



Wayanad
Community
Seed Fest
Jan 30, 31 & Feb 1, 2025

Wayanad Community Seed Fest 2025

REPORT

Organisers

M S Swaminathan Research Foundation, Wayanad District Tribal Development Action Council
and Seed Care

Partners

NABARD | Kerala State Council for Science Technology and Environment | Kerala State Biodiversity
Board | Keystone Foundation | DIVERSIFARM India | Kudumbashree Mission | ICAR-Indian
Institute of Spices Research | Directorate of Arecanut and Spices Development | Wayanad District
Panchayath | Wayanad District Biodiversity Management Committee

CAB-C-MSSRF, Puthoorvayal,
Meppadi, Wayanad, Kerala

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Seed Fest 2025

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Background

The Wayanad Community Seed Fest has long served as a crucial platform for advocating the conservation of agro-biodiversity, farmers' rights, and sustainable food systems. Over the years, the festival has emphasized the need for seed sovereignty, on-farm conservation, and the role of traditional knowledge in preserving genetic diversity. Past editions of the fest have brought attention to some of the adverse effects of the modern agriculture, including the loss of native crop varieties, farmer dependency on external seed markets, and the environmental consequences of large-scale monoculture farming. Kerala, and Wayanad in particular, has been a significant site for such discussions due to its rich agro-biodiversity. The region, home to numerous Adivasi communities, has retained valuable crop varieties, including rice, pepper, banana, and tubers, despite threats from climate change and modernization. Past Seed Fest events have stressed the urgency of preserving these traditional varieties and promoting policies that empower farmers as custodians of biodiversity.

Building on these historical discussions, the 2025 Wayanad Community Seed Fest embraces three interconnected themes that collectively strengthen the movement for seed sovereignty, agro-biodiversity conservation, and sustainable agricultural practices. First, the fest honours the legacy of Professor M. S. Swaminathan, whose pioneering advocacy for farmers' rights has significantly shaped policies ensuring their ownership over genetic resources. Through MSSRF's initiatives such as the Community Agrobiodiversity Management program and the facilitation of the Plant Genome Saviour Community Award, grassroots conservation efforts have been reinforced, and this year's fest aims to reflect on these achievements while strategizing further advancements. Complementing this, the second theme focuses on the role of Community Seed Banks (CSBs) in addressing food and nutrition security amidst the challenges of climate change. As vital institutions for conserving crop diversity, safeguarding indigenous knowledge, restoring lost varieties, and mitigating risks of crop failures, CSBs have played an essential role in strengthening farmer-managed

seed systems. The 2025 Seed Fest provided a collaborative space for representatives of CSBs across South India to exchange insights and enhance their impact on local agricultural resilience. Further aligning with global efforts, the third theme celebrates the UN International Year of Cooperatives (IYC 2025), highlighting how cooperative models serve as transformative solutions to contemporary agricultural challenges. By fostering farmer-led conservation, enhancing community resilience, and promoting sustainable rural economies, cooperatives play a crucial role in advancing food sovereignty. Together, these themes interweave into a broader vision that reaffirms the Seed Fest's commitment to empowering farming communities, securing biodiversity, and advocating for policies that protect and sustain traditional agricultural knowledge.

The 2025 themes are deeply intertwined with the objectives of the Seed Fest. Farmers' rights over seeds cannot be realized without strong community-driven institutions like CSBs, which in turn thrive in cooperative ecosystems that enable knowledge-sharing and mutual support. The fest aimed at creating a collaborative space where these themes merge into actionable strategies, strengthening the movement for sustainable agro-biodiversity conservation. By reflecting on past successes and embracing future challenges, the Wayanad Community Seed Fest 2025 reaffirmed its commitment to a just, resilient, and biodiversity-rich food system.

Objectives:



Showcase the seed diversity of Kerala



Document and communicate the resilient varieties, practises and ecosystems across Kerala



Strengthen the farmer networks to ensure conservation and adoption of the resilient varieties and practises.



Create and strengthen a net work of BMCs to lead agrobiodiversity conservation at local level.

ORGANIZERS AND SUPPORTERS

WAYANAD DISTRICT TRIBAL DEVELOPMENT ACTION COUNCIL

Wayanad District Tribal Development Action Council (WTDAC) is a registered society under the Indian Societies Registration Act, 1860, XXI (Reg No: 284/2007) headquartered at Puthoorvayal. It was formed under the aegis of M S Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) in the year 2007. The basic objective of this Council is the overall development of tribal communities of Wayanad. The members of the council are members of different Adivasi communities in the district. WTDAC had received the community genome saviour award for Kurichya and Kuruma communities of Wayanad in recognition of their on-farm conservation efforts of rice varieties. WTDAC has tribal farmer groups who are actively engaged in enriching the food baskets by diversified farmlands and to find a niche market for the traditional farmers.

SEED CARE

Seed Care is the organization of traditional farmers in the region of Malabar, registered under societies act under the aegis of MSSRF. Seed care is working among the farmers to encourage on farm conservation of traditional varieties of all crops in the region. Seed care is working mainly among the farmers' community rights on biodiversity in general and seeds in particular. Seed Care has taken the initiative to register 21 rice varieties as farmer's varieties from Wayanad. In this process of Wayanad Community Seed Fest, Seed Care took the lead role in organizing farmers and taking the message of conservation to the grass roots.

MS Swaminathan Research foundation

The organization, MS Swaminathan Research foundation (MSSRF) with headquarters in Chennai is a National level research institution, which has strong networks with farmers at grassroots level and also with local government institutions. Community Agro-biodiversity Centre (CAbC) of MSSRF in Puthoorvayal, Wayanad is working on conservation of biodiversity and enhancement of livelihood options in the rich bio and cultural diversity region like Wayanad. CAbC is providing the space for the farmers to come together from different parts of the state to exhibit and exchange seed materials and to discuss the sociopolitical dimensions of agro-biodiversity conservation. MSSRF is taking the lead in this process to take forward the policy and academic suggestions from the local level to higher levels and to advocate for changes.

PRE-FEST ACTIVITIES

LOCAL LEVEL AWARENESS PROGRAMMES

In the lead-up to the 2025 Seed Fest, a series of awareness campaigns and workshops were organized across key regions, including Panamaram and Kalpetta Block, to mobilize farmers, Panchayath officials, Biodiversity Management Committee (BMC) members, and elected representatives. These initiatives were instrumental in disseminating the objectives of the Seed Fest across the Malabar region, fostering community dialogue on the significance of seed exchange programs, and emphasizing the urgent need to participate in the conservation efforts.

During these workshops, discussions centered on the current status of traditional farming in Wayanad and the challenges threatening agro-biodiversity. Farmers highlighted the accelerating loss of traditional crop varieties due to land fragmentation, declining soil fertility, low yields of native varieties, and climate-induced risks such as prolonged droughts and floods. However, they also acknowledged that certain indigenous varieties demonstrated resilience, particularly in coping with erratic climatic conditions. The dialogue further revealed the lasting impacts of the pandemic on farming communities, underscoring the need for enhanced support systems.

Participants unanimously agreed on the importance of conserving agro-biodiversity and called for greater institutional and governmental assistance to facilitate on-farm conservation. The discussions reinforced the need for decentralized, community-driven, and democratic approaches to biodiversity preservation. Farmers recognized the Panchayath BMCs as the key local bodies responsible for implementing conservation measures, backed by the legislative framework of the Indian Biological Diversity Act. These pre-fest engagements not only heightened awareness but also laid the groundwork for collective action, ensuring that the 2025 Seed Fest serves as a catalyst for sustainable and farmer-led biodiversity conservation efforts.

