

Kerala: Food Security Army

“Sir, Food Security Army is at your service”



Background & Objectives

“The Wadakkanchery regiment of Food Security Army (FSA) is at your service, Sir”, the Regiment Commandant of Wadakkanchery Food Security Army and his men with their artillery of agro machinery is reporting at the door step of the farmer to receive instructions for execution of works on his farm. Wadakkanchery is a village which is largely agricultural. The FSA has the technical knowledge of farming operations and is trained to carry those out with modern agro machinery. They are attired in ‘FSA’ uniform and are ready to render services round the clock. Their services can be sought through mobile phones. They are the service providers for farming activities - the ‘guardian’ of food security of the country.

In Kerala, over the last four decades, there has been a steady decline in the number of people available for or willing to work in the fields with nearly 12 lakh workers having left the

agrarian sector. The primary reasons for this phenomenon are migration of the younger generation away from the State and from the agriculture sector due to the strenuous nature of the work. Migrant workers from other States were available, but their wages were exorbitant as it vied with employment opportunities in other, more lucrative sectors. Farmers were increasingly opting out of cultivation as it was just not economically viable.

How then, was the State to sustain seasonal agrarian activities? How to get people engaged in the noble profession of farming? How could social security, social respect, and self esteem be brought back to this profession? How to prevent fertile paddy fields from turning into fallow land? How would the food security of the State and the country be ensured if the current trend was to continue?

Intervention

Three years ago the Government of Kerala thought of an innovative idea to address this issue. The call of the hour was to create an able service provider for the farmer. The State visualised establishing a corps of highly disciplined and dedicated personnel, similar to the army, to work on farms to produce food and ensure food security for the country. This would be the “Food Security Army” (FSA)! They would be trained for punctuality, discipline, dedication and commitment, similar to military training. They would have first-hand experience in operating all agro machinery in actual field conditions. They would have a distinctive dress code and follow good work ethics.



The platform to translate this vision into reality was provided by the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana. The project had three phases. The first phase comprised of putting in place a veritable artillery of new generation agro-machinery that is user friendly, health and life caring and drudgery removing and establishing a quality training hall that is inspiring and motivating. The project was implemented during 2008-10. Machinery worth Rs.100 lakhs was procured and used for training. Around 2200 people were trained for the FSA, among them 1370 men and 830 women from 80 villages. An accreditation ceremony, akin to the passing out parade was organised on the occasion of the successful completion of the training process.



The second phase involved large scale demonstrations of operations of the FSA, to convince the farmer of the competence and usefulness of the FSA. In the process the FSA would gather valuable field experience, earn confidence and esteem and create goodwill among the public. This phase was drawn up and implemented during 2009-11.

The third phase was the actual creation of FSA service centres at village level. The FSA gets first hand experiential learning of hardware aspects, e.g., repair, service and operation of agro machinery and masters the art of crop production using machinery. They are organized to work in groups termed "Agro Machinery Operation Service Centres". 23 such service centres have already been registered to operate at village level, and many more are in the process. The Agro Machinery Operation Service Centres provide agro machinery operation services on contract basis to farmers on demand. The service charges are fixed and notified. The services are guaranteed and timely as per contract. The operational services include, land preparation, planting, inter cultivation operations, harvesting and post harvest handling and several such other operations using agro machinery for paddy and other crops.

The total outlay of Rs 250.60 lakhs for the 3 phases was met from RKVY allocation of the State.



Outcome

Latha Raveendran, Commandant of 'Parappur Regiment' says "Before joining FSA, my daily income was Rs. 80/- per day, that too seasonal. Now it is more than Rs. 700/- per day, I don't have holidays". She commands a 43-member regiment which collects more than Rs. 50 lakhs annually in service charges. "I have never seen currency worth lakhs before", she says.

Suresh, Commandant of Wadakkanchery Regiment tells, "The entire 4250 acres of paddy in Wadakkanchery is now completely mechanized. Green Army is rendering the service. All the 110 *padasekharams* (groups of paddy farmers) have contracted with us. The business is over Rs. 100 lakhs".

Indira Lawrance from Kodakara Regiment says "Last season the entire work in 10 acres of barren land was contracted for paddy cultivation from Panchayath and the service charge received was Rs. 14,000/- per acre". Indira also provides services of coconut climbing and is a Master Trainer for the FSA



Latha, Suresh and Indira are role models of FSA. Several Lathas, Indiras & Sureshs have been created by RKVY.

President of State *Kole* land farmers Sri. Kochu Muhammed openly admits. “When the idea of Food Security Army was mooted, I thought it will be a flop. But, now I understand that it is an inevitable part of society for food security”. Many echo his sentiments.

Creation of the FSA was a unique venture for bringing back prosperity in the agrarian sector and creating an invaluable human resource dedicated to this sector. It provided an opportunity for the youth to serve the country. The scope of the FSA is spreading from village to village in Kerala and also to other states. Farmers feel secure having the FSA to provide essential services round the clock. Land hitherto left fallow is slowly coming back under cultivation. RKVY has enabled quality and assured agricultural services at the door steps of the rural population.

The slogan being raised yet again is “Jai Jawan Jai Kisan”!!