

About Sahakari Spice Farm

Concept of Spice Farms

Modern Spice Farms have their origin in the age-old plantations of mixed crops called the 'Kulagor' in the local language terminology. These plantations were developed to make the optimum use of available natural resources namely water, land, solar energy and organic manures like the cow dung which were both cost effective and environment friendly.

The use of natural sources of water, solar energy and the organic manures for human use without causing any harm to any of the environmental elements has led to a unique concept which has blended the aspect of human development with environmental protection. These plantations were utilizing the modern day concepts of organic farming and water conservation way before the modern day environmentalists coined these terms.

Why Spice Plantations?

Indian economy is primarily an agro-based economy with around 70% of the population residing in the villages and having agriculture as their primary source of livelihood. In such a scenario the where primary focus of the various agencies in the country is on agro products it is natural on the part of the different agencies related to tourism to give more importance to ecotourism for attracting the foreign travelers to different destinations in the country. Apart from this increased emphasis by the different agencies there are other reasons that have influenced the growth of ecotourism in the country. These reasons are:

1. The GATT agreement and the Indian entry into WTO have led to the increased influx of foreign agriculture products into the country and reduction in the farm subsidies. These factors have led to increased pressure on the farmers who are the backbone of the country's economy. The reduction in the income from the farm produce has made it difficult for the farmers to make their living only on the agriculture produce forcing the small farmers to look at other activities linked to their primary profession i.e. agriculture which would supplement their income and help them in sustaining their present lifestyle and improve their standard of living.
2. The increased emphasis on environment protection and preservation of natural habitat by both the developed and developing countries has also led to fostering of ecotourism activity in all the primary tourist destinations around the world. This phenomenon of developing destinations, which depict the ecological diversity of the place, has also slowly but steadily percolated in India too. This has led to the growth of Spice Plantations primarily in the state of Goa.
3. The state of Goa is known in the outside world for its scenic beaches. For many years the primary focus of the local government was to project this beach tourism to the outside world to attract the foreign travelers to Goa. This has resulted in neglect of the other tourist attractions like the temples, historical monuments, ecological diversity and the local culture. These attractions are now receiving their due importance because of the increased prominence given to environment protection by the different governmental and non-governmental agencies. The spice plantations and other ecotourism activities also help in displaying the cultural heritage and cultural diversity of the

- place as these activities are labor intensive and are closely related to the lifestyle of the people residing at that particular place.
4. The Spice Plantations also serve as a very good example for showcasing the different aspects and activities related to organic farming and the use of different natural resources in such a way that it leads to protection of natural setting and ecological habitat of the place. The plantation also helps to explain the culinary application of the spices along with their medicinal properties, which have high significance in the cooking of different food items that are served to the visiting tourists in the spice farm.
 5. The plantations also serve the purpose of providing employment to unskilled landless laborers who depend on others with agricultural land for providing their services and earning their living. Because these laborers are unskilled and the agricultural activities are seasonal it is very difficult for these people to get a job round the year and earn a decent living.

The Sahakari Spice Farm

Sahakari Spice Farm is a modern day spice plantation, which blends the knowledge derived from the age-old spice plantation with the modern day scientific techniques of irrigation like the Sprinkler and Drip irrigation. The Spice Farm is over an area of 130 acres having Bettlenut, Coconut and Banana as the primary crops. Along with the primary crops the farm also cultivates different spices like the Cloves, Nutmeg, Cardamom, Cinnamon, Pepper, Turmeric, Ginger, 'All Spices', Curry leaves and Vanilla. The Spice Plantation is one of the few plantations in India to cultivate Vanilla. There

are also other tropical plants like Jackfruit, Breadfruit, Guava, Papaya, Mango, Pineapple, Sapota etc. in the farm. These crops serve as the primary source of income to the farm. The crops are cultivated employing purely organic techniques of farming like use of organic manure and pesticides. The farm does not use any chemical fertilizers or chemical pesticides.

Organic Farming

Organic farming concept is primarily based on the technique of cultivating crops with the help of easily available natural elements like the water, sunlight, land and manures like the cow dung, forest foliage in manner which is least harmful to the surrounding environment. The technique of organic farming gives very high importance to use of and recycling the organic waste to prepare the fertilizers required to improve the productivity. The farm blends the age-old technique of making efficient use of natural water sources with the modern day scientific irrigation techniques like Sprinkler irrigation. In the olden days the water flowing from the hills was stored in ponds in the plains at the foothills for cultivating the crops in the summer months. This stored water was later used for irrigation purpose by distribution through canals and trenches. The farm also employs the techniques of bunding and contour terracing to preserve water. The farm today employs Sprinklers and Drip irrigation instead of canals and trenches for moving the water from the ponds to the plants.

