

# Organic Farming Policy: Drawbacks and imperatives



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The Tamil Nadu Department of Agriculture has rolled out its organic farming policy which is, no doubt, quite welcome, given that this initiative has been taken now in deference to the demand pressed for over a decade.

But it is unfortunate that the policy puts forward several ideas which cause disappointment and distress.

## **Time aberrations or anachronisms**

The policy document's title 'Angaka Velaanmai Kolkai' (organic farming policy) uses the prominent northern term 'angaka' to denote organic farming. But in practice several farmer organisations and Tamil aficionados use the phrase 'Uyirmai Velaanmai' to refer to bio-farming or organic farming.

The policy projects the time of Indian sage Parasara and Greek poet Homer, which is totally unwarranted. It pegs the era of Homer at three millennia ago while the actual Greek literature and historical documents have put the ancient poet's time at 8 BCE. One wonders at the need for projecting in the policy Parasara who was said to have written 'Vishnu Puranam.'

The ancient Tamil grammarian Tholkappiyar's time is mentioned as 200 BCE in the policy document. But the Central Institute of Classical Tamil has categorically said he belonged to 711 BCE. Won't this anachronism come in handy for those hell-bent on negating the antiquity of the Tamil language? At a time when we have been sweating it out to prove our antiquity through evidences ranging from Keezhadi to Azhagankulam, the time aberration found in the government document will cause unnecessary confusion and encourage those pouring scorn on the researches that shed more light on the antiquity of Tamil and Tamils.

The organic farming policy document shows the Chinese and African agriculturists as the most ancient, dating back to 10 millennia ago. This error could have been averted, had the policy designers taken, at least, a cursory glance at the Athirampakkam archaeological findings and at the books – 'The Shining Stones at a Stone Age Site in India' - Shanti Pappu and 'The Evolution and History of Human Populations in South Asia' - Michael D. Petraglia, Bridget Allchin – which take the history of Tamil Nadu agriculture back to 17 lakh years ago. Then it will be made all the more clear that we have one of the longest histories and traditions and it will also be a shot in the arm to the Dravidian model.

### **Initiatives unfruitful**

The difference between natural farming and organic farming has been explained wrongly in the policy. In fact, the former means that nature is allowed to do agriculture on its own from which we reap benefits. That is called 'Do Nothing Farming.' Whereas the organic farming involves the use of biodegradable and bio-fertilizers produced on the farms or procured from outside.

The World Health Organization has not used the phrase 'single health' but the policy document has translated 'one health' used by the WHO as 'ottrai nalam' (single health) in Tamil. The real meaning of the WHO's usage 'one health' is the integrated health involving men, livestock, wildlife and ecological zone. The Tamil translation 'ottrai nalam' (single health) gives a wrong connotation and impression tantamount to agreeing with the union government on its insistence on 'singleness' in all endeavours.

The policy on organic farming must have laid stress on protection of health of farmers and farm workers who have been worst affected by toxic pesticides. Attainment of self-reliance in agriculture, particularly, self-reliance in seeds must be the objective of the policy.

As for agricultural strategies, there is only a system of organic agricultural certification for land. A system of certification for rice and pulses produced by farmers should also be incorporated into the policy. For organic farming research, an

autonomous institute must be set up because the existing research institutes and universities are promoting chemical-based farming only and so cannot be expected to come up with robust and reliable research findings on natural farming.

### **What's to be done**

The role of farmers' markets (uzhavar sandhai) in marketing agricultural produce has not been mentioned in the policy. In fact, the farmers' market is the dream project of former Chief Minister and DMK patriarch M. Karunanidhi. The farmers' markets can be tapped for promoting natural farming products so that the local people get toxic-free products.

The Tamil phrase meaning 'getting to know the origin of organic products' used in the policy document is quite ambiguous in that it raises a doubt whether it means 'getting to know the origin of products' or 'know the toxicity of products.'

A fair price policy must be formulated for organic products so that it is beneficial to farmers and consumers alike.

Cities are generating larger amounts of biodegradable waste which can be used as manure in the organic farming. A scheme on this count can be drawn up. The policy must lay stress on awareness campaign to explain the evil of pesticides and benefit of organic farming that produces toxic-free food.

Tours around organic farms and sojourns at the farms can be made part of the policy so that the organic farmers augment their knowledge and revenue as well.

There should be a plan to gradually remove the harmful pesticides from the farms. If the departments of agriculture, environment, climate change, forest, tourism and health work in tandem to promote organic farming, the initiatives will pay rich dividends.

A programme to cultivate non-toxic medicinal plants should be made part of the policy. A scheme should be drawn up to provide incentives to organic farmers who protect water, soil and environment from contamination during the cultivation of crops.

The policy should come up with schemes to clamp a ban on the cultivation of genetically modified crops and eliminate polluting industries in the organic farming zones.

As stressed by states like Tamil Nadu when they came under the GST regime, farmers who switch from chemical farming to organic farming should be given financial assistance for upgrading the health of the soil for a period of time. Then the farmers

will manufacture toxic-free food for themselves and for others, thereby creating a state that leads a life worth living.

Translated by V. Mariappan.