in more detail about the Iranian IPM programme at: www.ipmneareast.com/index.php?option=com_phocad-ownload

OFAI attempts new study programme for children of organic farmers

Nothing could be more thrilling than to review "Our Land Our Life" a curriculum for children of rural communities in India. It is really heartening to note that Taleemnet, Organic Farming Association of India, Natural Farming Institute, Cerana Foundation, and the New Education Group-Foundation for Innovation and Research in Education, thought of this not just enormous, but meaningful exercise of producing the curriculum.

This curriculum is "child centric" with rural demands meeting the needs of children, interwoven with love and skill and what do we expect but a miracle. Our Land Our Life is a skill and knowledge based curriculum providing skill development and knowledge for livelihood options especially to rural children.

It offers an alternative vision of the future in which children educated through this curriculum can hope to engage with the world on the basis of equality.

The neatly designed modules in the curriculum challenge the young minds, igniting them to critically evaluate the pre-enlightenment views and achievements of their own and other societies; make use of them where they seem appropriate and apply the same in their day to day needs and conditions. It prepares children to incorporate new modes of learning thereby freeing-up the learning process from the excessive structuring that characterises present-day formal school education while at the same time also honouring what a formal school may be teaching these children.

The content of the curriculum has been beautifully structured under two broad categories:

1. Core academic subjects
2. Farm related modules

I am glad that care has been taken in this curriculum in its design such that learning would be through active engagement with living systems on the farm and in the neighbourhood and not just confined to rooms with pen and paper. Most important of all is the participation of the local community which would play a key role in many ways in this learning programme. This would enable shar-

Our Land Our Life: A curriculum for children of rural communities in India

The beta version of the curriculum is available as a free download at the following link: http://multiworldindia.org/natural-farming-institute/

(The review of the book is written by Dr Sultan Ahmed Ismail, Director, Ecoscience Research Foundation, Chennai 600041. Email: sultanismail@gmail.com)
Biodiversity “is a commonly used word to describe the variety of life on earth. It refers to the wide range of living organisms: microbes, plants, animals and their habitats. Biodiversity on organic farms accounts for efficient nutrient recycling and effective insect management. An organic farm is a balanced system where the problem of insects is well taken care of by their natural predators. Therefore, most farms rich in biodiversity possess greater resilience and are able to recover more readily from stress such as drought, pests, diseases, epidemics, etc. Decline in biological diversity puts the functioning of ecosystems at risk. Hence, the level of biodiversity on a farm would be indicative of the resilience and sustainability of the farming system.

The Kodagu district is located in the Central Western Ghats at an altitude of 700 to 1,400 metres with an annual rainfall of 1,500 to 3,500 millimetres. It harbours rich forested areas and on account of its unique agroclimatic conditions, crops such as coffee and spices are extensively cultivated in the shade of the forest canopies. Coffee is generally grown on slopes while cardamom is grown in the valleys often intercropped with pepper and vanilla. Conventional cultivation of these crops requires heavy inputs of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. These chemicals are having devastating effects on the rich diversity of this region. This prompted us to undertake a scientific study to understand the effect of chemical pesticides on biodiversity on a farm would be indicative of the resilience and sustainability of the farming system.

Thirty plantations including several coffee and cardamom plantations were chosen randomly from the entire district for the study. These plantations involved three treatment types – full organic treatment; only NPK fertilisers; and NPK with pesticide use.

When flowers are visited by bees for their sap and in turn get pollinated, there is increase in fruit production. These bees are the target of the bee-eater bird population. The bee-eaters are in turn a prey of smaller mammals, reptiles and even larger birds. Such a link is referred to as a food chain and many such food chains form a complex network referred to as a food web. Similar food webs function in our farms, often irrespective of our awareness. Many organisms become a target of pesticide applications directly or by indirect ways. Pesticides tend to disturb the predator-prey balance. If there is eradication of any of the regulators of soil processes, pollination and other ecological services that they offer, these dramatically affect the sustainability of the agricultural system. Organic farming promotes and attempts to maintain this balance. Thus insects, butterflies and birds, all of them play varied key roles in maintaining the balance of our ecosystem.

