Sustainable Agriculture: Let us make it our top most priority!

Agriculture in Punjab
Punjab's economy is predominantly agriculture based. While Punjab itself is a fertile region, the Green Revolution of the 1970s contributed significantly to its increased productivity. Unfortunately, it also resulted in the long-term degradation of the region's rich biodiversity. The excessive use of agrochemicals and lack of crop diversity have caused serious damage to the environment, affecting not only the soil but the quality of the underground water, which is also linked to the deterioration of health of the local inhabitants.

To promote solutions that work, The Nabha Foundation has established a Sustainable Agriculture Program for small and landless farmers in Nabha. The new, innovative & improved best practices in agriculture are refining agriculture practices in Nabha. The Foundation is also linking farmers with government schemes, Krishi Vigyan Kendra KVKs (agriculture technology extension centres) and other institutions to improve their overall socio-economic status.

Organic Certification Program
The Foundation promotes the conversion to organic agriculture in Nabha to advance rural development, sustainable livelihoods, food security and environmental integrity. To support the conversion process, and ensure sustainability, the Foundation provides technical and practical training on organic production, processing, certification and marketing best practices.

Formation of Farmer’s Group
The Foundation facilitates the formation of Farmer’s Group to promote alliances among farmers, increase economic security by reducing risks, creating and expanding business opportunities, obtaining control over the marketing of their products and to create opportunities to improve their lives and that of the community on their own terms.

A special group of organic farmers have been facilitated and trained by the Nabha Foundation.
Sustainable Agriculture in Mansa (Navi Disha Program, TSPL, CSR Initiative)

Sustainable Agriculture means production of food, plants and animal products using farming techniques that prove beneficial for the environment and promote economic profitability. Sustainable agriculture helps the farmers innovate and employ recycling methods.

TSPL's Navi Disha Program in Mansa is promoting sustainable agriculture methods and practices that are economically viable, environmentally sound and in the farmer's interest in the long run. The program, in its initial phase, aimed at creating awareness and know-how among farmers across Mansa. It also promoted best practices that reduced chemical input and saved farmers' cost of production while keeping the yield constant.

In its two years of operation, the program promoted sustainable agriculture to farmers across 24 villages in Mansa, covering over 3000 farmers through awareness camps and pest management trainings.

These camps initiated the discussion regarding factors affecting the condition of soil and its impact on the crops, the excessive use of chemicals and benefits of techniques like crop rotation, inter-cropping and making bio-fertilizers. In order to train even then it was a mix of organic and non-organic in my kitchen and I was okay with it.

It was only very recently, when we had to start solids for my 6-month old baby that the idea of chemicals in the food and other harmful adulterations gave us a jolt. We thought about all that we have done to keep him safe and secure, and what's the meaning if we are feeding him chemically loaded food. This changed the way we looked at what we eat and where it is coming from. Even though the prices are slightly higher as compared to the regular products, it is a small price to pay in the long run keeping our health in mind. Since then, I have been using only organic pulses, dalia, turmeric and even the vegetables that we give him come from the organic kitchen gardens of one of the farmers in Nabha. I may not be able to keep my baby safe from everything forever, but I will do all that is possible and best for him to keep him healthy.

"My Say"

A consumer's perspective on chemical free, organic food - Mansi talks about her reasons for switching to organic products...

Parents would do anything for their child and one understands the extent of this only once they become a parent themselves. I had always been a sceptic whenever someone would talk about organic food and never made an extra effort to buy organic products. Every time it was pointed out by our parents that we should watch what we eat, I would brush it off as a matter of convenience. So when we moved to Nabha, organic food was literally available at the door step and it was genuinely organic (I had met the farmer who was growing it and had closely assessed his work), we ran out of excuses and started using a few products like pulses, wheat flour and jaggery powder. The difference in the taste and cooking was remarkable but...
farmers on these practices, two model farms were also developed. Additionally, to help farmers tackle specific soil and water issues in the area, 260 soil and 175 water samples were tested and results shared with farmers.

The program is currently working with 705 farmers covering over 3500 acres of land under chemical input reduction. These farmers reduced their cost of input by an average of Rs. 12,600/- per farmer as compared to previous year and no farmer recorded a loss of yield.

The Foundation also works to connect farmers with various Government Schemes to empower them.

Our continued effort is to improve and widen the below impact:

- Empower producers to combat limitations created by small land sizes
- Strengthen their capability to identify, select and utilize better agriculture practices including crop diversification
- Improve local management and marketing skills and build technical know how
- Built a eco-system that encourages the farmers to find solutions that work and take control of their future
- Water conservation & reduction of chemicals
- Improved soil condition

“What Makes Me Happy”

“A dignified, optimistic life being led by the HIV positive sex workers” – Community Health Program Team

She got married at the age of 16. Her husband left her after a few years and she came back to her parents’ house. She started working as a house help but the money was not enough to support the family of three sisters, a brother and ailing parents. Life became tough and she finally took up the profession very common in the region and became a sex worker.

She got in touch with the Nabha Foundation, Community Health Program (CHP) team after falling sick and got her first HIV test done at the age of 22, the test came out to be positive. After 6 months, she was put on ART (Anti Retroviral Therapy/Treatment). Eventually her health got better and she was helped in finding work as a house help. She continued to take the medicines for 2 years. 2 years later, she was misled by one of her clients who proposed to marry her, she left Nabha as a result and stopped taking ART.

After 7-8 months she came back to Nabha and met with our peer educators as her health had deteriorated. The peer educators took her to the hospital and got her tests. Her CD4 count was very low and it was also found that she was 5 months pregnant. Due to this she was again put on ART.

The CHP team regularly monitored her pregnancy, along with the counselors from Mata Kaushalya hospital. Her concern for the HIV status of her unborn child, caused a lot of mental stress to her. Regular counseling and monitoring helped her get through it.

She delivered a baby boy. The mother and the baby were under constant care of the CHP team. The team monitored and sponsored her tests, medicines, milk for the baby and also guided her on how to raise and take care of the baby so that the probability of the baby being HIV positive was mitigated. The baby was tested for HIV after 18 months, the result came out to be negative. It was a day of joy and celebration for the mother and the CHP team. Today she is 27 years and has started work again as a house help. The program supports her by providing timely tests, medicines and food and with regular counseling and awareness sessions, she has learned to take good decisions for herself.

We will carry this forward in the next issue featuring our Community Health Program (CHP)
Sustainable Agriculture Program