

Financial Assistance for Natural Farming

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Indian Council of Agricultural Research has initiated study from 2020-21 through All India Network Programme on Natural Farming (previously AINP-Organic Farming) with 20 cooperating centres covering 16 States to evaluate 8 major cropping systems and develop package of practices under Natural farming besides evaluation of cropping systems under organic farming. The scheme involves 11 State Agricultural Universities, 8 ICAR institutes/centres and 1 deemed to be university.

Studies on the benefits of natural farming have shown that if natural farming is adopted with the right techniques and in a balanced manner, yields improve. The experiences of many farmers have also proven that improving soil health in the initial years improves crop quality, taste, and long-term yield. Furthermore, reducing chemical costs increases farmers' net profits. Mulching in natural farming helps maintain soil moisture, control weeds, and increase organic matter in the soil. This also increases the activity of soil microorganisms and improves soil health. Multi-cropping increases biodiversity in the field, reduces the incidence of pests and diseases, and improves nutrient utilization. The finding is as below;

- i. Under the network research, crop system-based natural farming packages have been developed for various states, such as groundnut + sesame – fennel + cabbage (Rajasthan and Gujarat), soybean + maize – wheat + mustard (Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh), and cassava (Kerala).
- ii. In Bajaura (Himachal Pradesh), Almora (Uttarakhand) and Gangtok (Sikkim), the average system productivity (soybean equivalent) of 6475 kg/ha/year was recorded in the soybean + maize – vegetable pea + coriander (green leaf) crop system (in 5 years) under completely natural farming, which was about 5 percent higher than organic farming/integrated crop management.
- iii. In Bhopal and Jabalpur (Madhya Pradesh) and Raipur (Chhattisgarh), the average system productivity (soybean equivalent) of 3346 kg/ha/year was recorded in the soybean + maize – wheat + mustard crop system (in 5 years), which was found to be equivalent to integrated crop management and organic farming.
- iv. S.K. In Nagar (Gujarat), Ajmer, and Udaipur (Rajasthan), the average system productivity (cowpea equivalent) of 9209 kg/ha/year was recorded in the cowpea + maize/peanut + sesame – fennel + cauliflower/cabbage cropping system (in 5 years) under complete natural farming. This was found to be comparable to integrated crop management.
- v. Natural farming (NF) management has shown a clear improvement in soil health indicators. Soil organic carbon (SOC) levels increased in natural farming fields over a period of 2–3 years. For example, in trials conducted in the Himalayan regions, SOC increased from approximately 0.90% to 1.15%. The number and diversity index of microorganisms in natural farming soils was found to be higher than in soils cultivated with chemical fertilizers. The abundance and balanced distribution of beneficial bacteria, fungi, and actinomycetes were

observed, indicating the development of a healthy soil ecosystem over time. This increase in organic matter and microorganisms in the soil under natural farming improves nutrient cycling and soil structure, laying a strong foundation for long-term soil fertility and crop production sustainability.

Further, NITI Aayog Assessment Report states that approximately 91.2% of farmers adopting natural farming experience, increased crop productivity and significantly improved soil health. 90.1% of farmers reported that adopting natural farming has reduced input costs (production costs).

Under the Mission, there is a provision for an Output Based Incentive of ₹4000/- per acre, per year to a farmer for 2 years (up to 1 acre per farmer). The incentive support is for farmers to practice Natural Farming, to train more farmers, upkeep of livestock, preparation of natural farming inputs including purchase of mixing & storage containers or purchase of inputs from Bio-input Resource Centers (BRCs) etc.

This information was given by Minister of State for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Shri Ramnath Thakur in a written reply in Lok Sabha today.

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(रिलीज़ आईडी: 2287252) आगंतुक पटल : 1269
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