The study involved an assessment of insects collected through several techniques:

- Ground insects were collected through a pitfall trap method. This involves using a light apparatus to which flying insects get attracted and then fall into the trap.
- Nocturnal flying insects were collected through the light trap method. This involves using a light apparatus to which flying insects get attracted and then fall into a jar below the light and get trapped.
- The bait trap method involved the use of ripe bananas to attract fruit loving butterflies. They get attracted to the bananas and get trapped.
- The insects caught in the traps were collected into vials, identified, and scientifically analysed to enable a comparative assessment of the populations of the various insects. The results show that the diversity of insects found in organic plantations is significantly higher than that found in plantations using pesticides.

We also made a few interesting observations:

- There is a drastic decrease in ant diversity from organic to NPK to lowest in pesticide plantations. This is repeatedly observed in other group of insects (beetles, grasshoppers, etc) as well. Hence, studying ant diversity alone is adequate to get a fair idea of the wide range of insects in a given system.
- The previously known fact of using ants as biological indicators for assessing insect diversity is confirmed by our study. Whenever a habitat is severely disturbed, a yellow crazy ant (Anoplolepis gracilipes) has been found to be present. Hence, it is referred to as a disturbed habitat specialist. This species was found only in pesticide sprayed plantations and was totally absent in organic plantations indicating the disturbance.
- The “evenness” of the distribution of insects species in a habitat is an important factor in pest control. Organic farming promotes the even distribution of the species and the balance between species. Our study supports this fact.
- The coffee berry borer, a pest on coffee berries, was higher in pesticide treated plantations and in greater numbers when compared to organic plantations. Pesticides tend to disturb the predator-prey balance.

The study confirms that organic plantations support greater level of insect diversity and adopting sustainable and ecological farming practices can contribute significantly to the conservation of biological diversity.

(First major study to prove biodiversity richness of organic farms completed)

More than 32,000 insects were collected during the study period and analysed.
Organic and Biodynamic Farming Course

A five day training programme in Organic and Biodynamic Farming was conducted from 2nd to 6th December, 2011 in Gujarat. The programme took place at Bhaikaka Krishikendra, a practicing, sustainable, organic farm, near Anand. The farm is a vibrant, commercially viable community and it provided the perfect backdrop for this programme. This was the same farm where, amongst its bamboo groves, over 700 participants experienced a unique kind of conference on Organic Farming (OFAI conference) in December 2010.

The training program was attended by 17 farming enthusiasts from Karnatak (8), Mumbai (1), Gujarat (5), Goa (1), France (1) and Germany (1). The main teachers were David Hogg and Sarvdaman Patel.

David Hogg works with the Naandi Foundation in the Araku tribal belt of Andhra Pradesh where he has successfully helped over 3000 tribal families convert to a sustainable way of living and farming. He is teacher unri- valed in his eloquence and knowledge of both farming and nutrition - just to name a few.

Sarvdaman Patel, who owns and personally manages the Bhaikaka Krishikendra, is one of the country’s foremost agronomy experts. The farm stands testimony to the depth of his knowledge, expertise and passion for farming.

Dr. Yadav (one of the country’s most respected entomologists and Prof. Emeritus), provided a fascinating peek into the world of insects. Briony Young and Ravi Koushik provided able assistance to the teachers.

The course provided ample opportunity for the trainees not only to learn in the classroom, but personally try out these teachings in the many hands-on sessions that were provided. They were also able to see, first hand, how these practices have benefited the health and vibrancy of the farm.

A typical day would start at 5:00 a.m. in the morning with star gazing. This would be followed by a farm walk with Sarvdaman. After a sumptuous breakfast, there would be some classroom sessions discussing various aspects and techniques of biodynamic and organic farming. It would then be time for the morn-

ing practical work. Another nutritious meal, followed by some theory would make way for practical work in the evenings. In the night after enjoying another wonderful meal, there would be another star gazing session to see the night constellations.