Selection of agrobiodiversity conserver families

As part of the pre-fest activities the WDTDAC members continued its initiative of honoring indigenous conservation efforts through the Adivasi Agrobiodiversity Conserver Family Award. This award, instituted using the interest generated from the Community Genome Saviour Award's corpus fund received from the PPVFRA, Government of India, acknowledges the dedicated efforts of tribal families in conserving agrobiodiversity across Wayanad and the Nilgiris. So far, WDTDAC has recognized 23 Adivasi agrobiodiversity conserver families for their

invaluable contributions to seed and crop diversity conservation. The selection process for the 2025 award began with an open call for applications, disseminated through 40 online media platforms in Wayanad, along with direct outreach to district biodiversity management committees, tribal extension offices, and agricultural departments. To ensure the inclusion of all potential conserver families,

executive committee members visited households to collect applications, resulting in ten nominations. A six-member award committee, comprising farmer representatives, agricultural experts, and researchers from CAbC MSSRF, reviewed these applications and shortlisted four finalists for field verification. Based on predefined criteria, Mr. Kanaran Cholakolly and family were awarded first place for their exceptional conservation efforts, integrating cash and food crops across wetland and upland farming systems, implementing sustainable agricultural practices, and ensuring the active participation of all family members in farm operations. They received an award amount of ₹20,000 and a certificate of appreciation. The committee also recognized the outstanding contributions of Mr. Cheriya Kelu and Valakottil Kurichia joint family and Mr. Kelu and Pulikottil Kurichia joint family, who demonstrated extensive conservation of agrobiodiversity, including rare endemic and threatened plant species, alongside the preservation of sacred groves. Given the difficulty in selecting a single second-place recipient, both families were jointly awarded second place, each receiving ₹10,000 and a certificate of appreciation. This initiative not only highlights the pivotal role of tribal communities in conserving agrobiodiversity but also serves as an inspiration for future generations to continue safeguarding indigenous crop diversity. By recognizing and supporting these conservation champions, the Seed Fest reinforces its commitment to fostering community-led biodiversity conservation and sustainable agricultural practices.



Diversity of Agro-Biodiversity Showcased at the Seed Fest Exhibition

The 2025 Wayanad Community Seed Fest Exhibition showcased an extraordinary range of agro-biodiversity, featuring 55 varieties of bananas, 81 traditional rice varieties, 22 tuber varieties, and 10 types of millets, among other indigenous crops. The exhibition emphasized the resilience of traditional farming systems by displaying 4 types of yams, 3 Dioscorea varieties, 10 Colocasia varieties, and 9 types of arrowroot, all crucial for food security and climate adaptation. Farmers and tribal communities also presented 12 varieties of ginger, 20 turmeric varieties, 7 varieties of black pepper, and 12 tea and spice varieties, highlighting the rich flavors and medicinal properties embedded in indigenous agricultural practices. The festival also featured 11 vegetable seed varieties, 18 types of pulses, and 40 medicinal plants, demonstrating the diversity of plant-based food and herbal knowledge. Beyond crops, the exhibition celebrated



sustainable farming innovations through 12 types of biofertilizers, 6 organic fertilizers, 3 liquid fertilizers, and 1 type of insect trap, supporting eco-friendly cultivation techniques. Additionally, the festival showcased 25 value-added products, 7 varieties of pickles, and an array of traditional bamboo crafts, reinforcing the importance of local entrepreneurship in sustaining agro-biodiversity. With contributions from community seed banks, cooperatives, and research institutions, the Seed Fest reinforced its commitment to seed sovereignty, sustainable farming, and farmer-led biodiversity conservation, ensuring that these invaluable genetic resources remain accessible for future generations.





Inaugural Session

SOWING THE FUTURE: INAUGURAL SESSION ON SEED SOVEREIGNTY, INNOVATION, AND FARMER EMPOWERMENT

The Inaugural Session of the 9th Wayanad Seed Festival set the stage for an engaging and insightful discussion on seed conservation, farmers' rights, and sustainable agriculture. Bringing together a diverse range of speakers from policy, research, governance, and grassroots farming, the session underscored the urgent need to preserve agricultural biodiversity while empowering farmers. The 9th Wayanad Seed Festival provided a crucial platform to discuss the pressing need for seed sovereignty and sustainable agriculture, featuring contributions from farmers, policymakers, researchers, and community leaders. The discussions revolved around the importance of seed conservation, farmers' rights, climate resilience, policy interventions, and scientific advancements, emphasizing the need for collaborative efforts to sustain agricultural heritage and food security.

Dr. Shakeela V., Director of CAbC-MSSRF, opened the session by emphasizing the festival's role in showcasing Wayanad's agricultural heritage and the critical theme of Seed Conservation and Farmers' Rights. Adv. Issac T. J., Chairman of Kalpetta Municipality, highlighted the declining participation in agriculture, stressing the importance of traditional knowledge and the role of manufacturing in the agricultural economy. A keynote lecture by Dr. N. Anil Kumar, Chairman of the Kerala State Biodiversity Board, traced the historical evolution of seed ownership, underscoring the significance of farmers as custodians of biodiversity. The Chief Guest, Sri O. R. Kelu, Minister, Govt. of Kerala, addressed the challenges facing agriculture, including climate change, economic pressures, and policy gaps, reinforcing the need for revitalizing farming as a sustainable livelihood. A special message from Smt. Priyanka Gandhi highlighted the importance of community-led seed conservation efforts, recognizing the contributions of MSSRF, WTDAC, and SEEDCARE in strengthening farmers' self-reliance and agroecological practices. The session also featured scientists, policymakers, and grassroots leaders, who shared insights on integrating traditional knowledge with modern agricultural innovations. Through these discussions, the inaugural session laid a strong foundation for deliberations on seed sovereignty, sustainable farming practices, and policy interventions, setting the tone for the festival's broader agenda aimed at ensuring resilient and farmer-centric agricultural systems for the future.

THE NEED FOR SEED SOVEREIGNTY AND SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

Dr. Shakeela V., Director of CAbC-MSSRF, opened the session by emphasizing that seed sovereignty is fundamental to agricultural resilience, particularly in climate-vulnerable regions like Wayanad. She highlighted that seed conservation extends beyond biodiversity preservation, serving as a crucial mechanism to ensure farmers' autonomy over seed ownership and usage. Reinforcing this perspective, Dr. N. Anil Kumar, Chairman of the Kerala State Biodiversity Board, traced the historical evolution of seed ownership, explaining that seeds were once considered a shared global resource. However, the 1992 Convention on Biodiversity redefined this paradigm, granting sovereign control over genetic resources to individual nations. While this shift has strengthened conservation efforts, it has also introduced challenges for traditional seed-sharing practices among farmers. Echoing these concerns, Adv. Issac T. J., Chairman of Kalpetta Municipality, underscored the urgent need to revive agriculture as a primary economic sector, cautioning against its continued marginalization by the trade and service industries. He emphasized that food security is inseparable from seed security, warning that the loss of seed sovereignty would leave farmers increasingly dependent on commercial seed markets, thereby diminishing their control over agricultural choices and long-term sustainability.

TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND SEED CONSERVATION: A CRUCIAL CONNECTION

A recurring theme in the discussions was the vital role of traditional knowledge in sustainable agriculture and its urgent need for preservation. Adv. Issac T. J. cautioned that traditional agricultural wisdom is fading, emphasizing that inherited knowledge about local seeds, soil fertility, and climate adaptation is as valuable as scientific research. Supporting this view, Padmashree Cheruvayal Raman, a passionate advocate for indigenous seed conservation, underscored the sacred relationship between seeds and nature, stating, "Seed is nature; without seed, there is no nature." He highlighted the critical role of farmers as knowledge holders and expressed concern over the negative impact of modern technology on youth, which, he warned, is distancing them from farming traditions. Expanding on this perspective, Dr. N. Anil Kumar stressed the importance of integrating traditional knowledge with modern scientific advancements, noting that small and marginal farmers are the true custodians

of biodiversity. Their time-tested practices, he asserted, hold key insights into resilient and sustainable farming models, making them indispensable to the future of agriculture.



“Nature begins with a seed—no seed, no nature.”

Cheruvayal Raman

Climate change, policy gaps, and economic instability emerged as major threats to modern agriculture, with speakers highlighting their profound impact on farmers' livelihoods and food security. Sri. O. R. Kelu, Minister for Scheduled Tribes and Backward Classes, Kerala, expressed deep concern over the declining state of agriculture, noting that economic hardships and shifting lifestyles have led many to abandon farming as a viable profession. Adding to this, Dr. Deepa Surendran from KVK Wayanad pointed out that erratic rainfall, rising temperatures, and extreme weather events have made farming increasingly unpredictable, posing serious risks to crop productivity and soil health. She stressed the urgent need for climate-resilient seed varieties and stronger government interventions to help farmers adapt to changing environmental conditions. Beyond climate challenges, financial instability was identified as a key factor driving farmers away from agriculture, leading to land degradation and loss of genetic diversity. Addressing this issue, Sri. Raman Palliyara, a tribal

leader and farmer, emphasized the importance of developing financial incentives and stable income models to retain agricultural livelihoods and encourage sustained farming practices. Without policy reforms and institutional support, speakers warned, the exodus from farming would continue, further threatening food security and rural economies. sharing practices among farmers. Echoing these concerns, Adv. Issac T. J., Chairman of Kalpetta Municipality, underscored the urgent need to revive agriculture as a primary economic sector, cautioning against its continued marginalization by the trade and service industries. He emphasized that food security is inseparable from seed security, warning that the loss of seed sovereignty would leave farmers increasingly dependent on commercial seed markets, thereby diminishing their control over agricultural choices and long-term sustainability.

