



Blooming Economy With Memory Enhancer

- a success story of *Bacopa monnieri*
cultivation in South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal



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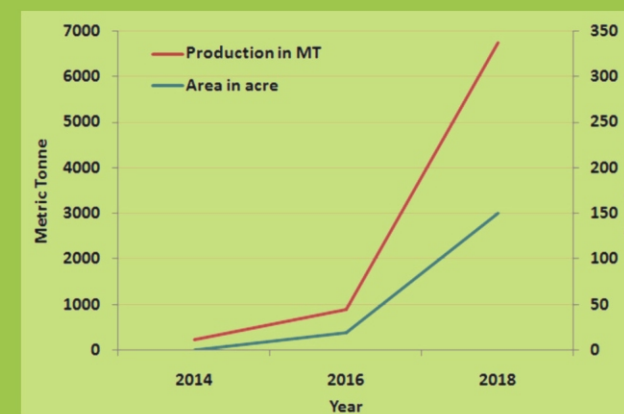
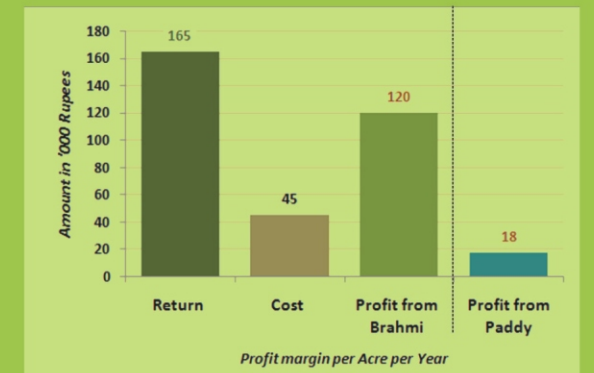
Brahmi (*Bacopa monnieri* Linn.) is a very important herb which occurs naturally in India and has a long tradition of use in the Ayurvedic medicine for treatment of a number of nervous and mental disorders, particularly those involving anxiety, intellect and amnesia. Studies have shown that the herb contains many active constituents, including a number of alkaloids and saponins amongst which the major constituents are the steroidal saponins named as Bacosides A and B. The extract of Brahmi is exported and currently being marketed in Western countries as a memory enhancing agent.

The plant grows naturally in the marshy lands in South 24 Parganas District of West Bengal. The villagers used to collect Brahmi from the paddy fields, especially from the isles and from the wetlands and sold to the small traders, after drying in their premises, with a nominal price. Every year, 250 metric tonnes of dry Brahmi were collected from the District. South 24 Parganas is the largest but one of the poor districts in West Bengal. The district was named as one of the country's 250 most backward districts (in 2006). On one side it has the urban fringe of Kolkata and on the other side, the remote island villages of Sundarban. Half of the district is occupied by the Sundarban forest (the largest mangrove forest and home of majestic Royal Bengal Tiger) and the largest delta. The soil condition is marshy, and flood is the regular phenomenon in every rainy and autumn season. The total population was 81 Lakhs (census, 2011). The main occupation of the people is paddy cultivation from which the profit margin is very less.



The Brahmi cultivation received huge success in South 24 Parganas district where Brahmi contains highest percentage of bacoside in India, due to tripartite interventions i.e. Kalpataru Welfare Society, a local NGO who engaged farmers for cultivation; Natural Remedies Pvt. Ltd., a Bengaluru based manufacturing unit who extracts bacosides from Brahmi and markets it; and West Bengal State Medicinal Plants Board who facilitated to initiate contract farming of Brahmi in the district.

The NGO intervened in Namkhana Block and started campaign for Brahmi cultivation amongst the inhabitants. Initially they started organic cultivation of Brahmi in 20 acres of land in 2016 with the technical support of the Company who also provided supported to establish a drying shade with modern drying facilities. Gradually, the NGO promoted cultivation in 150 acres of land and produced 6750 metric tonnes of Brahmi in 2018 with a target to expand to 250 acres area by 2020. They have formed Brahmi cultivation clusters involving around 2500 active farmers in 42 villages including Sagar island (famous for Ganga Sagar Mela). The NGO is buying the freshly harvested Brahmi from the farmers, drying in the drying yard by passing through hot air oven, packing the product and then transporting to the Natural Remedies, Bengaluru. Eight local villagers, four members from the NGO and one representative from the company are staying there to run and monitor the total project. The WBSMPB is supporting the project from the very beginning technically and financially from the State Annual Action Plan (SAAP) grant from National Medicinal Plants Board (NMPB). Currently, the RCFC-ER, NMPB is supporting the project by raising quality planting material (propagation material - plant parts/stem cutting) of Brahmi.



The economics is very strong as the farmers income from one acre Brahmi cultivation is shooting to approximately Rs. 1,20,000/- (Cultivation Cost - Rs. 15,000/-, 4 times harvesting in a year, 15 tonnes fresh Brahmi in one harvest with sale value - Rs. 45,000/-) from a mere amount of Rs. 18,000/- from paddy cultivation. Smoothly implemented contract farming, proper government intervention and huge economic gain within a short period of time made the Brahmi cultivation a blooming success in South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal.