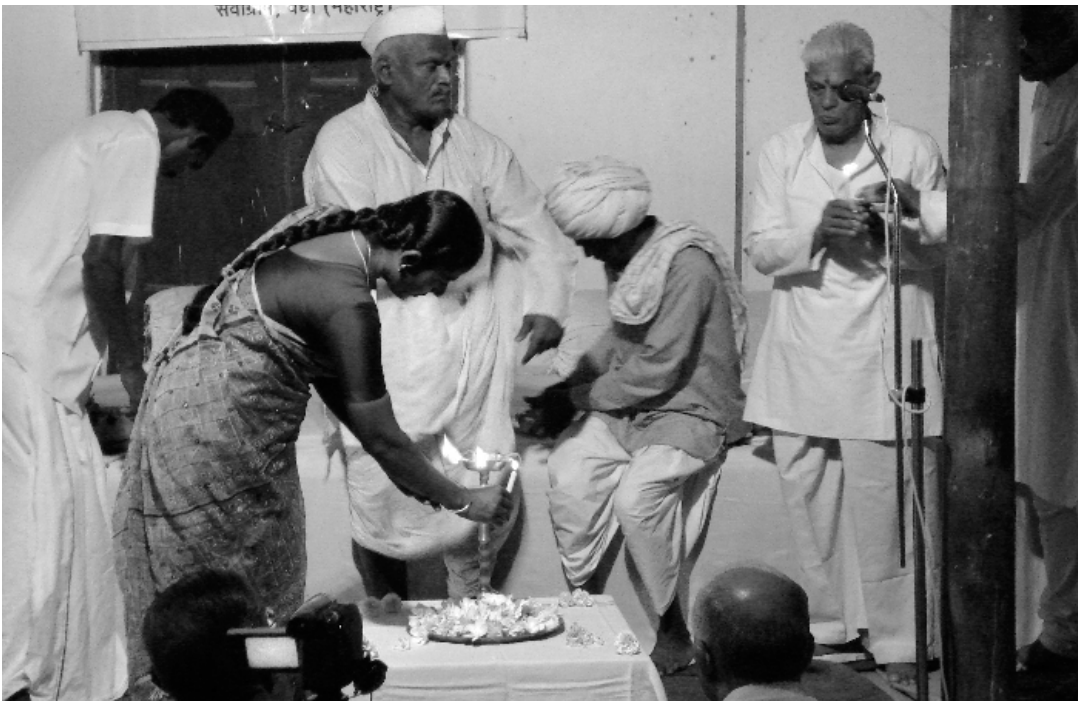


Huge Turnout for OFAI's Organic Farmers' Meet in Wardha

By Preeti Joshi



Organic farmers inaugurate the convention, by lighting the lamp. Earlier, they were presented with collections of organic seed brought from various states.

The first National Convention of the Organic Farming Association of India ran successfully over three days in November 2006 at Sewagram Ashram, Wardha. (Pictures of the event are at page 3.)

The convention was organized by OFAI in collaboration with other voluntary organizations like the Maharashtra Organic Farming Association (MOFF), Pune; Dharamitra, Wardha; Chetna Vikas, Wardha, Nai Taleem and Ashram Pratisthan, Sewagram. Over 800 participant farmers and visitors from about 12 states in India (Maharashtra, Goa, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka and Orissa) came for the event.

The national convention was inaugurated by twelve individual farmers from each of the twelve states. D. D. Bharamagoudra, OFAI President, gave the inaugural address, apprising the participants of the work of the association and on the challenges faced by organic farmers in India. Claude Alvares, Secretary of the association and also director of its central secretariat, highlighted the activities undertaken by OFAI over the past two years.

After the inauguration, the convention was handed over to the participants to conduct parallel sessions were in the open, under the trees. In unique sessions, organic farmers from Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu, Gujarat, Kerala, Karnataka, etc., carried out practical demonstrations of successful organic farming techniques like the manufacture and use of Panchagavya, seed treatment, biological insect control, biodynamic compost production,

and the conservation and preservation of different varieties of local seeds.

Farmers from Gujarat displayed well illustrated posters which indicated the limitations of chemical farming, its threats to farmers, their fields and health and the benefits from organic farming.

This was followed by a technical session on how organic farmers could successfully tackle the menace of genetically modified (GM) seeds. Ms. Kavitha Karunganti of the Centre of Sustainable Agriculture, Hyderabad, made a careful presentation of the issues surrounding genetic engineering (which was translated simultaneously in six different languages).

P. Babu from ICRA, Bangalore initiated a discussion on impact of the process of globalization and the WTO regime on the status of farming in India. Ashok Bang from Chetna Vilkas, Wardha and Vijay Jawandhia from the Shetkari Sanghatana spearheaded the discussions over government policies that aimed to promote globalisation even when it threatened the livelihood of India's farmers.

On 7th November, additional group discussions in parallel sessions were organized on different subjects like seed preservation, farmers suicides in Vidharbha, alternative education for the children of organic farmers, use and function of microbiological nutrient management in organic farming practices in rainfed areas.