SEEDS OF CHANGE: BRIDGING TRADITION, INNOVATION, AND POLICY FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

The integration of modern scientific innovations with traditional farming methods was highlighted as a crucial strategy for enhancing agricultural sustainability. James P. George, Deputy General Manager of NABARD, emphasized that research in seed genetics and plant breeding is essential for boosting agricultural resilience, noting that scientists have identified over 40,000 genes in rice varieties, demonstrating the potential of genetic research in strengthening food security. Expanding on this, Dr. Karuthamani from the Coffee Board of India stressed that advancements in seed technology must be guided by farmers' needs rather than purely market-driven demands. He pointed out that the slow adoption of technology in farming is largely due to gaps in awareness and accessibility, which must be addressed to ensure farmers can benefit from scientific advancements. Reinforcing this point, Dr. Sreedevi Annapoorna Singh, Director of CSIR-CFTRI, called for the scientific validation of the nutritional benefits of indigenous crops, particularly neglected varieties such as millets, which hold immense potential for addressing food and nutrition security.

Recognizing the need for institutional support to empower farmers, several speakers emphasized the role of policy in securing farmers' rights over seeds. Smt. Priyanka Gandhi acknowledged the efforts of MSSRF, WTDAC, and SEEDCARE in promoting seed conservation and farmer empowerment, stressing that community seed banks and cooperatives must be expanded to provide long-term solutions for farmers. Supporting this perspective, Sri. K.V. Vinayarajan, Head of Social Initiatives at Buimere India Foundation, advocated for formal recognition of farming as a profession and suggested incorporating agricultural education programs in schools to foster early interest in farming

among young learners. Additionally, speakers emphasized the urgent need for government-backed financial assistance, particularly for small and marginal farmers, to help them maintain traditional seed varieties while adopting modern agricultural techniques, ensuring a sustainable and farmer-centric agricultural future.

REVIVING ROOTS, SECURING FUTURES: THE CULTURAL, ECONOMIC, AND POLICY IMPERATIVES FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

The cultural and economic revival of agriculture was a key focus of the session, with speakers emphasizing the deep historical connection between Indian culture and farming. Sri. O. R. Kelu highlighted that while agriculture has always been central to Indian traditions, rapid urbanization has led to a significant disconnect from farming practices. He stressed that reviving agriculture should not be seen merely as an economic necessity but as a cultural and social imperative, ensuring that farming remains a valued profession. Reinforcing this point, Ms. Raji, Principal Agriculture Officer, Wayanad, emphasized that Wayanad's unique agricultural identity must be preserved, describing it as “a brand in agriculture” that reflects the region's rich farming heritage. Further underscoring the importance of recognizing farmers' contributions, Dr. P. E. Rajasekharan, former Principal Scientist of IIHR, Bangalore, described farmers as the unsung heroes of the agricultural revolution, stressing that their role in sustaining food security should be acknowledged at a national level.

The session concluded with a strong call to action, urging all stakeholders—farmers, scientists, policymakers, and communities—to work together to ensure food security through seed sovereignty and sustainable farming practices. Dr. Rengalakshmi, Executive Director (Area Operations), MSSRF, stated that farmers are not just cultivators but protectors of future food security, highlighting the need for greater collaboration between research institutions and farmer-led initiatives to build a holistic and sustainable agricultural ecosystem. Echoing this sentiment, Dr. Deepa Surendran emphasized that farmers must be at the center of all agricultural policies, ensuring that their knowledge, rights, and contributions are respected and safeguarded. The discussions reinforced that a resilient agricultural future depends on a united approach that values tradition, innovation, and policy support to empower farmers and secure food systems for generations to come.

CONCLUSION

The discussions at the Wayanad Seed Festival inaugural session reinforced that seed sovereignty and sustainable agriculture are fundamental to food security, climate resilience, and farmer empowerment. The festival serves as a reminder that preserving seeds means preserving culture, livelihood, and the future of farming itself. This dialogue between traditional knowledge, policy reforms, and scientific innovation must continue to ensure that agriculture remains viable, sustainable, and farmer-centric for generations to come.



Technical Session 1: Unfolding the Potentials of Community Seed Banks for Food and Nutrition Security



INTRODUCTION

The first technical session of the 9th Wayanad Seed Festival focused on the theme "Unfolding the Potentials of Community Seed Banks (CSBs) for Food and Nutrition Security." Bringing together researchers, policymakers, farmers, and conservationists, the session explored the role of CSBs in protecting agricultural biodiversity, ensuring food security, and addressing climate change challenges. The session was chaired by Dr. R. Rengalakshmi, Executive Director (Area Operations), MSSRF, and coordinated by Prajeesh Parameswaran, CAbC-MSSRF. The session emphasized that community seed banks play a crucial role in farmer-led conservation efforts, ensuring that indigenous and traditional seed varieties are preserved and remain accessible to local farming communities. This session featured key invited talks and expert discussions, focusing on the historical transition, sustainability, and policy support required to strengthen CSBs. Speakers also highlighted successful models of seed conservation, challenges in policy implementation, and the role of farmers in sustaining biodiversity.



Dr. R. Rengalakshmi, Executive Director (Area Operations) at MSSRF, opened the discussion by tracing the evolution of CSBs over the last three decades, highlighting how they have transformed from informal farmer-led initiatives to structured community-driven institutions. She emphasized that the success and longevity of CSBs depend on well-defined operational frameworks, ensuring sustainable management, financial stability, and policy support. The session also examined the growing importance of CSBs in response to climate change, their role in enhancing farmer resilience, and the need for policy recognition and global collaboration to scale up their impact. Dr. Regine Andersen, Research Director & Professor at the Fridtjof Nansen Institute, Norway, provided a comparative analysis of seed systems in India and Africa. She revealed that while 80% of seeds in Africa are managed through farmer-led seed systems, in India, the figure is only 40%, indicating a stronger reliance on market-driven seed systems. This disparity underscores the urgent need to strengthen farmer-managed seed networks in India to protect seed sovereignty and biodiversity. Findings from her study on CSBs in India highlighted the geographical distribution and management models of these seed banks:

- 51% of India's CSBs are located in Odisha, with 41% being managed directly by local communities.
- 80% of these seed banks focus on preserving specific crop varieties, particularly rice, small grains, vegetables, and cereals.
- There is an urgent need to map and document 600 CSBs across India, enabling better collaboration, research integration, and policy advocacy.

Dr. Andersen stressed that India must scale up its community seed bank initiatives through structured policy interventions and farmer-led initiatives, ensuring that seed diversity remains a cornerstone of agricultural resilience and food security.

Mr. Eshwarappa Angadi, Board Member of the Karnataka State Biodiversity Board, emphasized the need for formal policy recognition of CSBs. He proposed that CSBs should be declared as Agrobiodiversity Heritage Sites, ensuring that custodian farmers who preserve indigenous seed varieties receive institutional recognition and financial incentives. His key policy recommendations included:

- Official designation of agroclimatic zones as biodiversity protection areas, protecting traditional seed varieties and ecosystems.
- Recognition and financial incentives for custodian farmers, ensuring that their efforts in seed conservation are economically viable.
- Decentralization of conservation efforts by promoting farmer-led CSBs and agroecological practices.
- Government-backed financial, technical, and infrastructural support for CSB sustainability and seed exchange networks.

He referenced the 2004 Zero Rice Campaign in Kerala, which led to the documentation of 100 indigenous rice varieties. Despite its success in raising awareness, many of these varieties remain at risk due to the absence of policy frameworks that guarantee their long-term protection and commercialization at fair prices for farmers. The discussion emphasized that stronger institutional backing is essential to prevent the loss of genetic diversity in agriculture.

seed markets, ensuring greater control over seed security.

