



**DISEASE-FREE FARM NO PESTICIDE OR WEEDICIDE IS USED**

# A model in mixed farming

Farm yard manure is applied in alternate years and hand weeding is carried out around the base of pepper vines while taking care not to disturb their base



The 20-foot tall pepper plant at the farm of C. Mohandas, former Principal Scientist, ICAR, in Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu. — PHOTO: S. ANSHAMAM

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The two-decade-old farm located in a slope at Eribavoor village near Madhavode of Kanyakumari district, Tamil Nadu, has turned out to be a model. It is surrounded by paddy and banana fields. The one-hectare land is free from diseases and pests as no insecticide, weedicide, fungicide or weedicide is used. The one-line paddy farm sports a different look now with arecanut trees draped in pepper vines along rows of trenches filled with water almost all through the year.

When C. Mohandas, former Principal Scientist, Indian Council of Agricultural Research, found growing paddy labour-intensive, he switched to banana. From 1995, he started to experiment with mixed farming, using trench irrigation. As the erstwhile paddy field always had water stagnation in 11 months of the year, it had to be drained periodically. Hence, small drainage channels were dug and the mud was used to create long bunds around arecanut trees. Whenever they dry up, the silt is used to improve the health of the soil. Only surface wa-

ter and hand weeding is carried out around the base of pepper vines while taking care not to disturb their base. The income is from pepper, arecanut, inter-crops and fish, besides pepper saplings. He makes an average of 500 nuts per arecanut tree. Nurseries of climbers and bush pepper, which is ideal for home gardens, are raised at the farm.

Mr. Mohandas claims that the yield in the farm is increasing. It was two kg dry pepper in April-May and September 2014 in the off-season and went up to six kg per climber during December, the main season. As no pesticide was used for over two decades, there is a build up of a number of predators and parasites of pathogenic insects and fungi. Rubber shoots in the farm are used to produce about 10,000 rooted cuttings, which are sold at Rs.15 each. About 3,000 bush pepper seedlings are raised from lateral shoots. About 1,000 orthotropic shoots are also used to produce seedlings which are sold at Rs.25 each. The uses locally-designed humidity-chambers to enhance rooting.

"There is a big demand now for pepper and saplings. The demand has been amplified by the crop failure in nearby Kerala," says Mr. Mohandas. More details about the farm can be had from C. Mohandas, 29/104, Pillayar's Lane, North Street, Marthandam, Kanyakumari District, Tamil Nadu. Phone: 9843643546, 04651-274607.

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