During the session on seed conservation, the rural women's group of the Deccan Development Society, Hyderabad, presented the efforts made by

its members in developing local level 'Gene Banks' through conservation of the seeds of traditional varieties of crops and their promotion among farmers. This endeavour helped them to maintain adequate stocks of their own seeds through which they could attain complete self reliance in their villages.

Mrs. Revathi, OFAI Tamilnadu state secretariat, narrated her experience from the tsunami-affected coastal belt where approximately 18 lakh hectares of land had been rendered barren and unproductive due to the earlier introduction of dwarf varieties of paddy. She mentioned that earlier a local paddy variety known as 'Mandumulki' was grown which was very tall, could survive even under heavy rains and could also withstand waterlogged conditions. Farmers in this area in fact traditionally used boats to harvest this type of paddy. Such varieties had completely disappeared due to the invasion (or uncritical introduction) of hybrid paddy varieties. However, she said, the farmers of Tamilnadu are now getting actively involved in the promotion of organic farming.

Deepika from Auroville displayed about 90 varieties of seeds of vegetables to be grown in kitchen gardens and also explained how to maintain the purity of these varieties.

In the evening session, Claude Alvares introduced the Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) for organic certification of OFAI farmers.

For dinner that evening, the women from DDS served eighteen different kinds of organic foods which were relished by the participants.

Both evenings of the convention were dedicated to cultural events put up by delegates and professional troupes, Mr. Mahesh Pawar of 'Rashikashraya', a cultural group from Ghatanji, kept the audience roaring with amusement with their theatrics on organic and chemical farming. A group of Kerala children from the Sarang travelling school put up a heart-wrenching, silent drama depicting the effects of pesticides on the health of farmers.

On the third day of the convention, field visits of all the participating farmers from various parts of the country were organized to the farms of some innovative and pioneering organic farmers in the district. Farms visited include those of Subhash Sharma, Dorli; Raosaheb Dagadkar; Hirapur; Prakash Kochar, Hinganghat; Dhyaneswar Dhage and Narendra Pokle, Akoli; Gashyam Chopde, Mandwa and Sandeep Gangle, Umri. Two groups of farmers also visited the field demonstration stations of Dharamitra and Chetna Vikas, both organic farming institutions located in Wardha. (Both are technical resource centres of OFAI.)

The convention boosted the confidence of the organic farmers in the country and provided a new and enthusiastic direction to the organic farming community as a whole.

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D.D. BHARAMAGOUDRA

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Kapil Shah (contact person)

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Colony, Pune 411016 Maharashtra 400 016
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Email: drcsc@vsnl.com / enre_sc@vsnl.net

Forthcoming Agendas**PGS ORGANIC INDIA MEETING**

The second meeting (GOA II) of the PGS Organic India National Council will be held in Goa at Panaji from April 16-18, 2006. (The first meeting was held in September 2006, also in Goa.)

Local host is the Organic Farming Association of India central secretariat.

The meeting is to review the work done by the various organisations that are part of the National Council and to approve the different elements of the scheme, including the all-India

Those who would like to attend the Goa II meeting will have to get permission from the convenor (Joy Daniel) at the following address (since the number of participants is restricted to 20 persons):

Joy Daniels,
Institute for Integrated Rural Development
54, Kanchan Nagar
Nakshatrawadi
Aurangabad - 431002
Maharashtra, INDIA
Tel.: +91-240-2376336, 2376828
Fax: +91-240-2376866
Mobile: +91-9850676145,
Email: jdaniel@iird.org.in

Important Announcement

A 23-minute video-film of the Wardha Organic Farming Convention is available for a nominal cost of Rs.50. The film was prepared by the sons of two pioneering organic farmers: Gautham Sarang and Chinmay Futane. You can order it either from the central secretariat or your own state secretariat.

ABOUT THE ORGANIC FARMING ASSOCIATION OF INDIA (OFAI) WEBSITE

Members of OFAI are invited to visit the updated website of the Association (www.ofai.org). The new website has been designed by Gautham Sarang and is quickly becoming the most comprehensive website on organic farming in India.

The updated website contains all necessary details about OFAI. One special feature is that one can find all the names of the members of the association, statewise, and other relevant information including offices of OFAI in different parts of the country and details of the National Steering Committee and State Committees.

The Labelling Scheme has also been uploaded to the site and any person now visiting the site can copy the OFAI standards document, the National Standards document (NSOP), the IFOAM standards, list of OFAI farm appraisers and full details of the organic labelling scheme (third party and PGS). The site will soon host the list of approved organic farms and green shops marketing organic produce.

Organic farmers can find details of all forthcoming events or meetings on organic farming. A special page has been created for the anti-GM campaign which is inde-

pendently handled by Revathi and Ram (Samanvaya). The site also contains new features providing links to all other organic farming sites in the country. Since OFAI is multilingual, copies of bulletins on organic farming in different languages are being made available. The latest issue of 'Jatan' in Gujarati is already on the website.

