

Promoting Organic Agriculture



The most noticeable effect of climate change in Rajasthan is the frequent droughts, and without rain, agriculture suffers. Ground water is reducing daily and biomass in the soil has fallen by up to 75%. In an effort to maintain the productivity of the soil, farmers are using more and more pesticides and insecticides, together with mechanical farming methods. These come at a high cost, both financially and to the health of the fields and local community.

On the other hand, organic farming has low input costs and therefore greater profits by using local, natural resources such as ash, cow urine and the neem tree instead of expensive chemical fertilisers. Farmers feel less consumed by debt and if the monsoon fails they are less likely to resort to suicide. It provides a sustainable model for the future of agriculture in Rajasthan, mitigating the effects of climate change whilst avoiding damaging chemicals.

GVNML uses local model farms to provide inspiration to other families and illustrate the benefits of turning organic. We discuss the ethos of the scheme with farmers, prepare them to accept organic agriculture then provide support for the conversion. Seeds are provided, sometimes subsidised by the government, and we give guidance for maintaining the land. Through workshops and demonstrations we teach locals how to recycle farm waste; the benefits of using traditional bullocks and carts to plough rather than expensive tractors which also disrupt the soil's natural composition; and combining plants as natural insecticides.

Farms which have achieved organic commodity certification are able to sell their produce at higher prices. Many are working towards full certification, which takes 10 years from the point of conversion.

GVNML has been promoting organic agriculture for the last five years- 150 families in nine villages are now farming organically. ITC have recently partnered with us for a three year corporate social responsibility project working with 12 villages in the Osian area of Jodhpur. This funding will enable us to increase our concentration of awareness raising activities, allow consultation with organic experts and more collaboration between producers and suppliers.

Organic agriculture is changing lives in Rajasthan. Barren, unproductive fields are gradually becoming fertile and villagers are safe from the harmful effects of fertilisers. Farming has again become a viable option to secure livelihoods, so less people are migrating to the cities to earn a living.