The session also focused on the challenges of market-driven seed commercialization, which has led to the erosion of traditional seed-saving practices. Dr. Balakrishnan and Dr. EDI Oliver King (MSSRF) explained that CSBs operate with minimal external intervention, primarily benefiting smallholder and subsistence farmers. However, several barriers prevent their scalability and sustainability:

- Limited financial resources restrict their ability to expand and serve larger farming communities.
- Seed quality control and certification issues make it challenging for CSBs to compete with commercial seed suppliers.
- Lack of structured policy frameworks leads to inconsistencies in CSB operations across different states.

Key takeaways from the discussion included:

- The Karnataka government has set up five seed banks, but a national-level strategy is needed to expand conservation efforts.
- Community-led initiatives are crucial for the conservation of neglected and underutilized species (NUS).
- CSBs play a key role in reducing farmers' dependency on commercial seed markets.
- relying on external seed markets.

Speakers emphasized that CSBs must move beyond being just storage centers – they should actively engage in seed improvement, exchange programs, and policy advocacy to ensure wider farmer participation and long-term viability.

Several successful seed conservation models were showcased, demonstrating how CSBs can serve as sustainable alternatives to industrial seed production:

- Sahaja Samrudha (Karnataka): A network working with smallholder farmers and women's groups to preserve traditional landraces and heirloom seeds.
- Hooga Seed Collectives (Tamil Nadu): A social enterprise that partners with farmers to produce and market climate-resilient seeds while offering fair pricing and organic certification support.
- Natanam (Tamil Nadu): A seed-sharing initiative that discourages commercialization, encouraging farmers to exchange seeds within communities rather than confusion among farmers and policymakers. He called for clearer guidelines and financial support for indigenous seed farming,

Speakers stressed that indigenous seeds possess superior adaptability and nutritional value, making their conservation essential for sustainable agricultural practices. They also highlighted the need for scientific validation of the benefits of traditional crop varieties, ensuring their wider acceptance among policymakers and consumers.

Despite the benefits of CSBs, the discussion acknowledged several challenges in modern agriculture that threaten traditional seed systems:

- Synthetic fertilizers have altered traditional seed properties, reducing biodiversity and soil fertility.
- Climate change is making indigenous seed varieties more vulnerable, requiring adaptive strategies for conservation.
- The rapid decline of indigenous paddy varieties, as hybrid seeds dominate the market, reducing seed diversity and farmer autonomy.

Mr. Babu Nellarachal, a farmer conservator, stressed the difficulty in distinguishing hybrid varieties from traditional seeds, leading to

- Government-backed incentives for custodian farmers, ensuring that their

ensuring that traditional knowledge is preserved and passed on to future generations.

The session concluded with a call to action, urging:

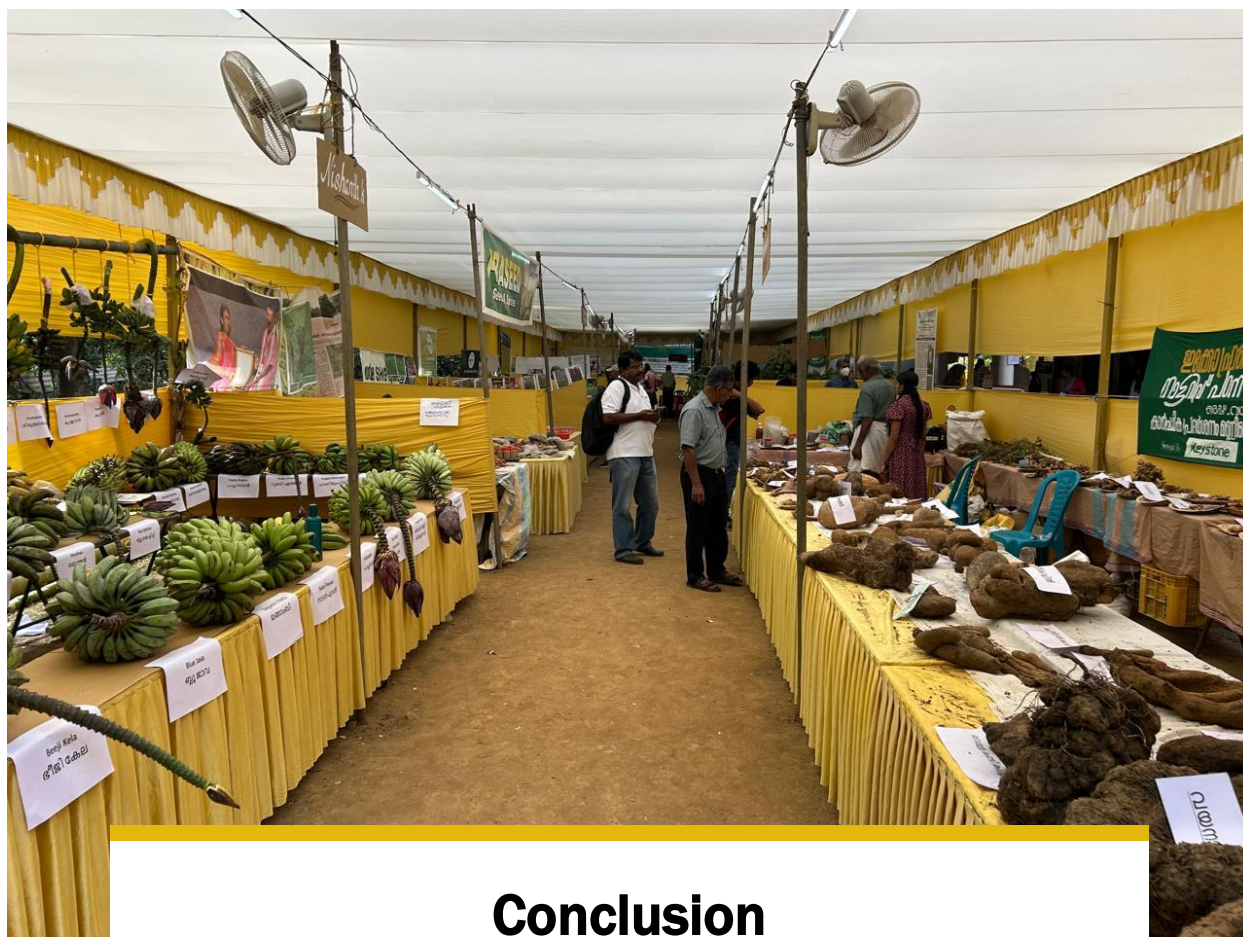
- Expanded financial and policy support for CSBs at the state and national levels.
- Greater research collaborations between scientific institutions and farmer networks to strengthen seed diversity.

efforts in seed conservation remain economically viable.

Dr. Rengalakshmi emphasized that farmers must be recognized as the protectors of future food security, calling for collaborative efforts between policymakers, researchers, and farming communities.

Dr. Deepa Surendran reiterated the need for farmer-centric policies, ensuring that traditional knowledge, indigenous seed varieties, and CSB-led conservation efforts receive long-term institutional support.





Conclusion

The first technical session of the 9th Wayanad Seed Festival emphasized the indispensable role of Community Seed Banks (CSBs) in preserving agricultural biodiversity, ensuring food security, and empowering farmers. Discussions highlighted that CSBs are not merely seed storage facilities but dynamic, community-driven institutions that safeguard indigenous crop varieties, strengthen local food systems, and build resilience against climate change.

Experts stressed that CSBs must receive structured financial, institutional, and policy support to expand their impact. Speakers, including researchers, policymakers, and farmers, called for greater government intervention,

financial incentives for custodian farmers, and decentralized conservation models to protect native seed diversity. Case studies from Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Odisha showcased successful community-led seed conservation models, emphasizing that farmer-led initiatives must be at the forefront of national agricultural policies.

The session laid the foundation for future collaborations between scientific institutions, government bodies, and farmer networks, ensuring that CSBs receive the recognition and support they need. As agricultural landscapes evolve, these initiatives will serve as the backbone of sustainable farming, ensuring that India's rich seed heritage is not only preserved but also thrives for generations to come, securing food sovereignty and ecological balance.