Organic farmers can also access the Other India Bookstore's collection of organic farming titles, copies of the The Living Field newsletter and articles written by organic farmers and other experts on issues related to organic farming, GMOs, etc.



Study visit to an organic farm in Wardha district in progress. Farmers were very excited with the things they saw



Another discussion on organic farming in progress, with Kapil Shah, Pradip Nigam and D. D. Bharamagoudra guiding the proceedings

Sarang children put up a wonderful theatrical performance on pesticides and the green revolution and impacts on health



OFAI President D. D. Bharamagoudra (an dryland farmer) welcomes the participants to the organic convention

PICTURES OF OFAI'S ORGANIC FARMING CONVENTION AT SEWAGRAM, WARDHA



DDS videographer preparing for action. Mostly village women handle cameras for DDS programmes and they do an impressive job



Agricultural graduates from Mexico demonstrate how to make a mud base for seedlings in place of plastic bags.



Exchange of information on organic/indigenous seeds, under a large banyan tree.



Brilliant organic farmer Subhash Sharma demonstrates preparation of organic nutrients on his farm during the farmers' study tour.



Organic Farming News

Farmers burn down genetically engineered crops in Punjab: Bhatiya Kisan Union leads flaming army



Bharatiya Kisan Union members prevent possible contamination from a GM rice plot in Haryana by dousing the fields containing the crop in flames.

Karnal, October 28, 2006: Over 500 activists of Bharatiya Kisan Union [BKU] and scores of villagers of Rampura village in Karnal district of Haryana destroyed a GM Rice plot in Haryana to prevent contamination from the rice plot and to ensure that DBT guidelines are not flouted. The BKU activists who went to investigate the trial in Rampura village found out that the farmer, who had leased out his land to Mahyco for Rs. 15,000/- for two acres had not been informed by the company about what kind of seeds are going to be sown on his land. Similarly, the panchayat head has not been given the full details of the trial.

The way trials are conducted in the country is about playing with the ignorance of the farmers as this case shows. Given the unreliable track record of the company and the regulators in preventing contamination from the trial plots into the supply chain where unwary consumers are eating untested products, we had to ensure that such a thing does not happen from this trial. This is all the more dangerous in a basmati-rice growing belt of the country. We have now ensured that the DBT guidelines regarding destruction of GM plant material in the trial are not flouted", said Mr Rakesh Tikait, spokesperson of Bhartiya Kisan Union.

GM trial plots have become the biggest source of contamination all over the world and regular scandals about untested and uncleared [by regulation] products entering the consumption chain have become routine now. Recent scandals include GM rice contamination in the US and China. India also witnessed several contamination scandals in connection with GM crop trials including the illegal proliferation of Bt Cotton much before the regulatory authorities allowed its cultivation. Civil society investigations have pointed out again and again that material including seed material is allowed to get into the supply chain due to lax or even absent monitoring of trials by the regulators. Mr Gurnam Singh, President, Haryana unit of Bhartiya Kisan Union stressed that given the

economic and trade potential of Basmati rice from this belt, it is disastrous for GM rice trials to be conducted, that too secretly.

TN farmers affected by BT Cotton Failure compensated in cash

BT cotton dealers Mahyco in India, have offered compensation to 125 of Omalur and Kadayampatty areas of Tamilnadu affected by cultivation of BT cotton, during a function held in Poosaripatty near Omalur on Sunday.

State Agriculture Minister, Veerapandy S Arumugam distributed compensation of Rs9.86 lakh to 88 farmers yesterday. About 125 farmers of Omalur and Kadayampatty reported huge losses in cultivation of Mahyco BT cotton seeds in over 198 acres. On State Agriculture Minister Veerapandy S Arumugam's instructions, Tamil Nadu Agriculture University (TNAU) scientists, several NGO's and environmental groups conducted studies to find causes for failure of Mahyco supplied BT cotton seeds in the region. TNAU studies reported that variation in soil condition was the major cause for BT seeds failure.

State Government convinced Mahyco to pay compensation of Rs 5000 per acre to affected farmers and asked TNAU officials and Mahyco staff to extend necessary technical support to farmers before cultivation.

FARMER'S DAY RALLY SHAKES GOVERNMENT IN TAMILNADU

The Farmer's Day Declaration (published alongside) was adopted at a mammoth rally of farmers, consumer activists and anti-GM activist organizations on December 23, 2006. Farmers' organizations and activist groups from Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Pondicherry, Maharashtra and Chattisgarh participated in the event which included a seminar, rally and public meeting.

Farmers' organizations affiliated to all major political parties, Federation of the Consumer Organizations of Tamilnadu and Pondicherry (FEDCOT), Tamilnadu Organic Agriculturists' Movement, (TNOAM), CREATE Trust, SEVA Trust, Tamilnadu Vanihar Sangangalin Peravai, Federation of Rice Traders Association, Thanal (Kerala), Centre for Sustainable Agriculture (Andhra Pradesh), Nagarika Seva Trust (Karnataka), Karnataka Rajya Rytha Sangha (KRRS) and ICRA (Karnataka) supported these events.

