

PROJECT: PRACTICAL FARMERS' EDUCATION FOR IMPROVEMENT OF QUALITY OF LIFE
CASE STUDY 1: RAM MILAN, BISKURI

Promising Profits

Ram Milan is a satisfied man as he strides through his lush green farm of over half an acre. "I grow Japanese rice mostly," he says, "among brinjals, chillies and tomatoes."

The entire crop in his farm is organic; the use of chemicals is rare. In the past few years, he has replaced chemical insecticides with neem oil and fertilizers with cattle dung. "I use chicken manure now though," he admits. "I get it from the poultry I keep."



Ram Milan, a resident of Biskuri hamlet, and member of the *Jagdish Swayam Sahayata Samuh*, a men's SHG, was first introduced to Japanese rice cultivation through the **Practical Farmers' Education Project** in 2009 by Japan based NGO Asian Sustainable Holistic Approach (ASHA).

Photo: Ram Milan at his chicken coop.

The JICA supported project is run in partnership with the Makino School of Continuing and Non-Formal Education (MSCNFE) at the Sam Higginbottom Institute of Agriculture, Technology and Sciences – formerly the Allahabad Agricultural University.

The project aims to improve the quality of life for marginal and small-scale farmers by educating them on organic farming, income-generation activities and market access.

AOAC: Supporting farmers

Ram Milan's large chicken coop is filled with nearly 100 chickens briskly feeding on the grain on the ground. His sharp eyes note one that appears to be ill. Namita Singh, the local project coordinator, advises, "Mix some powdered charcoal in the sawdust you use to coat the ground. It helps the chickens to move around more easily and also helps them to digest as they swallow some with their food."

This is among the many other tips that are a usual feature of the support that farmers receive through the project.

When Ram Milan wanted to start a poultry business, his SHG connected him to Nitin Kumar, the manager of the five-year old Allahabad Organic Agricultural Cooperative (AOAC) at the Sam Higginbottom Institute.

The cooperative has been associated with the project since the last two years. Besides training farmers like Ram Milan in organic farming and poultry, it also buys their produce at a fair price to market it locally and in cities like Varanasi and Delhi.

Poultry farming has proved to be profitable for Ram Milan. For every 100 chickens sold, he gets an extra income of about 1,400 rupees. The AOAC buys his chickens and smoke the meat at the AOAC food processing centre, thereby creating a market demand.

Takaya Machigami, Project Coordinator, ASHA, believes AOAC is connecting the rural and urban in a big way as it develops new urban markets and builds livelihoods for the rural populace.



The AOAC also offers loans to farmers at a small 2% interest rate. Ram Milan had recently borrowed 2,000 rupees for his farming needs and readily praises the idea for its simplicity and convenience.

Back at the AOAC, Namita informs Nitin about Ram Milan's desire to market his upcoming produce of brinjals through the cooperative. Nitin takes a mental note of this new supply expected to arrive soon.

Photo: Nitin (right) takes stock of the vegetables at AOAC.

“We often use these vegetables to make some new and innovative concoctions. A good example is the ‘Almighty sauce’ which uses 16 different vegetables and is rapidly gaining popularity among our customers,” he says.

“Processing and preserving farmers’ produce is a good way to ensure evergreen demand for their produce, as well as regular income for the rural men and women working at the food processing unit,” says Namita.

“This way everyone is happy,” adds Nitin with a smile. Ram Milan couldn’t agree more.

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