The Cultural Evening



The Cultural Evening at Seed Fest 2025, held on January 30, 2025, provided a deeply immersive experience that intertwined artistic expression, agricultural heritage, and ecological wisdom. Through dance, music, poetry, and folk traditions, the evening reinforced the festival's broader mission of seed conservation, biodiversity preservation, and sustainable farming practices. Organized by WDTDAC and other stakeholders, the event attracted a diverse audience of farmers, officials, students, and cultural enthusiasts, creating a space where generations connected through shared traditions and stories of the land. The performances were not merely artistic displays but served as cultural testimonies to the resilience of agrarian life and the enduring wisdom of indigenous practices.

The evening began with a traditional tribal dance performance by students from Govt. Vocational HSS Mananthavadi, depicting the agricultural cycles of the Paniya community. The dancers, adorned in ethnically significant attire with accessories like anklets, bangles, and winnowing fans, moved in a circular formation, symbolizing the continuity of life and farming. The rhythm of the thudi drums mimicked the seasonal changes, reflecting the harmony between human effort and nature's cycles. This dance was a vivid reminder that agriculture is more than an economic activity—it is a cultural and spiritual act that sustains both people and traditions. The audience, particularly elderly farmers, responded with admiration, recognizing elements of ancient agricultural rituals that had once been part of their daily lives.



Following this was a light music performance by Vinsha from Vazhavatta, a member of the Farmers Producers Company (FPO). Her voice, rich and melodious, filled the air, creating a sense of calmness and nostalgia. The lyrics of the song captured themes of love for nature, the passage of time, and the wisdom carried by the land. This performance highlighted the role of folk music in preserving agricultural history, reinforcing communal ties, and passing down ecological knowledge through oral traditions. Many attendees hummed along, while others clapped softly in rhythm, signifying their deep emotional engagement with the song.

The Bharatanatyam recital by Aswathy Sibbu, also from Vazhavatta and a member of the FPO, was a striking visual and spiritual experience. Dressed in vivid red and gold, adorned with temple jewelry, she performed a devotional dance dedicated to Lord Krishna, embodying the balance, grace, and discipline that mirrors a farmer's relationship with the land. Each precise footstep and expressive gesture told a story of devotion, patience, and reverence for nature's bounty.



Though rooted in mythology, the performance echoed the farmer's dependence on rain, soil fertility, and the divine rhythms that govern agricultural success. The audience sat in rapt attention, visibly moved by the depth of expression in the performance, further reinforcing the idea that farming is not just labor but a form of devotion.

A profound shift in tone came with the poetry recitation by Dr. Balakrishnan DYSP, titled "Whispers of Wisdom: A Poetic Ode from Kaatupoov". As the lights dimmed, the audience was drawn into a contemplative silence, eagerly anticipating the words to come. His voice, filled with reverence and nostalgia, carried the audience through vivid landscapes of rural life, love, and the eternal wisdom of the natural world. Each verse was met with stillness, broken only by the soft rustling of leaves and distant chirping of crickets, making the performance feel like a sacred moment of communion between people and nature.



As the final words faded, the audience erupted into resounding applause, their expressions reflecting a sense of longing and appreciation for the simplicity and wisdom of bygone eras. This performance was a reminder that poetry, like seeds, carries the potential to grow and sustain cultural memory, ensuring that the wisdom of past generations is not lost to modernization.

The final act of the evening was a folk song performance by the Kabani Folk Band, whose music served as a bridge between past and present, rural and urban, oral and written traditions. The songs, rich with stories of resilience, triumph, and environmental stewardship, depicted the struggles of small-scale farmers, the impact of climate change, and the need for sustainable agricultural practices. The beats of the thakil and thudi drums resonated through the gathering, stirring emotions that transcended words. Many in the audience sang along, reinforcing how folk music acts as a collective memory bank, keeping alive the struggles, joys, and lessons of agrarian life.

As the evening progressed, the Kabani Folk Band took the stage, performing songs that spoke of farmers' struggles, triumphs, and the ongoing battle to protect their ancestral lands. The beats of the thakil and thudi drums reverberated through the venue, igniting a sense of shared identity and cultural pride. Folk songs, known for their ability to preserve oral histories and environmental wisdom, became a bridge between the past and present, reminding attendees that agricultural knowledge is passed down not just through farming but through song and storytelling as well.

The evening reached its crescendo with a soul-stirring folk song performance by Green Skill students from MSSRF, a poignant tribute to the history and resilience of Wayanad. The singers, their voices rich with emotion, sang of the land, its people, and its indomitable spirit, paying homage to Mr. Kanakan, a revered figure in folk music. Their voices carried deep reverence and gratitude, highlighting his contributions to preserving the oral traditions of Wayanad. The song was more than a performance—it was a ritual of remembrance, a moment of honoring the past while ensuring its continuity into the future.

The Cultural Evening at Seed Fest 2025 was more than a celebration; it served as a powerful bridge between scientific discussions on biodiversity and the lived experiences of farming communities, using dance, music, poetry, and folklore to transform seed conservation from an intellectual concept into an emotional and cultural reality. As the final notes faded and heartfelt applause filled the air, the evening reaffirmed that preserving seeds is not just about sustaining crops but about safeguarding ancestral wisdom, traditions, and the collective identity of agricultural communities for generations to come.

Day 2 Technical session 1: Empowering Farmers, Strengthening Cooperatives: Advancing Sustainable Growth Through Collective Action



Introduction

The morning session of Day 2 (January 31, 2025) was dedicated to the Dr. Verghese Kurien Memorial Session, celebrating the UN International Year of Cooperatives (IYC 2025). The session emphasized the critical role of cooperatives in fostering economic development, social equity, and sustainability, with a special focus on the dairy and agricultural sectors. Experts, policymakers, and grassroots representatives engaged in discussions on the successes, challenges, and future prospects of cooperatives, drawing insights from Operation Flood, Amul, MILMA, and other cooperative models. The speakers explored the cooperative movement as a unique economic model that balances socialism and capitalism, ensuring that profits are reinvested in stakeholders rather than concentrated among a few. Issues such as market price fluctuations, youth disengagement, leadership challenges, and the need for technological innovation were discussed in depth. The panelists and lead discussants underscored the importance of strengthening governance, increasing financial inclusion, and expanding cooperative models beyond dairy into other agricultural sectors like meat, fish, and coffee farming. The session concluded with a panel discussion and audience engagement, where pressing concerns about fair pricing, leadership, and policy interventions were raised. The morning session ended on a symbolic note with panelists receiving seed pouches, representing the continued growth and sustainability of the cooperative movement.



The Cooperative Movement and Economic Development

One of the central themes of the session was the role of cooperatives in economic growth and poverty alleviation. Cooperatives provide direct employment, income security, and market stability, contributing to Sustainable Development Goal 1 (No Poverty). Sri. G. Balagopal, IAS, in his welcome address, highlighted that Wayanad's cooperative sector has immense potential, particularly in dairy and coffee farming. He emphasized that cooperative models, if strengthened, could position Wayanad as an economic hub. Speakers drew inspiration from Dr. Verghese Kurien's pioneering work in Operation Flood, which transformed India from a milk-deficient country into the world's largest producer of dairy products. Sri. P.T. Gopala Kurup, former Chairman of MILMA, reiterated that the cooperative movement must remain farmer-centric, ensuring that producers—not intermediaries—retain control over profits. Sri. K.T. Thomas, former MD of MILMA, further explained how cooperatives strike a balance between economic efficiency and social responsibility, ensuring sustainable income generation for members. A significant takeaway from the discussion was that cooperatives provide a unique alternative to conventional economic models by integrating social ownership, democratic decision-making, and

equitable profit-sharing mechanisms. Unlike private corporations that prioritize shareholder profits, cooperatives reinvest surplus revenue into farmer welfare, technological advancements, and community development



Market Challenges and Policy Gaps in Cooperatives

The session delved into market volatility and policy shortcomings that hinder the growth of cooperatives. Key concerns raised by speakers included:

- **Price instability in agricultural markets:** Fluctuations in ginger, banana, coffee, and milk prices often put farmers at financial risk. Sri. P.T. Gopala Kurup urged policymakers to introduce mechanisms that stabilize market prices to protect farmers from unpredictable losses.
- **Challenges posed by private sector competition:** With corporate giants like Amul and Karnataka's Nandini expanding operations in Kerala, MILMA faces intense competition. Sri. K.T. Thomas highlighted the need for innovation, product diversification, and cost efficiency to sustain Kerala's cooperative sector.