Thiru G Nammalvar, President, Tamilnadu Organic Agriculturists Movement, presided over the meeting. Dr Devinder Sharma, Food & Trade Expert from New Delhi and Prof. Duraisingham, Chairman, Consumer Council of India delivered special lectures. Thiru T Vellayan, President, Tamilnadu Vanihar Sangangalin Peravai delivered the inaugural address. Ms Kavitha Kuruganti from CSA in Andhra Pradesh, Mr Vijay Jawandhia from Shetkari Sanghatan in Maharashtra, Ms S Usha from Thanal in Kerala and Sri Ranjan Rao Yerdoor from NST in Karnataka took part in the seminar. Mrs S Bakya Lakshmi, General Secretary, FEDCOT, Mr S Peer Mohammed, Chairman, FEDCOT, Mr S Susai Michael, Executive Secretary of SEVA Trust, Mr R Jayaram, Training Director of CREATE, Mr G Thirunavukkarasu, Vice-President, TNOAM also participated.

Mr K Chellamuthu, Tamizhaga Uzhavar Uzhapalar Sangam, spoke about why farmers had to destroy a Bt Rice trial field in Tamil Nadu.

The seminar welcomed the decision of Tamil Nadu state government to bring in a legislation to ban all GM crop trials and passed a resolution demanding a GM-free India.

OFAI has also endorsed the declaration.

Keeping in mind various issues including food sovereignty and trade security, the forum also demanded:

- Immediate stoppage of all research and trials of GM crops in India;
- No GM seeds and foods should be allowed to be imported into the country;
- The approach for the future of Indian agriculture should be based on ecological and sustainable farming.

OFAI'S ANTI-GM CAMPAIGN

People who wish to join OFAI's anti-GM campaign are welcome to come on board. The campaign is managed by Ramasubramaniam (Samanvaya, Chennai), M. Revathi (Nagapattinam) and D.D. Bharamagoudra (Belgaum). Samanvaya phones: 044-25512040; 09444957781
Email: chief@samanvaya.com

DECLARATION

National Farmers' Day - Thanjavur, December 23rd 2006

In order to safeguard our land, people, food security and food sovereignty, representatives of different farmers' organisations, trade unions, consumer fora, self-help groups and non-government organizations belonging to South India declare the following on National Farmers' Day on December 23rd 2006:

Our country, after 60 years of freedom and development is today facing a serious crisis related to food security and national sovereignty. The Prime Minister has officially acknowledged that India is faced with a terrible agrarian crisis. Further, the report of the Chairman of National Farmers' Commission, Dr M S Swaminathan, describes the bleak national situation related to farming communities in the country.

Sixty-five percent of our population consists of farmers whose livelihood base is being systematically destroyed. The regions which were considered the heartland of Green Revolution have been subjected to severe environmental degradation and exploitation of natural resources. The Green Revolution has collapsed. The lack of vision and unmindful implementation of the first Green Revolution has destroyed the ecological balance, made farming unsustainable and contaminated the food, air and the drinking water of all Indians. Now, the country faces the threat of a second Green Revolution designed by America. In this context, Multi-National Companies like Monsanto, supported by the Government of India, are taking control over our seed and food in the name of Indo-US Knowledge Initiative on Agriculture, which would ostensibly usher in the Second Green Revolution. Gene robbery by agri-corporations will further be legitimized through this bilateral deal between India and the US, though public-private partnerships with our agriculture research & education establishment.

In this context, introduction of Genetically Engineered crops poses a serious threat to our environment, farm economy, health of Indians and to our national food sovereignty.

Consider this: Trials conducted in UK reveal that the cultivation of GE organisms has been found to damage the wildlife. Reports are available from different countries on the threat of contamination of indigenous varieties. Throughout the world, consumer preferences are against GE in food - only 21 countries across the world have approved the planting of GM crops, almost 15 years of their initial development. Even this consists of only traits of insect and herbicide resistance in four main crops - cotton, soybean, maize and canola. 94% of the World GE crops are grown in just four countries (USA, Argentina, Canada and China). 91% of GE seed is made and owned by one company called Monsanto. 27 of 30 EU top retailers have a non-GE policy throughout the EU. What is important to note that there is no GM crop in the world which has contributed to increase in crop productivity. Evidence is in fact to the contrary, showing that yields of GM crops are actually lower than conventional crops. There is also growing evidence of serious health hazards for both animals and human beings.

GE crops also come with a threat on the Intellectual Property Rights front. These crops are PATENTED - this means that saving, re-sowing and exchanging seeds will be illegal. This is an unacceptable violation of farmers' rights. The technology along with the IPR regime and strong corporate control jeopardizes the primary livelihood of millions of Indians. It also seriously threatens the national food security and sovereignty. GE has potential hazards for everybody except the companies who own and sell the seeds.

On the other hand, the efforts taken by farmers and NGOs towards ecological and sustainable farming methods have proved to be farmer-centric, viable and sustainable. This has been acknowledged by the Central and State Governments of India.