The highlights of the hands-on sessions were the compost and CPP making sessions where the trainees, who were divided into teams, enthusiastically competed against each other to make the best compost and CPP. The few who started with inhibitions about touching cow dung fell completely in love with this wonderful stuff by the time the sessions were over.

The farm walks provided everybody the opportunity to tap into Sarvdaman’s inexhaustible reserves of knowledge. Simultaneously, it fostered an appreciation of how man’s genius, when working in tune with nature, can produce a true work of art even on a farm. It was truly a gratifying scene to see the master and the eager pupils in earnest discussions over a handful of soil or a leaf.

The highlight of the star gazing sessions was a newly acquired telescope using which particip- ants were able to see the 4 moons of Jupiter and the rings of Saturn.

Meena Patel (Sarvdaman’s better half), spoilt everybody with delicious food - the farm fresh vegetables, sweet corn and salads ensured that the nutrition element was not overlooked. With her enormous generosity and hospitality she made it seem more like a big family get-together than a formal training programme.

The training course somehow felt totally wholesome, abundantly covering every aspect of farming from techniques to animals to crops to insects to snakes to stars to farm implements.

The course was extremely well received. There are now enthusiastic plans to have more com- prehensive courses that, in addition to covering the basics covered in this course, will cover in-depth aspects of vegetable growing, animal husbandry and fodder management.

(Written by Ravi Koushik, email: ravikoushik@yahoo.com)

Events Held

5 February, 2012
OFAI Managing Committee meeting held at Bangalore

3rd April, 2012
PGSOC Annual General Meeting at Pastapur, Andhra Pradesh.

Upcoming

6th and 7th November, 2012
Announcing OFAI’s Fourth Biennial Convention 2012

OFAI is happy to take its large countrywide organic farming community to Odisha for its Biennial Convention to be held at Bhubaneshwar on 6th and 7th November 2012.

Preliminary work to welcome everyone from across the country to meet with the farmers of Odisha is already underway. ‘Living Farms’ headed by Debjeet Sarangi is the main co-ordinating agency for the convention.

Block your calendars now for a two day celebration of farming. You may also consider extending your visit to see the world famous temples at Puri and Konark.

Look out for further details in the next issue of Living Fields or do a regular check on the OFAI website under the ‘Calendar’ section.

Updates on Organic Events

The organic farming community has, over the past years, become adept at using electronic technology. Hence we would like to encourage our members and readers to regularly look up the website www.ofai.org/calendar for a day to day update on events organized by OFAI and events related to organic farming.

OFAI Central Secretariat Staff Update

Miguel Braganza left the central secretariat in November 2011. His place is now taken by Nyla Coelho who had taken a year off to do the Rural Curriculum Design book which is now ready for circulation.

Miguel Braganza left the central secretariat in November 2011. His place is now taken by Nyla Coelho who had taken a year off to do the Rural Curriculum Design book which is now ready for circulation.

Ms Shamika Mone is expected to join OFAI as its principal researcher in July 2012. With an MSc degree, Mone says she wants to spend her life helping organic farmers in whatever way her skills can do so. She has been assigned to represent OFAI on the joint productivity study of organic and chemical farmers being carried out with ASHA (Alliance for Sustain- able and Holistic Agriculture).

Jenessey Dias continues to assist Nyla in the office.

OFAI website and Facebook

The OFAI website (www.ofai.org) is updated everyday with news and events relating to organic farming. The resource section is being enriched with soft copies of books and newsletters on organic farming available in local languages. OFAI Facebook is also operational and is being used to announce events as well as establish links with like-minded people everywhere.
Organic Nitish Kumar sets record in potato production

Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's dream of India's second green revolution taking off from Bihar seems to be coming closer to reality thanks to his namesake, Nitish Kumar, a young farmer of Darveshpura village in Nalanda district who has set what is claimed to be a world record in potato production through organic farming.

Three months ago, a group of farmers in the same village had created a "world record" producing 224 quintals of paddy per hectare using the SRI (System of Rice Intensification) method.

