

Zero Budget Natural Farming: A boon or a curse for our nation?

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Abstract

The growth and importance of zero budget natural farming (ZBNF) in our nation. It's journey from a single state (Karnataka) and that also led by some peasants, to gaining importance in the entire country is actually considered as a boon, keeping in context its importance to our farmers. There is a popular saying that nothing in this universe is perfect and the same goes with ZBNF

Introduction

Zero Budget Natural Farming, as the name implies, is a method of farming where the cost of growing and harvesting plants is zero. This means that farmers need not purchase fertilizers and pesticides in order to ensure the healthy growth of crops.



It is, basically, a natural farming technique that uses biological pesticides instead of chemical-based fertilizers. Farmers use earthworms, cow dung, urine, plants, human excreta

and such biological fertilizers for crop protection. It reduces farmers' investment. It also protects the soil from degradation. It is a cultivating practice for the normal development of yields without including substance composts.

Start of Zero Budget Natural Farming:

When the Green revolution began to destroy lands and livelihoods, some farmers began their search for a return to alternative systems. One of them was Subhash Palekar of Vidarbha, who had practiced chemical farming but after several experiments he met Fukuoka when this Japanese philosopher visited India. They took the initiative together for that technique of natural farming. They promoted it widely across Karnataka under the official name as Zero Budget Natural Farming.



Subhash Palekar is an Indian agriculturist who practiced and wrote many books about Subhash Palekar Natural Farming (SPNF) formerly known as ZBNF (Zero Budget Natural Farming). Subhash Palekar was born in 1949 in a small village Belora in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra in India, and he has an agricultural background. He practised Zero Budget Natural Farming without using pesticides to cultivate. He conducted many workshops all over India. **He was awarded India's fourth highest civilian award the Padma Shri in 2016.**



What makes Zero Budget Natural Farming a boon for our nation?

In this context let's discuss about the benefits of Zero Budget Natural Farming. As both a social and environmental programme, it aims to ensure that farming – particularly smallholder farming is economically viable by enhancing farm biodiversity and ecosystem services. It reduces farmers' costs through eliminating external inputs and using in-situ resources to rejuvenate soils, whilst simultaneously increasing incomes, and restoring ecosystem health through diverse, multi-layered cropping systems.

Cow dung from local cows has proven to be a miraculous cure to revive the fertility and nutrient value of soil. One gram of cow dung is believed to have anywhere between 300 to 500 crore beneficial micro-organisms. These micro-organisms decompose the dried biomass on the soil and convert it into ready-to-use nutrients for plants. Resilient food systems are the need of the day given the variability of the monsoons due to global warming and declining groundwater in large parts of India. The drought-prone regions in India are reportedly seeing promising changes already in farms with the ZBNF.

Zero budget natural farming requires only 10 per cent water and 10 per cent electricity than what is required under chemical and organic farming. ZBNF may improve the potential of crops to adapt to and be produced for evolving climatic conditions. In ZBNF, yields of various cash and food crops have been found to be significantly higher. E.g. yields from ZBNF plots were found on average to be 11% higher for cotton than in non-ZBNF plots.



The yield for Guli ragi (ZBNF) was 40% higher than non-ZBNF. Input costs are near zero as no fertilizers and pesticides are used. Profits in most areas under ZBNF were from higher yield and lower inputs. Model ZBNF farms were able to withstand drought and flooding. Notably these are the serious emerging concerns with regard to climate change. Planting multiple crops and border crops on same field provides varied income and nutrient sources. Overall, there is Reduced use of water and electricity Improved health of farmers Flourishing of local ecosystems and biodiversity No toxic chemical residues in the

environment Improvements in soil, biodiversity, livelihoods, water Climate resilience Women's empowerment and nutrition. These all points lead to a total conclusion that Zero Budget Natural Farming is a boon for our nation.

Initiative of government towards Zero Budget Natural Farming:

Nirmala Sitharaman in her budget speech said zero budget farming is already being practiced in some states of the country. Sitharaman said emphasis on zero budget farming will help double the farming income in days to come. Government of India has been promoting organic farming in the country through the dedicated schemes of Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) since 2015-16 and also through Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY).

In the revised guidelines of PKVY scheme during the year 2018, various organic farming models like Natural Farming, Rishi Farming, Vedic Farming, Cow Farming, Homa Farming, Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF) etc. have been included wherein flexibility is given to states to adopt any model of Organic Farming including ZBNF depending on farmer's choice. Under the RKVY scheme, organic farming/ natural farming project components are considered by the respective State Level Sanctioning Committee (SLSC) according to their priority/ choice.

Drawbacks of Zero Budget Natural Farming :

- Labour intensive pushes production price to higher.
- For fragmented land holdings, giving jeevamrutha is much more difficult.
- Desi cow maintenance is another burden.
- Finding consumer to sell at premium price is difficult. Assume you find them.
- Difficult to convince customer that their produce is nutritious and pesticide free in order to command premium price.
- Cannot sell to reputed organic brands in wholesale as they insist on organic certification.

Conclusion

Zero Budget Natural Farming has its own benefits and drawbacks, although if properly executed it will become a secure part of Indian agriculture. Government should take the initiative to build the bridge of knowledge between the farmers and his system of farming. First of all government should address the crisis like rising labour cost in this, and by

providing better produce price to the farmers. This all if looked into a better way will help overcome the various drawbacks of ZBNF. It should be tested on a wider scale and on all soil types. Hence, implementing this at larger scale and in a better way will help the nation to progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