On behalf of farmers, consumers and traders of this country, this forum reiterates the right of all Indians to a GM-Free India. It demands that the State and Central Governments declare India as a GM-Free country to retain our food security, food sovereignty, bio-diversity and trade security. We demand immediate stoppage of all experimentation on GM crops and animals. Governments should promote and support adoption of ecological & sustainable ways of farming as the only way forward.



Courtesy: Greenpeace India

OFAI-MOFF Train UP farmers in Organic Farming

OFAI and MOFF helped organize a study tour-cum-training programme for UP farmers desiring to convert to organic farming in the month of January 2007.

The UP farmers were organized for the visit by Anil Rana of the Janhit Foundation.

The 23 UP farmers' team led by Shri Devpalji from the Janhit foundation were welcomed by MOFF staff at the Pune Railway Station on 16th Jan, 2007.

They were first addressed by Shri. Manohar Parchureji at the place they were put up. The following day they visited the organic sugarcane and wheat plots of Shri. Kantila Nalge, Shri. Sanjay Thorat and three other farmers. Parchure accompanied them till noon. The visitors were quite impressed with the sugarcane crop planted at 8 to 12 feet distance intercropped with gram, maize, wheat, turmeric and chily crops in the Shirur Tehsil of Pune district.

Though a tour was scheduled for Ahmednagar district the following day, the farmers showed greater interest in discussing matters with Manohar Parchure, especially his farm where plantation crops are experimented with dose spacing and minimal water requirements. The farmers visited Agriculture Research Institute, Pune and also the Acharya Rajesh farm.

Shri. Suresh Desai Bedkihal, Karnataka, a member of OFAI's faculty, addressed the visitors on the 19th with a CD presentation. Thereafter, there were interactions with Shri. Sanjay Deshmukh of NOCA and Shri. Vikram Bokey discussed. The farmers also visited Visitors MITCON's biofertilizer and bioagent laboratory in the evening.

They returned to UP on 20 January morning, much pleased with the study tour and with organic farming in Maharashtra.

~ From Diliprao Deshmukh Baradkar,
Vice Chairman, MOFF

Hindi edition of *The Living Field* published

It's official. Shashya Shyamala, the Hindi language edition of *The Living Field* has appeared in January 2007. Shashya Shyamala is being edited by Dr Bharatendu Prakash, an organic farming expert who is presently also Director of the Vigyan Shiksha Kendra, Banda, UP.

Dr Prakash brings to his new calling experience of more than 20 years in organic farming. Vigyan Shiksha Kendra now routinely organises organic farming courses supported by OFAI.

The Hindi edition of the journal will meet a long standing need of the organic farmers of northern belt of India for information, and advice and sharing on organic farming techniques and news of organic farming markets etc.

OFAI Training Workshop on Microbials for Organic Agriculture

OFAI has recently made a proposal to the National Centre of Organic Farming, Bhubaneswar, for a joint training course on the preparation of on farm microbial cultures for use by organic farmers in the states of Orissa, West Bengal and Bihar.

Though the workshop was originally scheduled for March 2007, it will now actually be held in the monsoon period. Venue will be Bhubaneswar. Members interested should keep in touch with the central secretariat for the final dates and exact venue.

It is also proposed to impart training to the participants in the use of biofertilisers.

Bhrantendu Prakash and Manohar Parchure have confirmed they will be part of the faculty for the course, which will comprise experienced and trained organic farmers from various parts of the country.

Workshop on Special Curriculum for Education of Rural Kids

The working group set up under the leadership of Gopalkrishnan and Vijayalaksmi from Sarang, Kerala, is proposing a meeting in March or April this year to discuss the first draft of the rural curriculum concept it has drawn up for those children of farmers who do not wish to go to school, but want to do intelligent agriculture, assist their parents, and also be able, without going to formal school, to pass High School examinations and enter University, if necessary.

Those who wish to participate in the meetings may write to the central secretariat. Those only casually interested may not attend, as the meetings will remain small and will compose largely of participants who are themselves already working with children who have walked out of school or have integrated farming activities within their school curriculum.

The concept note prepared by Gopalkrishnan and Vijayalaksmi is being uploaded to the OFAI website. Those who do not have access to email can always phone or write to the OFAI office for a copy which will be sent to them by post.

This is one of the most serious tasks taken up by OFAI and it is being done at the express request of some organic farmers who are worried that the urban oriented schooling system which already conveys severe prejudice against agriculture may destroy their children's interest in organic farming altogether.

Beware! Your subscription to *The Living Field* may expire with this issue!

RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP!!

Your subscription to *The Living Field* comes free with your membership of OFAI. You may be one of those members whose membership will come to an end on March 31, 2007 unless you renew.

If you do not renew your membership of OFAI you will not receive *The Living Field* and this means you will lose an important means of keeping in touch with news and other events relating to organic farming in India and the rest of the world.

OFAI permits payment of membership fees for five years at one go. Save yourselves the worry and send us a five year membership and get *The Living Field* free for the next five years!