Kumar has harvested 72.9 tonnes of the tuber per hectare. The world record thus far was 45 tonnes per hectare held by farmers in the Netherlands, officials said.

Nalanda District Magistrate Sanjay Kumar Agrawal said several officials and agricultural experts were present in the field at the harvest time to verify the claim and record it.

“The world record is the result of hard labour and experimentation with organic farming,” Agrawal said.

Kumar Kishore Nanda, a soil scientist, who helped Nitish Kumar, said success was a result of the organic method of farming. “Once again the organic method of farming proved superior to other methods of farming,”

Nanda said the loam soil of the village is suitable for several crops, including potato.

Rajesh Umath, a district horticulture officer, said the new record will certainly go a long way in removing doubts about low production associated with organic farming and encourage other farmers to adopt it.

Nalanda, the home district of the chief minister, is already the leading potato producing district in Bihar with farmers growing the crop on over 27,000 hectares.

Bihar is the third largest potato producing state after Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. Last year, five farmers of the village are said to have created a world record when they produced 224 quintals of paddy per hectare. A young farmer, Sumant Kumar, produced 224 quintals of paddy per hectare beating the world record of Yuan Longping of China with 190 quintals of paddy produce per hectare.

Chief Minister Nitish Kumar of Bihar has set what is claimed to be a world record in potato production with his choice of an organic method of farming. "Once again the organic method of farming proved a big achievement in the agriculture sector in the state. The next green revolution in the country would be ushered in from Bihar, he had said.

P.S.: Post the euphoria, five kg hampers of these potatoes were distributed to each MLA and MLC at Patna on the 27th and the 28th of March, 2012. Reliable sources informed OFAI that the topic of discussion on the day in the assembly halls revolved around each parliamentarian’s favourite potato dish followed by calling up one another’s wives and cooks for exchange of recipes!

Bangalore Goes Bananas over Millets

The Marigowda Memorial Hall in Lalbagh, Bangalore witnessed a steady footfall of 100 to 200 people at any given time on the 13th, 14th and 15th of April. The occasion being 'The Millet Mela' that introduced Bangloreans to an incredible range of millets and their lip-smacking derivatives. Earth360, pioneered, promoted and founded by M N Dinesh Kumar promotes natural and ecological farming practices in the areas around Kadiri in Andhra Pradesh. Its stakeholders are the small land holding millet growers of the surrounding area. It mandates non use of chemical inputs and facilitates the reaching of the farmers’ produce directly to the customer through its partner agency, Grameena Naturals. Dr. Mahesh Joshi at the inaugural of the mela said that Indian culture is not a rishi culture anymore, but a krishi culture. Doordarshan personnel present at the inaugural made a commitment to this initiative with an assurance that programmes related to millets would be given adequate airt ime within their agricultural theme time slots.

Dinesh is of the firm belief that unpolished rice can be easily replaced by millets in our daily diet. Millets have many beneficial properties, the most important being that they have a low glycemic index. The consumption of millets, unlike other carbohydrates, does not raise blood sugar levels immediately while at the same time facilitates a progressive release of glucose into the blood stream. An important point to note is that India has the undesirable distinction of having the largest diabetic population in the world, juxtaposed against also being the largest producer of millets. Given this, it is a simple matter to change this sad state of affairs - adopt a diet rich in millets!

Earth 360 is a farmer friendly millet processing and marketing initiative. It runs an exclusive unit for processing of millets. Millets are generally processed into single polish whole millet, rava, flour and pops. Mrs. Kalyani Dinesh, wife of Dinesh Kumar has experimented with millet cooking and standardized several recipes which can cater to all palates with a range of snacks, complete meals and desserts. A book Siridiyanna Advige (Millet Recipes) in Kannada, with all her standardized recipes was also released at the inauguration at the Millet Mela. The book is available with Dinesh Kumar. Contact him at: Dinesh Kumar Earth360 Eco Ventures (P) Limited 3-316 APIC Industrial Park Kadiri – 535551 Andhra Pradesh Phone: (0)8449 221265 Cell: 09448078785 / 09481438384 Email: millets.dinesh@gmail.com http://millets.wordpress.com/millets/
Cross Country Visiting Organic Farms