- Cooperative governance and leadership challenges: Sri. M. Prakash, former Joint Director of the Dairy Development Department, pointed out that leadership in cooperatives should emerge organically from within the sector. However, external political influences often disrupt cooperative governance, reducing operational efficiency.
- Lack of youth participation in cooperatives: With a declining number of young farmers entering dairy and agricultural cooperatives, future sustainability is at risk. Sri. Bobby Kuriakose emphasized that youth-targeted cooperative programs must be developed to engage the next generation in cooperative ventures.

Speakers also stressed that the cooperative model needs stronger policy support, including financial incentives, research grants, and infrastructural investments. Without these, cooperatives risk being overshadowed by profit-driven private enterprises.



Expanding Cooperatives Beyond Dairy: New Frontiers in Agriculture

While dairy cooperatives have been historically successful, the session explored the potential to expand the cooperative model to other agricultural sectors, particularly meat, fish, and coffee farming. Dr. T.S. Rajeev, Director of Entrepreneurship at Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University, emphasized that Kerala is one of India's largest meat-consuming states but lacks a robust local meat production system. He proposed replicating the dairy cooperative model in the meat sector to ensure better income for farmers and self-sufficiency in meat production. Similarly, Sri. Sylvest (Dairy Dreams, Pulpally) and Sri. NM Balan (Erumad Adivasi Kurumba Munnetta Sangham) advocated for strengthening cooperative efforts in fish and coffee farming. The latter highlighted the language and knowledge barriers faced by Adivasi coffee farmers, underscoring the need for localized training and technical assistance to enhance cooperative participation. The overarching recommendation was that the cooperative model should not remain limited to dairy but be expanded to other agricultural sectors where small-scale farmers can collectively benefit from economies of scale, improved market access, and financial stability.

The Role of Cooperatives in Financial Inclusion and Fair Pricing

The session also highlighted the importance of financial inclusion and fair pricing mechanisms within cooperative structures. Sri. S. Suresh Kumar, National General Secretary of the Kisan Service Society, pointed out that cooperatives empower small farmers by providing access to financial resources without the constraints of traditional banking systems. He emphasized that cooperatives enable small farmers to negotiate better prices, access credit facilities, and secure storage infrastructure to prevent distress sales. Another critical aspect discussed was the disparity between farm-gate milk prices and retail prices. Farmers often receive significantly lower prices for milk, while consumers pay high retail rates. Panelists recommended that pricing mechanisms be restructured to ensure farmers receive a fair share of the final sale price.

Governance, Leadership, and the Future of Cooperatives

A key theme in the session was governance and leadership challenges in cooperative organizations. Several speakers pointed out that:

- External political interference weakens cooperative efficiency.
- Leadership positions should be reserved for individuals with practical farming experience rather than bureaucratic or politically motivated appointees.
- Greater representation of farmers, particularly from marginalized communities, is necessary in cooperative boards.

The panel discussion raised concerns regarding the governance of MILMA, the lack of transparency in leadership selections, and the need for structural reforms to ensure democratic decision-making within cooperatives.



Discussion

During the panel discussion, several pressing questions were raised concerning market challenges, cooperative governance, sector expansion, youth engagement, and innovation in dairy farming. A key concern was MILMA's pricing policy, where farmers receive lower procurement prices despite high consumer costs. The panelists responded by highlighting MILMA's high percentage of profit transfer to farmers and ongoing efforts to reassess pricing structures for better farmer compensation. Concerns regarding market price fluctuations in agricultural commodities like ginger and bananas were also raised, with panelists acknowledging the need for cooperative-led stabilization mechanisms to protect farmers from unpredictable losses.

Another major issue discussed was leadership and governance within cooperatives, particularly the dominance of power-driven individuals with no farming experience. The panelists admitted that political interference remains a challenge, but urged farmers to actively participate in general body meetings to push for democratic reforms and greater representation of Wayanad farmers in decision-making roles. In response to whether the cooperative model could be extended beyond dairy into meat and fish farming, the panelists expressed strong support, citing the scalability of the cooperative model and recommending targeted policies and financial incentives to encourage diversification. The discussion also addressed youth disengagement in farming, with concerns about the declining number of young individuals entering dairy cooperatives. The panelists stressed the need for awareness programs, mentorship opportunities, and financial incentives to attract young entrepreneurs to the cooperative sector. Lastly, questions about MILMA's breeding policies and innovation in dairy farming were raised, with the panel acknowledging administrative challenges in implementing effective breeding programs while emphasizing the importance of genetic improvement and investment in advanced breeding techniques to enhance milk production. The discussion concluded with a strong consensus on the need for policy interventions, leadership reforms, financial inclusion, and technological advancements to ensure the long-term sustainability of cooperatives and economic prosperity for farmers.

Conclusion

The Dr. Verghese Kurien Memorial Session provided a comprehensive and insightful discussion on the role of cooperatives in sustainable development, particularly in dairy and agriculture. The session reinforced that cooperatives serve as a powerful economic model, balancing profitability with social equity, and ensuring inclusive growth for farmers and rural communities. While the success of Operation Flood and cooperative-led dairy enterprises like MILMA were widely acknowledged, the discussions also highlighted critical challenges, including market instability, leadership inefficiencies, and declining youth participation.

The panelists emphasized the need for policy interventions, such as pricing reforms, financial incentives, and governance restructuring, to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of cooperatives. Additionally, the potential to expand cooperative models beyond dairy into emerging sectors like meat, fish, and coffee farming was strongly advocated. The session concluded with a call to action for farmers, policymakers, and industry leaders to collaborate in strengthening cooperative institutions and ensuring fair pricing, innovation, and financial security for farmers. By fostering youth engagement, promoting cooperative leadership from within, and leveraging technological advancements, cooperatives can continue to serve as a pillar of economic resilience and social empowerment in India's agricultural landscape.



Poster Presentations: Conservation of Agrobiodiversity

Friday

2: 00 PM to 4:10 PM

Key Research Highlights

The presented research spanned across various sub-themes, including the role of agrobiodiversity in nutrition, sustainable models for conservation, microbial interventions for plant growth, and bioactive properties of medicinal plants.

Agrobiodiversity and Nutrition: A study from Mores College of Arts and Science emphasized how diverse agrobiodiversity enhances food security and contributes to better health by sustaining genetic, species, and ecosystem diversity.

Seed Dormancy Techniques: A study on *Annona reticulata* from Sree Gokulam Arts and Science College explored artificial seed dormancy-breaking methods. The research showed that mechanical scarification (using blades and sandpaper) improved germination rates, whereas acid treatments led to microbial infections.

Wild Edible Plants for Nutrition and Medicine: Research from Payyanur College highlighted the nutritional and medicinal benefits of underutilized wild edible plants, advocating for their increased use to combat malnutrition.

Microbial Formulations for Agriculture: Another study from Jain University presented an encapsulated microbial formulation for promoting *Eleusine coracana* (finger millet) growth. The findings supported microbial-based alternatives to chemical fertilizers.

Antibacterial and Antidiabetic Properties of Fenugreek: MSSRF Wayanad researchers analyzed *Trigonella foenum-graecum* extracts, which showed significant antibacterial activity against *Staphylococcus aureus* but only moderate antidiabetic effects.



Session Overview

The poster presentation session on Conservation of Agrobiodiversity was held with the objective of showcasing research contributions in the field of sustainable agriculture, biodiversity conservation, and nutritional security. The session featured six posters presented by students and researchers from five different institutions: Mores College of Arts and Science, Sree Gokulam Arts and Science College, Payyanur College, Jain University, and MSSRF Wayanad. The posters were evaluated by a panel of experts, including Dr P Rajasekharan, Dr Shakeela V, Dr. N. S. Pradeep, Mr. Prajeesh Parameswaran and Ms CS Dhanya.

The Chair, Dr. P. E. Rajasekharan, commended the innovative research contributions but highlighted the need for further interdisciplinary collaboration. He emphasized integrating these findings into policy and practice for greater real-world impact.

Key Takeaways and Recommendations

- **Strengths:** The session successfully showcased diverse approaches to agrobiodiversity conservation, linking research to sustainable agricultural solutions.
- **Improvements Needed:** Future sessions could incorporate more interactive demonstrations and case studies to enhance audience engagement.