It costs to edit, print and publish *The Living Field* newsletter. Postage alone come to Rs.4 per issue. We therefore need the assistance from our members in the form of membership fees if the newsletter is to survive.

You can send your membership to OFAI either in postage stamps, or by M.O., or by cheque or dd. Or if you have a UTI bank in your village or town, simply deposit the membership in our account, with the following details:

OFAI 180010100029917

In case you are doing this, please send us a post card or email, informing us on which date you deposited the amount and in which branch. Many thanks!

OFAI Central Secretariat

Meeting on Organic Coconut

The International Coconut Summit will be held in Kochi in May. There will be a special session on Organic Coconut Production on 9th May, 2007. Claude Alvares will inaugurate the session. Sultan Ismail from OFAI is also scheduled to speak. Those wanting to attend should contact P.K. Thampan (an advisor to OFAI) at the following address or email id:

PGS Organic India Launches PGS-based Organic Labelling

The PGS Organic India National Council has opened pilot scale experimentation of the PGS organic labelling system promoted by both IFOAM, FAO and the Government of India.

The PGS system was discussed and approved at the Goa meeting organised by FAO in September 2006. The fourteen member, non-governmental team that took charge of the PGS Organic India Council (and which included OFAI) decided that farmers groups could start the scheme if they had access to the basic documentation required by the scheme.

The fourteen members of the PGS Organic India council include, besides OFAI, the Keystone Foundation, the IIRD, INHERE, etc.

The Council nominated Claude Alvares from OFAI, Mathew from Keystone Foundation and Joy Daniel from IIRD to a three member group that would meet and formalise the basic documents required. The three member group has completed the task and the documents have been sent to all the 14 supporting organisations.

For further liaison work on the project, Joy Daniel has been selected by the three member group to act as coordinator till the meeting in April in Goa. OFAI has once again been given the responsibility of hosting GOA II, which will approve other aspects of the PGS Organic India system.

The PGS basic documents have already been translated into Marathi, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu and Hindi. More states are expected to follow suit.

PGS Organic India has its own website where interested organisations who want to participate can download the necessary documentation and forms. These can also be downloaded from the OFAI website: www.ofai.org.

The most enthusiastic about the PGS implementation are the organic farmers themselves. After many years of waiting, they have a system designed to their needs and which is based on their own organic farming experience which is considerable. The PGS is also extremely low-cost when compared with conventional third party systems which only well-off farmers and corporates can afford. A good deal of corruption has also entered the third-party system.

OFAI has already stated it does not accept a third-party system based on persons who do not have experience in organic farming. Outside policing has led to widespread corruption.

OFAI's own third-party system operates on a system of appraisals carried out only by trained and experienced organic farmers. The PGS version is based on group monitoring by farmers in various localities who could get de-recognised as a full group if any irregularities are noticed by supervisory staff from the Regional Councils or the National Council.

Journal on Organic Farming from NCOF

For many farmers who do not know, the National Centre of Organic Farming (NCOF) regularly publishes a journal on organic farming. You can get a copy of the journal by writing to:

National Centre of Organic Farming
CGO Complex II,
Kamla Nehru Nagar,
Ghaziabad 201002 UP

No subscription rate is mentioned so the newsletter is sent complimentary upon request.

New perspectives from farmers going organic

Claude Alvares, Director of the Central Secretariat of OFAI, was invited to deliver the keynote address at the ICCO- COA Conference on organic farming in Bangalore in November. Excerpts from his remarks:

I am happy to be able to be invited to represent the OFAI at this important event organized by ICCO. I am not very important in this story, except as an observer of things that have taken place in the fields of organic farmers in the past twenty years. I bring out the Organic Farming Sourcebook (which will go into its 4th edition soon) and when we have some interesting material, an association newsletter called, *The Living Field*. I also work as the secretary of the Organic Farming Association of India and as the first director of its central secretariat. I am not here to recount my biography, but to place what I wish to say now, as a person for long involved in the issues driving the organic farming community, within a certain context.

Twenty two years ago, a small group of us met in Sewagram, Wardha, for what appears to have been the first meeting on organic farming in the country. Vandana was there, so was Dr R.H. Richharia, Dr Sailen Ghosh, Mr Korah Mathen and a few others. The number was not more than 15.

I have just now come to Bangalore from another meeting on organic farming in Sewagram. This time, the number of people attending the meeting exceeded 800, with almost 95 per cent of them organic farmers. So if you wish to ask, is the organic farming movement growing in the country, here you have a very ready answer.

The simple question to ask is how has this explosion in the population of organic farmers come about? Who was responsible for it? The answer is also similarly direct: the farmer himself. The organic farming movement in India has been driven by the farmer himself. This much is unmistakable and indubitable. Neither the government nor the agricultural universities or departments have been involved.

The pioneers, some of whom have been doing organic farming for more than 15-20 years, have taught the others. Those taught by the pioneers have taught others in turn. Organisations have sprung up to teach and spread the message of organic farming. The Government and the rest of civil society have been lagging behind, trying to catch up, sometimes even unwilling to even move in this direction.

