

The United Nations has declared 2026 as the International Year of Women Farmers. This year, the role played by women in the agricultural and food systems, from planting to marketing of agricultural products, is being highlighted. Along with this, the declaration aims to raise awareness about the challenges they face and their survival. Women farmers occupy a prominent position in society in matters such as food security, nutritional availability, and economic security.

Women who know the soil

Richard Joseph

If you travel through the areas of Nedinjhal, Pappanchani, and Palapur in Kalliyoor Panchayat, Thiruvananthapuram, you will see women toiling with the soil with smiling faces. Hectares of farmlands spread out on both flat and sloping land. The soil is not very fertile, but they are reaping gold in the soil with hard work. Spinach, brinjal, Indian butter bean, snake beans, bitter gourd, lady's finger, cucumber, salad cucumber, pumpkin, green chilli, banana, ivy gourd, winged beans, papaya, tapioca etc. are cultivated here. They use neem oil garlic mixture, tobacco decoction etc. for pest control and fertilizers like vermicompost to increase soil fertility.

If you travel about 20 km from Thiruvananthapuram on the Kanyakumari National Highway via Pappanamcode and Punnamoodu, you can reach a place called Pappanchani in Kalliyur panchayat. Mary Stella, who has been farming for many years, says that most of the farming here is done using organic farming methods. Mary Stella, who has been making a living through farming for many years, has a clear understanding of farming methods. Favorable weather is very important for farming, but prolonged rains can be detrimental to farming. Good sun and good irrigation are necessary for farming. But lack of sunlight and stagnant water at the base can have a detrimental effect on agriculture. Mary Stella says that she can get assistance from the Kalliyoor Agriculture Office for all her farming needs. They are passionate about organic farming methods that protect the soil and nature. They are also able to provide advice and assistance to the new generation of farmers. Various crops are grown here three times a year.

To the farm in the morning

Mary Stella, who arrives at the farm at 5.45 am, does so first if she has new seedlings to plant. Then, if she has peas or spinach to harvest, she tends to that. After that, she carries out tasks like fertilizing, watering, and weeding. She digs the soil and waits for the soil to dry for two days. After that, she sows spinach seeds mixed with ash. The first fertilizer is applied after seven or eight days. After weeding the 10th day, chicken manure is also applied as fertilizer. The spinach can be harvested after 25 days.

By the time the work, which starts at 5.45 am, it is noon. She leaves home with all the food and water she has until then. Mary Stella says that she needs God's blessings to overcome adverse weather conditions and move forward with her farming.

Cassava is a favorite crop of this female farmer. The sprawling cassava plantation will make anyone want it. Bananas are also cultivated in some places. This woman farmer testifies that cassava is a tuber crop that does not require much maintenance and attention. One special feature is that it is not subject to major pests. Fertilizer is applied once as a base fertilizer. Later, it is sufficient to fertilize it two or three times. There is no need to spray any pesticides. However, rodents must be kept away. The farming method here is divided into three sections so that the crop can be harvested throughout the year.

It is said that cassava coming from Tamil Nadu is a setback for Kerala farmers. However, they say that there is a lot of demand for the cassava they produce. If cassava is cultivated scientifically, there will be no loss. 3000 to 3500 cassava stalks are planted in one acre of land. They are planted in such a way that three shoots emerge from the top. Two shoots that sprout from one stalk are grown. The others are pinched off. During the rainy season, water should not pool at the base, while watering should be done during the summer.

Kumari's Amaranth Field

If you reach the village of Palapur in Kalliyoor panchayat, you will see Kumari's farm where lentils and spinach are growing. Vegetables are growing in an area of several acres. Of these, spinach and lentils are the main ones. The specialty is that spinach can be harvested in 24-27 days. Kumari herself mainly takes care of them. Shanti and Ambika provide assistance Kumari. Kumari says that farming has been her livelihood for more than a quarter of a century. Earlier, she used to cultivate cassava and plantain. Later, she reduced it. It is better to change the varieties cultivated from time to time. Therefore, Kumari says that she cultivates these alternately from time to time.

Cultivating lentils will give satisfaction

Kumari says that cultivating lentil is an agricultural resource that gives the most satisfaction to farmers. That is why there are farmers who cultivate only lentils. Although they used to cultivate okra, they reduced it due to low prices and pest problems. There is always a good market for lentils. Once the crop starts to bear fruit, it can be harvested for about a month and a half. If you go to the garden in the morning, you can get up to 20 kg of beans for five cents. You can harvest beans on alternate days. There will be four to five beans in a bunch. The cultivation is done according to the exact instructions of the Kalliyoor Agriculture Officer. The vines will grow long from the beans. They should be tied up. But they should be cut before they grow too long. "When you do that, the flowers and fruits you get will be larger. Otherwise, the fruits will be smaller" - Kumari's experience tells us. She has been interested in farming since childhood. Kumari says that the satisfaction she gets from farming is something else.

Fertilizer is important

Chicken manure is mainly used as fertilizer for lentils. The land is prepared with chicken manure before planting. Chicken manure is applied by digging a trench. Once applied in this way, there is no need for other fertilizers later. Applying chicken manure can also control fungal diseases. Cow dung is also used as fertilizer.

From seed to market Everything is ready

The agricultural work force working under Kalliyur Krishi Bhavan produces and supplies the hybrid seeds required by this women farmer group in the nursery. Kalliyur Krishi Bhavan is with them with a precise plan for all activities from seed to market. There are also groups that deliver organic fertilizers required for farming to the farm itself. However, the farmers plant and produce spinach seeds themselves. Some people organize markets and sell the harvested agricultural products at the place where they are grown.

Bananas of all kinds

Although many different types of bananas are cultivated here, the main varieties cultivated are nendran banana, cavendish banana, and elaichi banana. The elders say that once the elaichi banana is dug up, it is enough to go to its base for harvesting. There is no need to water it, it will not break, and it will not be damaged much. If you plant bananas in loose soil, you can get a good harvest. However, you should be careful when choosing cuttings for the cultivation of other bananas. Cuttings with pointed leaves that sprout from the banana should be used for planting. Cuttings should be done within 10-20 days of cutting the cuttings. Soak them in water mixed with cow dung and ash for three to four days and dry them in the sun. Then, after keeping them in the shade for about 10 days, they are taken for planting. If you prepare the land and dig holes two meters apart and plant the seedlings, 2500 cuttings can be planted per hectare. Lime is also added to the hole dug for planting along with organic fertilizer. This is to avoid soil acidity. Cow dung, green manure and organic fertilizer are used for farming.

Spreading and planting bitter gourd

The specialty of bitter gourd farming is that it yields a large yield in some seasons. Bitter gourd is planted in a pandal. This method involves regularly placing a pandal. Farmers here say that farming combined with technology is very profitable. Drip irrigation is important in this. There is a system to pass fertilizer through this water itself. This can save a lot of work. Pests can be controlled through organic pesticide applications. Once pipes for drip irrigation are installed, it is possible to farm regularly in this way. If agriculture is the desire of man to survive, then women farmers are the backbone of that agriculture today. They work by digging the soil and do not see agriculture as just a way of life. They live knowing that the joy of their life is agriculture.