The session concluded with a call for continued research and knowledge-sharing in agrobiodiversity conservation to ensure long-term food security and ecological balance.



Farmers as Spice Breeders and Conservators



The session was a crucial component of the Seed Fest, shedding light on the indispensable role of farmers in spice breeding and conservation. Chaired by Dr. B. Sasikumar, Former Principal Scientist and Head at ICAR-IISR, and convened by Sanil P. C. from CAbC-MSSRF, the event brought together lead farmers, agricultural scientists, and researchers who shared their experiences and insights. The session emphasized how farmer-led spice breeding initiatives contribute to agricultural biodiversity, sustainability, and economic resilience. Discussions revolved around innovations in spice breeding, conservation methods, participatory plant breeding, and legal aspects concerning farmers' rights over seeds. The forum also facilitated an interactive discussion where farmers engaged with scientists and policy experts on challenges related to spice cultivation and agricultural sustainability.



Farmer-Led Innovation in Spice Breeding and Conservation

The session highlighted several remarkable farmer-led innovations in spice breeding, focusing on the contributions of key individuals. Sri. Balakrishnan Kammanna shared his extensive experience in breeding new varieties of pepper through artificial pollination. His journey, which began in 1882, led to the development of the Aswathi variety, a hybrid of the Cheruvalli and Utramkotta varieties, and the Suvarna variety, obtained by cross-pollinating the Suvarna and Cheruvalli varieties. His conservation efforts extend to maintaining twelve unique varieties of pepper from Wayanad and a total of fifty-two varieties. His work has been widely recognized, culminating in the recent granting of a patent for 916 Turmeric, a significant achievement in spice breeding.

Equally inspiring was the contribution of Sri. Mathew Sebastian, who focused on nutmeg breeding, emphasizing the economic and ecological importance of nutmeg cultivation. He elaborated on how the climatic conditions and soil composition of Wayanad and Idukki make them ideal for nutmeg cultivation. One of his key innovations has been a grafting technique that ensures better growth, stability, and productivity, addressing challenges that traditional nutmeg cultivation often faces.



Another notable presentation was delivered by Sri. John Joseph, who spoke about his lifelong passion for agriculture and the importance of preserving spice biodiversity. He has collected one hundred different varieties of nutmeg from across Kerala and maintains a unique collection of tapioca varieties, including the Spainmaria variety. His work in ginger cultivation has also been substantial, and he has developed innovative methods for growing high-yield and disease-resistant ginger varieties. His address underscored the necessity of blending traditional agricultural knowledge with modern scientific advancements to ensure the sustainability of spice cultivation.

Sri. George K. V's presentation focused on his innovation in breeding Agali Pepper, a variety known for its thick meriderm, which enhances resilience and quality. He explained how Agali Pepper is a superior choice for farmers due to its high yield and good weight, making it a profitable investment. In 2016, he received the FRO certificate for this innovation, marking a significant milestone in spice breeding. His work does not stop at breeding; he also runs a nursery where he propagates and distributes Agali Pepper plants to farmers, ensuring wider adoption of this variety. His presentation emphasized the need for farmers to embrace innovation and adaptability in spice cultivation.

Scientific Perspectives on Farmer-Led Spice Breeding

Beyond individual farmer contributions, the session also included expert insights from agricultural scientists who addressed the broader challenges and opportunities associated with farmer-led spice breeding. Dr. Lijo Thomas from ICAR-IISR discussed the difficulties that farmers face, including limited access to scientific research, financial constraints, and environmental unpredictability. However, he also highlighted the potential of farmer-led breeding initiatives, particularly in the development of climate-resilient varieties and the increasing global demand for organic spices. He stressed the importance of research institutions collaborating with farmers to validate and promote newly developed spice varieties, ensuring that they gain widespread recognition and market access. Expanding on this theme, Mr. V. A. Muhammed Nissar from ICAR-IISR provided a detailed explanation of participatory plant breeding approaches for tree spices. He emphasized that an effective breeding strategy requires a collaborative effort between farmers, researchers, and local communities to improve traits such as yield, quality, pest resistance, and adaptability to climate change. This approach integrates traditional farming wisdom with scientific advancements, creating sustainable, high-value spice varieties that meet both market demands and environmental challenges. He also touched upon the importance of ethics in agriculture, the impact of climate change on spice cultivation, and the need for regional adaptability in farming practices.

Legal Framework and Farmers' Rights Over Seeds

One of the critical discussions in the session revolved around the legal aspects of farmers' rights over seeds and the need for protecting indigenous agricultural knowledge. Mr. Prajeesh P. from MSSRF-CAbC elaborated on how farmers can secure legal ownership over their seeds, preventing unauthorized commercial exploitation by external entities. He explained the significance of intellectual property rights in agriculture and the need for policy frameworks that safeguard the contributions of farmers. A particularly thought-provoking aspect of his presentation was his discussion on the lack of gender inclusivity in agriculture. Women, despite playing a crucial role in farming, often remain excluded from decision-making processes and seed conservation initiatives. Addressing this imbalance, he called for more inclusive policies that recognize and integrate women's contributions to agricultural sustainability. His presentation also highlighted the role of MSSRF in bringing the Plant Genome Saviour Award to tribal communities in Wayanad, a recognition that underscores the vital role that farmers play in conserving agricultural biodiversity. The Seed Care Movement in Wayanad is working towards acknowledging registered and non-registered seeds, giving due credit to the farmers responsible for their preservation. This initiative aims to ensure sustainable farming practices through continued seed conservation and equitable recognition of farmer innovations.

Open Discussion, Key Takeaways, and Recommendations

The session concluded with an engaging discussion where farmers raised concerns about the continued reliance on pesticides and the slow recognition of their innovations, with panelists recommending disease-resistant crop varieties like Thevamudi, certified seeds, and regional innovation meets to address these issues. They also dispelled myths about bitter melon's safety, emphasizing that while excessive pesticide use is a concern, the vegetable itself is not harmful, and advised farmers to consult research centers regarding the declining Arecanut tree population in Wayanad. The session ended with key recommendations, including increased financial and institutional support for farmer-led breeding, stronger farmer-scientist collaboration for resilient spice varieties, and policy measures to ensure gender inclusivity and expanded agricultural awareness programs, particularly in Idukki.

Celebrating the Success of the 2025 Wayanad Community Seed Fest

The Valedictory Ceremony of the 2025 Wayanad Community Seed Fest marked the conclusion of an inspiring three-day event dedicated to agro-biodiversity conservation, farmers' rights, and sustainable agricultural practices. Held from 2:00 PM to 3:30 PM, the session brought together distinguished speakers, organizers, and participants to reflect on the event's impact, share key takeaways, and outline future directions for biodiversity conservation and seed sovereignty.

Several esteemed guests addressed the gathering, appreciating the significance of the Seed Fest in fostering a collective commitment toward conservation. Smt. Chandrika Krishnan, President of Kalpetta Block Panchayath, commended the M. S. Swaminathan Foundation for providing a platform for farmers, traders, and agriculturalists to showcase their work and achievements. Muhammad Rafi of Keystone Foundation acknowledged the diverse ideas exchanged during the fest and emphasized the importance of implementing the discussed strategies. Devaki from WDTDAC spoke warmly about the Seed Fest, recognizing its cultural and ecological significance, particularly in empowering tribal communities and ensuring the preservation of traditional farming systems. She highlighted the contributions of the Wayanad District Biodiversity Board in protecting indigenous biodiversity.

Adding to the discussions, Dr. N. Anil Kumar, Chairman of the Kerala State Biodiversity Board, emphasized the urgent need for biodiversity conservation centers across different regions. He proposed that Wayanad should take the lead in launching a Seed Register, ensuring that both food crops and tree species from home gardens are systematically documented. He cautioned that by 2050, population growth and shrinking land availability would heighten food security challenges, making it imperative to have high-quality seeds to sustain agricultural production. Bala Subramanian from Kudumbashree Mission highlighted the role of urban farming, agrinutri gardens, and bio-fertilization in promoting sustainable agriculture. He commended the Summer Shelter Watermelon Cultivation Initiative and suggested that Kudumbashree members should have greater representation in biodiversity conservation efforts. Jose, President of the District Biodiversity Board, expressed concerns about the lack of awareness regarding biodiversity management committees, stating that development should not be limited to infrastructure but should equally focus on conserving biodiversity. He praised the biodiversity management efforts in Wayanad and highlighted the district's BioPark initiative, funded through CSR programs, as a model for conservation-driven development.