The abundant and freely available solar energy is used for drying the farm produce and preserving it for a longer time span. The farm has a mini dairy that provides milk for consumption in the farm and also for sale to local residents to supplement the farm income. The farm has a very cost effective

and non-polluting non-conventional energy source in form of a 'Bio-gas' (Methane) unit, which is used to generate gas suitable for, cooking and lighting from cow dung. The cow dung from the mini dairy is mixed with forest foliage and stored this mixture in specially designed pits to prepare organic manure, which increased the quantity of farm produce and also led to increased fertility of the soil. The use of forest foliage to prepare compost through controlled chopping of forest trees helps in protecting the available forest cover. The use of these naturally available resources was also a cost effective alternative to the chemical fertilizers without compromise on the quality or quantity of the farm produce.

The peculiar nature of cultivating crops and the labor intensive nature of the organic farming technique difficult for the farmers to go in for mechanized farming and thus these farms prove to be a source of employment to the local residents.

The Tourism Aspect

The Spice Plantations is designed to provide the visiting guests with the information, which is a perfect blend of the different facts about organic farming and also the local culture and traditions. The spice farm is a unique place where the visiting guests can experience and get related information about all the three aspects viz. cultivation, culinary and medicinal applications of spices.

The Program at Spice Farm

At the outset the visiting guests are given a traditional ceremonial welcome whenever they visit the spice plantation. The visiting guest is offered an Arti (Lamp), Kumkum and Garland of Flowers. Then the guests are served either

Tender coconut or Kokum drink as welcome drink and some snacks like cashew nut.

The guests are then taken to shacks where they sit and are then briefed by the guides in the farm with the information about the medicinal and other properties of the various spices cultivated in the farm. The guests are encouraged to get their queries clarified before they are taken for a round of the plantation.

The guests are then taken for a round in the spice plantation that lasts for about one to one and half hour. The guides take the visitors to the different spice plants and give them information about the plant and the spices. The visitors are taken for a round in the plantation to help them see the different plants and spices in their natural habitat. This helps them understand the different aspects of the ecology and cultivation of different spices and other trees. The process of sun drying of the different crops like Vanilla, Cloves and Bettlenut is also shown to the guests during the round in the plantation. The guests can also see the unique method of plucking Bettlenut where the person swings from one tree to another without any support.

The farm has two other attractions apart from the crops cultivated in the plantation. The guests can see the traditional way of preparing local liquor 'Feni' from the juice of cashew apple at the distillery present in the plantation.

The plantation also has a Bio-gas unit which is used to generate gas for cooking and lighting purpose. This is unique non-conventional energy source which generates the gas from animal waste.

The farm being thickly vegetated due to the different trees grown in the farm, the temperature in the farm remains very low as compared to the surrounding areas. This thick vegetation also attracts different types of birds to the plantation. One can spot around 80 different types of birds in their natural habitat during a visit to the plantation. The farm provides enough opportunities for serious bird watchers to watch birds and take photographs. The guests can also enjoy Elephant feeding, Elephant washing and ride during or after the round.

After the round the guests are taken back to the shack for lunch. Before the lunch the guests are given information about the traditional style of cooking and use of different spices in cooking the lunch being served. They are also explain the significance of cooking the food in traditional style in earthen pots and serving the lunch on the banana leaves. The guests are given instructions about eating the food just by hand without using spoon or fork. The food served in the plantation is very traditional and consists of locally available items. The lunch consists of local bread called 'Pav', rice, two types of vegetables, all spice curry / fish curry, fried fish, fried potato, vegetable salad, pickle, 'Papad', dessert.

At the end of lunch the guest are served with fresh fruits like watermelon, papaya, pineapple, mango etc. The guides then answer any queries from the guests about the round in the plantation or about the information provided