Two 25 year olds from Tamil Nadu decide to opt out of their lucrative careers to pursue a life on the land through organic farming. Muthu Kumar and Deepan - both childhood friends and classmates - decided to quit being part of the global services and the entertainment industry work force to reclaim their connectedness to the land through organic farming. Taking the practical approach, in late July 2011, they decided to embark on a countrywide motorcycle ride. A trip to the OFS office in Goa for a firsthand briefing on organic farms and using the Organic Farming Sourcebook (OFSB) as their resource guide, they have visited most parts of southern, northern and western India, clocking 120 days of travel time on the road. They will conclude their journey with a trip to central and northeastern parts of India in the coming months.

A glimpse into this journey follows:

What gave you the idea of travelling around?
Deepan was working as RJ (Radio Jockey) and programme producer in Coimbatore and had the habit of visiting the nearby forests and found agriculture as the only option. I (Muthu Kumar) was working with an MNC (Multi National Company) in the United States and found the routine job dull and could not take it anymore. We both wanted to do agriculture. Without the knowledge or support we thought it would be unwise to venture into it right away. We wanted, at first, to learn about it in Tamil Nadu but then changed our mind and planned to travel across the country to know what exactly was happening on ground.

Was the Organic Farming Sourcebook information accurate?
Yes, most of the details were right except for a few landline numbers. It was of great help to us.

How many states did you visit?
We have completed our visits to the south, north and west of the country, central India and the northeast to be completed in the following months.

What is your impression of what organic farmers are doing?
Organic farming is done with passion by many. However the major population, or to be frank, nearly all see it as an agri-business. Hence the important factor of taking care of the soil or maintaining the bio-diversity is not a consideration in such farms. There are some real good farms too, but these can be handpicked. It cannot be denied that more and more people have become conscious of the value of taking healthy and organic food. Since many people see it as a business we think it is dangerous from that perspective. The health of the soil will suffer again.

Which farms impressed you the most?
Vivek and Juli Cariappa’s farm in Karnataka, Clea Chandmal’s farm in Goa, An ex IPS officer, Vikram Bokey’s farm near Pune, Sardar Patel farm of Dr.Dinesh in Gujarat, Mr. Anthonysamy’s farm in puliyangudi, Thirunelveli. Tamilnadu were some of the few that impressed us.

Which farmers impressed you the most?
The same as mentioned above and the one of Mr.Gomathi Nayagam, a friend of Anthonysamy.

Would you advise people of your age and background to take up farming?
Definitely, but they must have the basic understanding of why they have to do it and what is their goal. If money is what they are coming into for, then it would be a little disheartening. What would you do with the training you have received during your education? Would that be of help in your farming?

(continued from col.2)

From all the travel, visits and interaction with farmers we learnt to look at agriculture as our culture. We have a lot of unlearning and relearning to do which will help us setup the farm and take it in the right direction.

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Thalassery’s Mohan: Passion for Plants

One can never be sure as to what may trigger a pursuit of passion.

In the case of Mohan, it was khabsa, a popular dish in Saudi Arabia, whose major ingredients are meat, rice and greens. Having lived in Saudi Arabia for twenty years, working for the oil and construction related industry there, Mohan returned to India in September 2011. According to him, the Arabs use plenty of greens and herbs in their cooking and this seems to meet their micro nutrient needs adequately. This got him thinking about the nutritional requirements of people in India whose diets are highly deficient in micro-nutrients such as vitamins and minerals.

His research on the subject led him to identify several popular greens that are used by people in India and more specifically to where he currently lives in Kerala.