The Vote of Thanks, delivered by Joseph John of CAbC-MSSRF, expressed deep gratitude to all participants, speakers, and organizers. He acknowledged the continuous support of WDTDAC and SEED CARE, along with contributions from district panchayats, biodiversity boards, the Indian Institute of Spices Research, NABARD, and various institutional partners. He also extended his appreciation to the Keystone Foundation, Directorate



of Arecanut and Spices Development, Milma, Coffee Board, HDFC Bank, and all technical, logistical, and cultural teams involved in ensuring the success of the event.

The session underscored several key observations, including the successful facilitation of seed exchanges, knowledge-sharing, and community participation, reinforcing the importance of local seed sovereignty. Participants highlighted the necessity of institutional support for seed banks, biodiversity conservation policies, and decentralized governance to empower farmers and tribal communities. Moving forward, there was a strong call to scale up sustainable farming initiatives, enhance farmer training programs, and integrate biodiversity conservation into mainstream agricultural policies. Recommendations for future events included the establishment of a Seed Register in Wayanad, ensuring the systematic documentation of traditional and indigenous seed varieties, along with strengthening awareness programs on biodiversity conservation at the panchayat and grassroots levels. Additionally, increased collaboration with cooperative institutions like Kudumbashree was suggested to integrate them into biodiversity conservation efforts. Participants also stressed the need for enhanced climate resilience strategies, particularly by supporting farmers in cultivating drought-resistant and traditional crop varieties.

The 2025 Seed Fest successfully reinforced community-driven conservation efforts, highlighting the crucial role of farmers, tribal groups, and local governing bodies in sustaining agro-biodiversity. Moving forward, the focus will be on policy advocacy, institutional support for conservation initiatives, and scaling up farmer-led seed preservation efforts. With the collective commitment of all stakeholders, the Seed Fest reaffirmed its mission of ensuring seed sovereignty, ecological sustainability, and food security for future generations. The Valedictory Ceremony concluded with a renewed sense of dedication, inspiring all participants to continue their efforts in conservation and sustainable agricultural practices.





*Your presence was
an honour that made
the programme a
grand success.*

THANK YOU...



കാർഷിക സമൃദ്ധി വിളംബരംചെയ്ത് വിത്തുത്സവം

സ്വന്തം ലേഖകൻ

കൽപ്പറ്റ

വയനാടിന്റെ കാർഷിക സമൃദ്ധി വിളംബരംചെയ്ത് വിത്തുത്സവത്തിന് തുടക്കമായി. എം എസ് സ്വാമിനാഥൻ ഗവേഷണ നിലയത്തിൽ മൂന്നുദിവസം നീണ്ടുനിൽക്കുന്ന വിത്തുത്സവം മന്ത്രി ഓ ആർ കേളു ഉദ്ഘാടനംചെയ്തു. ശനിയാഴ്ച സമാപിക്കും.

അനും നിന്നുപോകുന്ന വിത്തുത്സവങ്ങളുടെയും കൃഷിരീതികളുടെയും സംരക്ഷണവും കാർഷിക പരിക്ഷണങ്ങളും വിത്തുത്സവത്തിൽ സജീവമാർച്ചയാണ്. പ്രതികൂലമായ കാലാവസ്ഥകളെയും കീടങ്ങളെയും പ്രതിരോധിച്ച വിത്തുകളുടെ പ്രദർശനം പ്രധാന ആകർഷണമാണ്. ഇതിനായി വിവിധ സ്റ്റാളുകളും ഒരുക്കിയിട്ടുണ്ട്. ജില്ലയുടെ വിവിധ ഭാഗങ്ങളിലുള്ള കർഷകരുടെ വൈവിധ്യമാർന്ന കാർഷികോൽപ്പന്നങ്ങളുടെ പ്രദർശനവും വിപണനവും നടത്തുന്നു. വിവിധയിനം വാഴകൾ, കിഴങ്ങുവർഗങ്ങൾ, കുരുമുളക് ഇനങ്ങൾ എന്നിവയെല്ലാം പുത്തൻ അറിവുകൾ പകരുന്നതായി. പരമ്പരാഗത കാർഷികോപകരണങ്ങൾ, വംശനാശ ഭീഷണി



വിത്തുത്സവത്തിലെ സ്റ്റാളുകൾ മന്ത്രി ഓ ആർ കേളു സന്ദർശിക്കുന്നു

നേരിടുന്ന സസ്യങ്ങളുടെ വിവരശേഖരങ്ങൾ എന്നിവയും പ്രദർശനത്തിലുണ്ട്. വിവിധ സ്വാശ്രയ കർഷക കൂട്ടായ്മകളും തങ്ങളുടെ മൂല്യവർധിത ഉൽപ്പന്നങ്ങൾ പരിചയപ്പെടുത്തുന്നു. തനത് ജനിതക വൈവിധ്യം കൃഷിയിടത്തിൽ പരിപാലിക്കുന്ന മികച്ച ആദിവാസി കർഷകർ

ക്ക് നൽകുന്ന കമ്മ്യൂണിറ്റി ജീനോം സേവിയർ അവാർഡ് മന്ത്രി സമ്മാനിച്ചു. ചടങ്ങിൽ നഗരസഭാ ചെയർമാൻ അഡ്വ. ടി ജെ ഐസക്ക് അധ്യക്ഷനായി. നബാർഡ് ഡെപ്യൂട്ടി ജനറൽ മാനേജർ ജെയിംസ് പി ജോർജ്ജ് മുഖ്യ പ്രഭാഷണം നടത്തി. വിത്ത് വിള വൈവിധ്യം സൂക്ഷിക്കുന്ന

കൃഷിക്കാരെ ആദരിച്ചു. വിത്തുപുര പദ്മശ്രീ ചെറുവയൽ രാമൻ ഉദ്ഘാടനംചെയ്തു. കേരള സംസ്ഥാന ജൈവവൈവിധ്യ ബോർഡ് ചെയർമാൻ ഡോ. അനിൽ കുമാർ, ഡോ. റെഗിനെ ആൻഡേഴ്സൺ, ഡോ. ബാലകൃഷ്ണൻ, ഡോ. രംഗലക്ഷ്മി തുടങ്ങിയവർ സംസാരിച്ചു.

വിത്തുത്സവം സമാപിച്ചു

കൽപ്പറ്റ

കാർഷിക സമൃദ്ധിയുടെയും വിളവൈവിധ്യത്തിന്റെയും നേർക്കാഴ്ച ഒരുക്കിയ വിത്തുത്സവം സമാപിച്ചു. തനത് വിളവൈവിധ്യം ഉറപ്പാക്കാനായി പുതിയ തലമുറയ്ക്ക് വിത്തുകൾ കൈമാറിക്കൊണ്ടാണ് വിത്തുത്സവം സമാപിച്ചത്. വിത്തുത്സവത്തോടനുബന്ധിച്ചു നടത്തിയ ദേശീയ സെമിനാറിൽ വിത്ത് സംരക്ഷണവും കർഷകരുടെ അവകാശങ്ങളും എന്ന വിഷയം ചർച്ചചെയ്തു. ഡോ. അനിൽ കുമാർ എം എസ് സ്വാമിനാഥൻ അനുസ്മരണ പ്രഭാഷണം നടത്തി.

വിത്തുത്സവത്തിന്റെ സമാപന സമ്മേളനം കൽപ്പറ്റ ബ്ലോക്ക് പഞ്ചായത്ത് പ്രസിഡന്റ് ചന്ദ്രിക കൃഷ്ണൻ ഉദ്ഘാടനം ചെയ്തു. മികച്ച പോസ്റ്റർ അവാർഡുകളും പ്രദർശന സ്റ്റാളുകൾക്കും സ്വയം സേവകർക്കുള്ള അംഗീകാരപത്രങ്ങൾ പരിപാടിയിൽ സമ്മാനിച്ചു. കുടുംബശ്രീ മിഷൻ കോ ഓർഡിനേറ്റർ ബാല സുബ്രഹ്മണ്യൻ, ജോസഫ് ജോൺ എന്നിവർ സംസാരിച്ചു.



വിത്തുത്സവത്തിലെ സ്റ്റാളിൽനിന്ന്