This has also been the situation all over the world. IFOAM was not formed by any government. But now governments learn from it. Neither was organic farming in the US or New Zealand started by governments or official agencies. If the movement has taken strength in these countries, it has been simply due to the results seen from organic agriculture and hardworking organic farming families.

All the major exciting innovations in agriculture in today's organic world have come from farmers. The best vermiculture is done by farmers: zoology professors now routinely descend on vermiculture units to learn about earthworms from farmers who mastered zoology by observation and practice, both of which you cannot have in a university that is dedicated to exclusive knowledge from books. That is why today's agricultural universities do not produce farmers: they produce officials and extension officers in banks who will administer the agricultural apparatus of the state.

Panchagavya was the creation of a medical doctor who runs a farm and an NGO. That mixture of the five elements taken from the cow has now caused consternation in banking and credit circles, as fertilizer sales have dwindled and so has the need for credit. Now with further experimentation,

panchagavya has become navagavya: the ingredients in the mixture have risen to nine. Panchagavya has restored the role of women in agriculture as the provider of soil fertility. Farmers continue to experiment. We have amirthakaraisal, amrut pani, beejamrut, jeevamrut, and a host of other mixtures, all designed to enhance the population of microbes in the soil.

Farmers stumbled on the theory that we do not feed the plant; that if we feed the living community in the soil, the plant will take care of itself. They did not come to this conclusion from reading Albert Howard or Claude Bourguignon.

Similarly, the invention of the Madagascar system of rice cultivation was again sourced not to an agricultural scientist but to a Jesuit. We all know that Masanobu Fukuoka is a Japanese farmer. He began to crack the secrets of no-till farming only after he had rubbed out his earlier knowledge of agricultural science.

In India, considerable dissemination of ecological farming in south India came from an NGO, the LEISA network and its insistence on low external input agriculture.

I have seen illiterate peasants working with small but effective systems of biological pest control. I have met and discussed innovations with extraordinarily gifted farmers like Suresh Desai, Subhash Sharma, S.R. Sundara Raman, Sarvadamman Patel, Bhasker Save, Narayan Reddy, Bernard of Auroville. The list is long. These are the pioneers that made organic agriculture a credible venture. Farmers saw that it was possible to raise plants without external inputs. After that, they have never looked back. In May this year, OFAI and MOFF hosted a common programme in Vidarbha to show farmers how they could farm with almost zero costs. No doubt, these important insights came to both our organizations from the various farmers who are their members.

For the past two decades that I have spent visiting and talking to organic farmers, I have seen something so remarkable that it is worth reporting. I got a Ph.D. and surrendered the company of academics because I found the university had become sterile. They had stopped using their brains. They were in fact merely making a living by denying the

existence of their own brains. They merely implemented directives. Research was dictated. They carried out what they were told to do. In turn, the farmers listened and implemented the new strategies in their fields. It was a large scale abdication of mind.

So when the bug of organic farming got into the environment, there were no teachers to be found either in the university or in the labs. The farmers found they had to experiment on their own. Freed from the necessity of looking for advice and directions from the scientists they once knew, they began to use their own brains. In all my travel, I have not found even one organic farm similar to the next. Each organic farm bears the imprint of the thinking of the farmer, his personality. Each is unique, in its understanding of its natural endowments, its capacity, and there is a pride in reporting achievement. It's literally a case of a hundred flowers blooming.

The response of the agricultural scientific community is one of resentment since they have no role to play in the new agriculture that is attracting the farmers. Even now it is difficult to find scientists who are willing to entertain the idea that plants can grow without chemicals. How far science has departed from nature!

Albert Howard was the first to insist that the best farmers would be those who would model their farms on the forest. The forest we all know needs no fertilizers, no ploughing, no pesticides, no irrigation. It works in symbiosis with the community of living organisms within the soil, including earthworms, termites, and small bacteria and microorganisms.

Claude Bourguignon has shown that that between 92-98% of the plant's sustenance comes from the atmosphere and only 3-4% from the soil. In other words, plants feed quantitatively from the atmosphere, qualitatively from the soil. Modern agriculture, husbanded by chemical factories, has turned that upside down. Now we feed the plant quantitatively from the soil. However, as common sense will indicate, the plant can take only that which it can absorb. Everything else goes into the environment. But the pernicious effects of these artificial salts is on the living organisms that they



ICCOA President and other visitors at the ICCO Organic Farming Trade Fair

help drive out of the soil, leaving it eventually sterile. As sterility increases, and as the population of microbes diminishes, their free contributions in the form of making available mineals to the plants also declines. More and more chemicals are required to maintain yields.

Now through their microbe population enhancing activities carried out with the principal source of such microorganisms – the gut of the cow – organic farmers in India are able to restore and repopulate their soils with a living community. They find corroboration of what they have done in the work of Howard, Bourguignon and Terua Higa.

And as for problems of imbalance reflected in insect populations that may harm crops, they found they could concoct excellent mixtures from the very plants in their immediate surroundings which proved to be excellent insect repellants.

