

The Wave Andaman

The Voice of Andaman and Nicobar Islands

'Khet Bachao' Meet Charts Roadmap for Sustainable Farming



Sri Vijaya Puram, June 4: Efforts to promote sustainable agriculture and restore soil health in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands received a fresh push as the ICAR-Central Island Agricultural Research Institute (ICAR-CIARI) organized a consultation meeting for input dealers and stakeholders under the nationwide "Khet Bachao Abhiyan" campaign.

The meeting brought together scientists, officials from the Department of Agriculture, representatives of the Central Integrated Pest Management Centre (CIPMC), Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs), and agricultural input dealers to deliberate on balanced fertilizer use and strategies for ensuring long-term agricultural sustainability in the Islands.

The consultation forms part of the month-long "Khet Bachao Abhiyan," a national initiative aimed at promoting scientific nutrient management, reducing excessive chemical input use, and encouraging sustainable farming practices to improve soil health and farm productivity.

Welcoming participants, Dr. Y. Ramakrishna, Principal Scientist and Head at ICAR-CIARI, emphasized the importance of collaboration among farmers, scientists, government agencies, and input suppliers in advancing balanced nutrient management and sustainable agriculture in the island ecosystem.

Addressing the gathering, Dr. Debabrata Basantia, Director of Agriculture, Andaman and Nicobar Administration, outlined the objectives of the campaign and highlighted the critical role of balanced fertilizer application in maintaining soil fertility and ensuring long-term agricultural productivity.

He said the campaign seeks to strengthen awareness among farmers by taking scientific knowledge and practical guidance directly to villages through the coordinated efforts of ICAR-CIARI, KVKs, Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA), and the Department of Agriculture. He expressed confidence that the initiative would have a positive impact on farming communities across the Islands.

A major highlight of the consultation was an open-house discussion involving scientists, input dealers, stakeholders, and agriculture officials. Participants deliberated on key challenges facing agriculture in the Islands and proposed several measures aimed at enhancing productivity while conserving natural resources.

Among the recommendations was the promotion of judicious fertilizer use and wider adoption of bio-pesticides and biological control agents to improve soil health and reduce dependence on chemical inputs. Participants also suggested that the Department of Agriculture could explore production of Trichoderma-based bio-control formulations with technical support from ICAR-CIARI.

The meeting further proposed the establishment of block-level seed collection centres where quality seeds produced by farmers could be procured and distributed through Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs). Under the proposed model, ICAR-CIARI would provide breeder and parent seed materials to support local seed production.

Scientists informed stakeholders that the institute has developed high-yielding, wilt-resistant vegetable varieties such as Brinjal-1 and Brinjal-2, which are specifically suited to the climatic conditions of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. They also highlighted the availability of quality rice breeder seeds and Bio-Consortia strains that could be multiplied and distributed through the Department of Agriculture.

Discussions also focused on improving soil fertility through pulse-based crop rotation systems. Scientists explained that integrating pulses into cropping systems can naturally enrich soil nitrogen content, improve soil structure, and reduce dependence on synthetic fertilizers.

The consultation highlighted ongoing efforts to promote natural farming demonstrations in farmers' fields. Participants appreciated initiatives undertaken by the Agriculture Department to encourage eco-friendly farming practices and reduce production costs while preserving environmental health.

ICAR-CIARI assured continued support through capacity-building programmes and training on Integrated Pest Management (IPM). Scientists highlighted the use of pheromone traps as effective and environmentally friendly tools for pest monitoring and management and suggested that FPOs could play an important role in popularizing such technologies among farmers.

Addressing pest management challenges, Dr. M. Ranjit, APPO, CIPMC, stressed the need to reduce excessive use of chemical pesticides. He recommended the use of the biofungicide *Isaria fumosorosea* for controlling Rugose Spiralling Whitefly infestations in coconut plantations. He also advocated the release of the parasitoid *Encarsia guadeloupae* as a biological control agent against the pest.

For the management of papaya mealybug infestations, Dr. Ranjit suggested the use of the parasitoid *Acerophagus papayae*, describing it as an effective and sustainable solution for horticultural ecosystems.

Delivering the valedictory address, Dr. Jai Sunder called for systematic documentation of land under natural farming and urged the Department of Agriculture to initiate certification processes that could help farmers access premium markets.