



Fostering Economy through farming of
'BENGAL VARIETY ASWAGANDHA' IN WEST BENGAL



Regional-cum-facilitation Centre, Eastern Region (RCFC-ER)
National Medicinal Plants Board (NMPB), Ministry of AYUSH, Govt. of India
Jadavpur University, Kolkata - 700 032

Aswagandha (*Withania somnifera*) or Winter cherry (family – Solanaceae) primarily cultivated in central part of India especially for its roots which is used for centuries in traditional medicine and also consumed as dietary supplement.



Motivated by an article in printed media, Mr. Pinak Pratim Dan ventured for introduction of Ashwagandha to Bengal farmers. Mr. Dan established Madhyamgram Kalpataru Welfare Society (MKWS) an NGO registered under 'Societies Registration Act 1961' in 2009 to support marginal and poor farmers. The mission of MKWS has been promotion of cultivation of medicinal plants and economic upliftment of the beneficiary farmers by providing them advanced agro-technology, access to financing and marketing support.

Meanwhile, Abul Kalam Azad, a resident of Baramallika in the district of North 24 Parganas, a graduate progressive farmer received an assortment of trainings on Fishery, Goatery, Animal Husbandry and Advanced Agricultural Practices from different organizations. Apart from regularly cultivating paddy, jute and seasonal vegetables, he passionately experimented with unconventional crops in one acre of his ancestral farming land.

Both of them met in one training programme of National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) in 2010 and discussed the prospects of Ashwagandha and wished to promote its cultivation in West Bengal through Farmers' Club initiatives of NABARD. They were unsuccessful in registering their Farmers' Club at the first attempt due to low land holding of the beneficiary farmers. Their next application supported with appropriate documentation was successful in registering their Farmers' Club in 2013 and they received the related financial aid. Subsequently, they motivated several farmers and arranged their training for Aswagandha cultivation in Bidhan Chandra Krishi Viswavidyalaya (BCKV), Mohanpur, West Bengal, India.



Through continuous motivation and technical resources provided by this duo, finally 9 farmers agreed to cultivate Ashwagandha in their 7 acres of land at Barasat, North 24 Pgs. by sourcing seeds from Madhya Pradesh. At first, the crop yield and quality was very discouraging. The harvested roots could only be sold as local astrologers' charm in the form of small cuttings.

Surprisingly, after two rotations of seeds by a persistent local root cuttings seller, that specific Ashwagandha variety got acclimatized to the local agro-climatic conditions of West Bengal and demonstrated remarkable root growth. Again the same farmers were motivated and free seeds with marketing assurance was provided by the NGO. Only 2 farmers (out of 7) succeeded in production of 3 MT dry roots. The phytochemical content was tested through HPTLC from BCKV and found comparatively low Withanolide A (0.0215% of dry weight) content and Withaferrin A (0.004% of dry weight). But due to their excellent appearance and size, the harvested roots were sold in Neemach Mandi, Madhya Pradesh @Rs.180/- in 2014 which was almost equal to the prevailing price of the best quality Ashwaganda at that time. The traders of Neemach Mandi christened the variety as "Bengal Variety".

Both Abul Kalam Azad and Pinak Pratim Dan gained their confidence and again started motivating more farmers. Their continuous endeavor translated into wide spread cultivation of Bengal variety of Ashagandha in West Bengal. At Matti Utsav in 2016, Abul Kalam Azad was bestowed with "Krishak Ratna" award by the Government of West Bengal for his major contribution in medicinal plants cultivation.



TRAINING PROGRAMME ON HUSBANDRY & CULTIVATION
VALUE ADDITION & MARKETING OF MEDICINAL PLANTS
West Bengal Sahasrabhoga Mission
Organized by
Krishak-Facilitator Centre
National Institute of Horticultural Sciences
University of West Bengal
University, K

Mr. Pinak Pratim Dan has also been relentlessly promoting medicinal plants cultivation through his NGO, also widely acclaimed and highly regarded by the farmers. Both of them are associated with RCFC-ER from its inception and they have been promoting medicinal plants farming on behalf of RCFC-ER. The RCFC-ER has already documented more than 1500 farmers with their geo-tagged land details and also organized one program on 15th March 2023 regarding possible strategies to enrich the phytochemical content in the Bengal variety through improved agro-techniques.

Albeit the initial sub-optimal start, commercial cultivation of 'Bengal variety Ashwagandha' ultimately flourished in West Bengal. At present, farmers are reaping genuine profits from the cultivation because of its high root yield, though its current sale prices are low (almost half of the best variety). At present more than 5000 farmers in Murshidabad district are cultivating approximately 2500 acres of land and sold volume of Ashwagandha alone crossed 3,000 MT in 2022, exhibiting huge success.



For more information please contact:

Prof. (Dr.) Asis Mazumdar
Nodal Coordinator
coordinatorrcfc@jadavpuruniversity.in

Dr. Sanjay Bala
Regional Director
rdrcfc@jadavpuruniversity.in

Regional-cum-Facilitation Centre, Eastern Region
NMPB, Ministry of AYUSH, Government of India
Jadavpur University, Kolkata - 700032
Tel: +91-33-24146979, Fax: +91-33-24146886
Email: rcfcnmpb@jadavpuruniversity.in, Website : <http://www.rcfceast.org>