His passion for popularising greens has led him to keep a collection and nursery of forty seven varieties of cultivated and wild lines. His favourite happens to be Pisonia alba a native to the Andaman and Nicobar islands. At some point, the government of Tamil Nadu, used this plant - which grows as a beautiful, five to six metre tall sprawling tree - to line the pavements of Rameshwaram and Coimbatore. Pisonia alba, apart from its ornamental and shade giving uses has high medicinal and nutritive properties. The leaves can be used as greens in the diet to provide for most of the micro-nutritional requirements. Mohan is presently promoting this plant and maintains a nursery that caters to areas around Kadirur. Contact him at: “Vazhivilakku”
An Academy of Energy & Environmental Friendship,
Kadirur, Thalassery
Cell : 7736458116
E-mail : edibleleafkadirur@yahoo.in

Passion for Plants

(Thalassery’s Mohan)

Mohan has returned to India in September 2011. According to him, the Arabs use plenty of greens and herbs in their cooking and this seems to meet their micro nutrient needs adequately. This got him thinking about the nutritional requirements of people in India whose diets are highly deficient in micro-nutrients such as vitamins and minerals.

His research on the subject led him to identify several popular greens that are used by people in India and more specifically to where he currently lives in Kerala.

His passion for popularising greens has led him to keep a collection and nursery of forty seven varieties of cultivated and wild lines. His favourite happens to be Pisonia alba a native to the Andaman and Nicobar islands. At some point, the government of Tamil Nadu, used this plant - which grows as a beautiful, five to six metre tall sprawling tree - to line the pavements of Rameshwaram and Coimbatore. Pisonia alba, apart from its ornamental and shade giving uses has high medicinal and nutritive properties. The leaves can be used as greens in the diet to provide for most of the micro-nutritional requirements. Mohan is presently promoting this plant and maintains a nursery that caters to areas around Kadirur. Contact him at: “Vazhivilakku”
An Academy of Energy & Environmental Friendship,
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E-mail : edibleleafkadirur@yahoo.in

(continued from col.2)

From all the travel, visits and interaction with farmers we learnt to look at agriculture as our culture. We have a lot of unlearning and relearning to do which will help us setup the farm and take it in the right direction.

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New Book on Organic Farming

Venkat, the permaculture man of India, was a deep thinker. However, being a man of few words he was able to make his jottings extremely brief. Written in an easy-to-read style, the 54 page book with ample illustrations is a good introductory manual for understanding permaculture. His apprehensions about the environmental and food crisis globally and possible interventions through agriculture are reflected through chapters such as ‘Designing for Regeneration of Farmland,’ ‘New Roots for the Agriculture of the Future,’ ‘Dynamics of New Agriculture’ and ‘The Goal’. Other chapters that are more practical in nature deal with soils, water, pests and trees. The book also contains a note on Dr. Venkat as a person and a note on his famed home garden.

Just published in March 2012, the book is modestly priced at Rs.30. It is available from Manchipustakam, Secunderabad and the Other India Press, Goa. An e-copy of the book maybe obtained by writing to info@manchipustakam.in or can be downloaded from the OFAI website.

Contact: Suresh Kosaraju at Manchipustakam: Cell-09490746614

Attention All OFAI Members

All individual members of OFAI who have not yet renewed their membership are requested to deposit their annual fee in favour of Organic Farming Association of India payable in SB A/c No. 1800100029917 at Mapusa-Goa branch of AXIS Bank @Rs.100 per year upto a maximum of 10 years.

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

____________________________

Membership proforma (can also be used by those applying for first time membership)

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Email Address: _______________

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Newsletter: English / Hindi

Signature: ___________________

The expenses in printing and posting The Living Field are quite high and we would appreciate some support in the form of renewed membership or donations. Those who do not send in their subscriptions may note that this will be the last issue of The Living Field or Shashya Shamala they will be receiving.

The 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.

Pp.460 Rs.500 (post and packing free)

Payment by DD only, drawn in favour of ‘Other India Bookstore,’ payable at Mapusa 403507 Goa.

For assistance in getting a copy, call 0832-2255913 (Jenessey) or email: myofai@gmail.com or simply write a postcard to: OFAI Central Secretariat, G-8 St Britto’s Apts., Feira Alta, Mapusa 403507 Goa or Other India Bookstore, Next to New Mapusa Clinic, Mapusa 403507 Goa.

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Editor: Claude Alvares