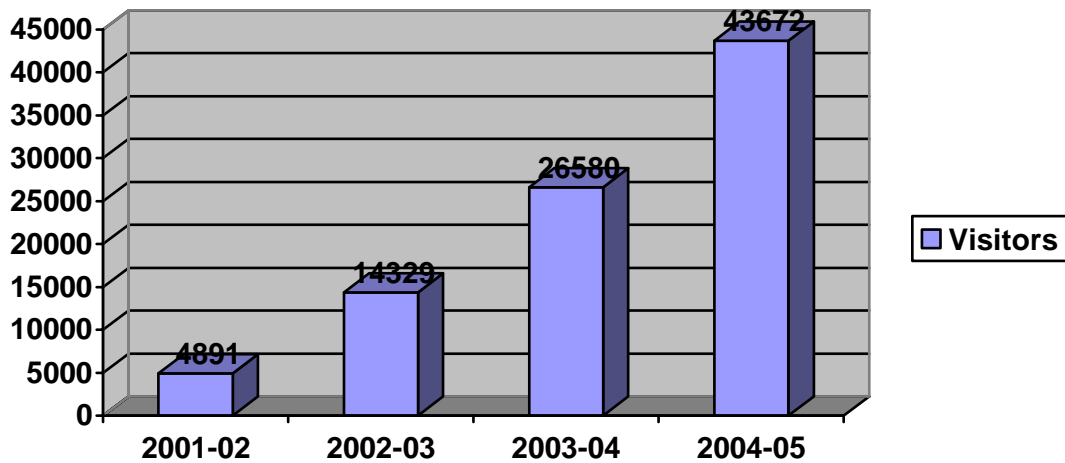
during the round. The guests are also provided with information regarding Ayurvedic remedies for any common ailments troubling the guests. The guests are given a memento at the end of the discussion session and they can then proceed to purchase any spices, medicinal oils or handicrafts at the sale counter.

The farm also has facility, which makes it easier for the guests to purchase organically produced spices specially vanilla and saffron. The farm also sells various types of oils and powders that are used for the treatment of different common ailments. The instructions for using these oils and powders are also provided to the guests to aid them in using the products in correct manner. Along with the spices and medicinal oils and powders the plantation also sells premium quality local liquor 'Feni' prepared in the farm itself. There are different flavors of feni available in the farm namely Plain, Vanilla, Masala etc. Handicrafts made out of locally available items such as coconut, bamboo, and oyster shells are available for purchase at the sale counter.

Other Attractions

The farm also arranges for local folk dances and other local cultural programs for entertaining the guests and also for displaying the rich and diverse cultural heritage of the locality in which the farm is situated. These cultural programs also help the guests to understand more about the lifestyle of the local community, their sources of entertainment etc.

The farm has seen a steady rise in the number of visitors from the year of its inception. The farm had a turnover of around Rs. 1.7 crore in the financial year 2004-05.



The Human Resources

The plantation is designed to display the different aspects of the local culture and ecology to the visiting guests. The farm employs local people who find it difficult to get employment due to lack of advanced skills. These unskilled workers are trained in the plantation itself to perform different duties. There are 55 number of employees in direct employment.

Out of these 35 number of employees work in the plantation to cultivate different spices and plants. They have the task of farm maintenance which is the primary attraction for the visiting guests. They are trained in different aspects of cultivation and agriculture.

20 number of employees are employed in the tourism activities. There are 6 guides and 14 number of employees who perform the other activities like cooking, cleaning and packing different spices.

The guides are given proper training in different aspects of spices like their medicinal and culinary values, the cultivation aspects and presentation skills. Other employees are trained for specialized job of cooking food in

traditional and hygienic condition, cleaning aspects and other activities like proper packing of spices etc.

Along with the direct employment provided to the people working in the farm the farm also provides indirect employment to the private taxi operators which contributes to more than 60% of the total number of visitors visiting the plantation. There is also indirect employment to other people who manufacture handicrafts etc which are sold at the plantation.

The Marketing Aspects

The program for marketing and promoting the ecotourism is not fully developed. The farm being a small entity it has tie-ups with different stakeholders to promote and market the concepts.

The primary and major tie-up is with different tour operator companies in Goa which arrange different trips for both foreign as well as local guests. This arrangement consists of designing programs by the tour operators for taking guests to the farm.

There are two types of tours arranged by the tour companies.

- a. Exclusive trip to the spice plantation by the guests.
- b. Spice plantation visit along with other places like the temples and churches.

The payment for the visit is made by the tour operators directly to the farm and the guests are charged only if they purchase any product at the farm.

The second tie-up arrangement is with hotels in Goa. In this arrangement the hotels perform the task of accepting booking from the guests and arranging transportation facilities for the visit. The payment for the visit to the

plantation is made by the hotels directly and the guests are not charged for the visit at the plantation, they are only charged for any purchases.

The third arrangement is with private taxi owners in the state. These private taxi operators bring the tourist to the plantation. The guests are directly charged for the visit at the plantation as well as any purchases.

Apart from these tie-ups the farm also gives importance to putting advertisements in different tourism related magazines and periodicals published in Goa. The farm also has a website to provide the foreign guests with required information about the farm and also the travel arrangements.