They learnt the need for mulches. They invaded fields of sugarcane that had been harvested and borrowed the sugarcane stalks for mulch before they could be destroyed by burning.

Today, while modern agricultural science speaks of a crisis, of insect imbalances, of the need for further dangerous technologies like GMOs and nanotechnologies, the organic farmers of India as a group have no concept any longer of either productivity, lack of trace elements, water, or insect balance. They need no money for purchases of agricultural inputs. They have been set free of the very need for credit. They have come very close to the idea of zero-cost farming.

They will not go back from these lessons: field is a living field; the land must be covered at all times; the plants needed to restrict insects are to be found in their own fields; with their animal products, they can generate their own nutrition, since the soil need only small quantities, these are supplied by microbes, and to enhance the population of microbes, they have now a dozen different methods and more are in line.

That is the reason why I have changed the title of my little talk this morning from “Better perspectives for farmers going organic” to “better perspectives from farmers going organic.” The issue is who will teach whom. In my opinion, it is time to admit that the lecturers are safer kept at home, their salary checks sent there, and these organic farmers who can raise better yields, be now declared the new lecturers and teachers.

Their insights can save those farmers in district now become suicide prone. Organic is not just a technique; it is an attitude. At the end of modern agriculture, there is only suicide. Because modern agriculture is bred on violence: look at its toxic vocabulary: we have fungicides, weedicides, pesticides, insecticides, bactericides, and this must eventually translate into homicide.

Organic farmers do not commit suicide. They love life, they love the experience of growing food on their own, without any further crutches. It has brought them to look at their children anew. Once they sent them to school. Now they think they should also invite them to share in the excitement of raising crops in a way their ancestors might have known of, but from which they were temporarily distracted when they took to the green revolution.

The Organic Farming Association of India

(A society registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860)

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Membership form of the Association

I, _____, aged _____

male/female, desire to become a member of the Organic Farming Association of India. My membership fee is enclosed herewith.

My complete and correct address (with phone and email data, if available) is provided below:

I would qualify to be a member of the Association under one of the following categories (please underline the chosen category):

- Organic Farmer
- Company/Society/Trust involved in organic food production
- Green Shop (applicable only to shops marketing organic produce)
- Green Trader (also includes suppliers of organic farming inputs)
- Organic Farming Promoter
- Organic Consumer

I am willing to assist the Association in the furtherance of its objectives as and when I have the time or when called upon to do so. I can assist in the following ways:

Name and signature of applicant

Details for applicants:

Membership fees as per bye-laws of the association:

Individuals: Rs.100 per year

Non-profit organizations: Rs.1,000 per year

Companies and partnerships: Rs.5,000 per year

All members are entitled in the first year of membership to four free issues of The Living Field newsletter.

Membership is valid for one year from date of receipt issued. Membership fees can be paid for more than one year at a time in advance.

Membership can be paid direct at the following OFAI secretariats.:

● **Andhra Pradesh: Deccan Development Society**, 101, Kishan Residency, Road no. 5, Begumpet, Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh Tel.: 040 27764577, 27764744 ● **Maharashtra: Maharashtra Organic Farming Federation**, 103A/11, Balaji Niwas, Flat.No.5, Cosmos Bank Lane, Deep Bungalow Chowk, Model Colony, Pune, Maharashtra 400 016 Tel.: 500 016, 020 25659090 Mob.: 9422035230 / 9822060606 Email: vbfoundation@yahoo.com ● **Gujarat: Jatan**, Vinoba Ashram, Gotri, Vadodara Gujarat 390 021 Mob: 09427054132 Tel.: 0265 2371429, Email: jatan@satyam.net.in ● **Tamil Nadu: Mahanadi**, 79, Elancheran Nagar, Nambiar Nagar Road, Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu 611 001 Tel.: 0944334336(M), 04365 247007 09443764197(Thiruvengkataswami) Email: revathi7359@yahoo.co.in ● **Karnataka: ICRA**, No. 22, 'Samskruthi', Michael Palya, NTP, Bangalore 560 075, Karnataka Tel.: 080-25283370; 25213104 Email: icra@vsnl.net ● **Kerala: INFAC**, Kizhathadiyoor PO, Palai, Kottayam District Kerala 686 574 Tel.: 09447285525(M); 04822 211997 / 211689 Email: ktm_infact@sancharnet.in ● **Orissa: Living Farms**, 77 B, Brhameswarpatna, Tankapani Road, Bhubaneswar, Orissa - 751018 Tel.: 0674 - 5524011 Email: ofaiorissa@gmail.com ● **Goa & rest of India: OFAI**, G-8, St. Britto's Apartments, Feira Alta, Mapusa, Goa 403507 Tel.: 0832 2256479 Mob: 09326115907 Email: ofaigoa@gmail.com, admin@ofai.org

(Please note: Since OFAI state secretariats are managed by NGOs, membership may be required to be paid in the name of the NGO concerned and not OFAI. Receipt may also be given by the concerned organization. However, the applicant will get a membership certificate from OFAI, after the fee is transmitted to the central secretariat of the organization by the state secretariat concerned.)

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