

Past history and present coverage of the programme

Action for Food Production (AFPRO) has initiated a unique research project in late nineties, in two villages of cotton growing belt of Maharashtra to test the utility of IPM in an actual and on-the-ground situation. The area was selected on the basis of the fact that it accounted for the highest consumption of chemical fertilizers, with lowest yields in cotton. The project started with 120 acres(48.56 hec.) of cotton-growing fields in Bhutkheda, a village in the Jalna district of Maharashtra. Sixty-four farmers of Bhutkheda village participated voluntarily of the action research project. Funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Berne and implemented by AFPRO and Marathwada Sheti Sahayak Mandal (MSSM) Aurangabad, the uniqueness of the project lay in making an environment-friendly alternative amenable to the farmers. It combined knowledge with application to make the whole learning process practicable. The beginning was not however smooth as farmers remained unconvinced about the utility of such low-cost and simple methods in controlling pest populations, given that the high cost pesticides had failed. Each step was discussed, tried and tested, and only after the first crop did mindsets start changing. Over a period of time, farmers learnt about the technicalities like record of ETL, utility of bioagent, technique of preparing neem kernal extract etc. Looking at the benefits from IPM that farmers from Bhutkheda got, the neighboring village of Pokhri campaigned with AFPRO and MSSM to make them part of the project too.

By January 2003, the results from IPM are there for all to see. The people have also come up with their own innovations to complement the IPM techniques. Asrabai Nikas from Pokhri, for instance, tried planting cotton in polythene bags instead of directly in the soil, in the pre-monsoon period. This, she observed, gave better results. This practice was then picked up by other farmers.

An appreciation of AFPRO's community centric approach, enshrined in our preamble; and our past experiences on Integrated Pest Management (IPM) attracted the attention of IKEA who agreed to partner with AFPRO for initiating a project on "Better Management practice (BMP) of cotton" in Yavatmal district of Maharashtra during 2008-09 with 6400 farmers who harvested 9614.7 MT of seed cotton (Average productivity 0.746 MT/ha) .Yavatmal is a key cotton growing area of Maharashtra, where erratic rainfall and high input cost lead to crop failure and indebtedness among farmers. In addition, rapid falling up of water tables in the irrigated regions and drying up of springs forcing farmers to dig over deeper for water. This poor water management as well as contamination of surface and ground water due to excessive pesticide use harms plant and animal life as well as people living in this area. In this project, AFPRO's initial focus on reducing chemical use was expanded to cover other aspects of crop management in support of the move towards better cotton through series of interventions range from soft measures like awareness generation events (camps, trainings, cross learning visits) to capacity building initiatives and practical demonstration. In 2010-11, under this project, the number of farmers doubled to over 12,000 with production of 18270.54 MT of seed cotton (productivity 0.755 MT/ha) . In 2009, IKEA and AFPRO partnership was extended to two more districts (Rajkot and Surendranagar) of Gujarat. In wankaner (Gujarat), despite the fact that production of cotton is more, farmers were less informed about proper crop and water management practices. Under the interventions adopted in the BMP project , for the starting year (2010 -11) total production was 25158.4 MT (Productivity 1.14 MT/ha) of seed cotton for 6000 farmers with an area coverage of 22000 ha and for the season 2011-12 the production level goes up to 26110.5 MT (Productivity 1.16 MT/ha)with 6800 number of farmers with an arae coverage of 22500 ha.

Farmers involved in the IKEA BMP project were learned how to manage water resources more effectively by using drip irrigation, alternate row irrigation, improving the soils ability to retain moisture, how to control pest by using natural methods at appropriate time in their life cycle etc. Impact of this

project was also reflected in increase of farmers earnings, as because they have been able to reduce the amount of chemicals they use, and thus their input cost. An acknowledgement of this IKEA AFPRO partnership was reflected in 2011, when AFPRO got recognized by multi donor BCFT to start a project with special attention to social issues related to cotton cultivation along with agricultural practices. AFPRO has initiated the first BCFT project in Yavatmal district of Maharashtra with 11300 farmers for the season 2011-12, who harvested 20586 MT (Productivity 0.99 MT/ha) of seed cotton. Subsequently BCFT has supported AFPRO for another two district of Gujarat i.e., Surendranagar & Wankaner with 12000 more farmers for the season 2012-13. Presently AFPRO is covering 30000 farmers under this programme from both Maharashtra & Gujarat.

Project Coverage:

Yavatmal District , Maharashtra

	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Target number of farmers	6393	11826	11826	12000	12000	14000
Target number of villages	77	91	97	92	92	100
Actual Hectares	12883	24370	24203	20763	16642.60	25492
Actual Production (MT lint)	3204.9	8056.23	4050.66	6863	6570.06	-

Surendranagar District, Gujarat

	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Target number of farmers	2611	6087	7468	6000	5459
Target number of villages	16	33	33	30	30
Actual Hectares	4316	7417	9764	13812	14011
Actual Production (MT lint)	9762.7	17043.1	25192.8	11563	-

Wankaner District, Gujarat

	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Target number of farmers	6196	6840	6020	5972
Target number of villages	38	38	38	38
Actual Hectares	8640	8933	9076	9290
Actual Production (MT Lint)	8386	8703	17150	-