

Zero Budget Natural Farming: Need Of The Hour

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Introduction

Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF) is one such low-input, climate-resilient type of farming that encourages farmers to use low-cost locally-sourced inputs, eliminating the use of artificial fertilisers, and industrial pesticides. In India, agriculturist Subhash Palekar has helped popularise ZBNF practices across the country. He has identified four aspects that are integral to ZBNF (1) Beejamrutham, or microbial coating of seeds using cow dung and urine based formulations; (2) Jeevamrutham, or the application of a bioinoculum made with cow dung, cow urine, jaggery, pulse flour, water and soil to multiply soil microbes; (3) Mulching, or applying a layer of organic material to the soil surface in order to prevent water evaporation, and to contribute to soil humus formation; and (d) Waaphasa, or soil aeration through a favourable microclimate in the soil. For insect and pest management, ZBNF encourages the use of various Kashayams (decoctions) made with cow dung, cow urine, lilac and green chillies.

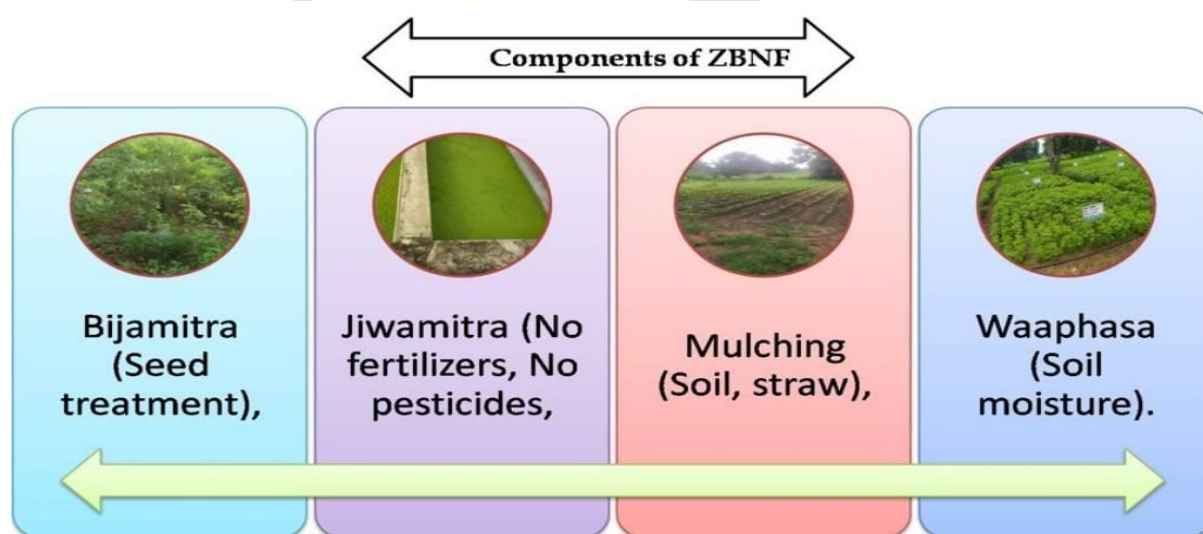


Figure1: Different components of Zero Budget Natural Farming

Need of ZBNF-

- The major characteristic of the Zero Budget Natural Farming is that the cost of production is zero and farmers do not have to buy any inputs to initiate this method of farming.
- Against the conventional methods, the Zero Budget Natural Farming used only 10 percent of the water that is used in the former method.
- As it promotes use of Indian local breed of cow for 30 acres of land, it makes it possible for farmer to earn profits earlier than expected.
- As the Zero Budget Natural Farming covers all kinds of agro-climatic areas, it is mentioned to be suitable for all kinds of crops
- The Zero Budget Farming is also seen to ease out the debt pressure on the farmers as they don't have to take loans to buy any inputs for their farming

Issues Related to ZBNF

- Sikkim (India's first organic state), has seen some decline in yields following conversion to organic farming.
- Many farmers have reverted to conventional farming after seeing their ZBNF returns drop after a few years.
- While ZBNF has definitely helped preserve soil fertility, its role in boosting productivity and farmers' income isn't conclusive yet.
- ZBNF advocates the need of an Indian breed cow, whose numbers are declining at a fast pace. According to Livestock Census, the country's total population of indigenous and nondescript cattle has dropped by 8.1%.

Criticism

- The concept of Zero Budget Natural Farming is not well-accepted by the scientific community. National Academy of Agricultural Sciences scientists mentioned that India cannot rely on Zero Budget Natural Farming as there is no scientific validation of the techniques used in Zero Budget Farming.
- As against the name suggests, the farming method does bear a minimum input cost
- The maintenance of the local cow breed is difficult as against those that are used currently

- Organic certification of the crops planted by the Zero Budget Natural Farming will face another hurdle and it might lead to a difficulty in selling the products to the organic brands.



Five government scheme promoting organic farming are as follow-

- Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY)
- Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North Eastern Region (MOVCDNER)
- Capital Investment Subsidy Scheme (CISS) under Soil Health Management Scheme
- National Mission on Oilseeds and Oil Palm (NMOOP)
- National Food Security Mission (NFSM)