

Promotion of Off-season Vegetable Value Chain in Sirmaur, Himachal Pradesh



The production of off-season vegetables is being promoted in thirty villages of Nahar Development block in the Sirmaur District, Himachal Pradesh. The total population is ~5,000 in all these villages. Agriculture and livestock keeping are the main sources of livelihood for these people. In addition to traditional food crops such as wheat, maize, potato, and pulses (kidney bean and lentils), farmers in these villages also cultivate seasonal vegetables. These crops provide them with cash income in addition to wage labour. Unlike traditional agriculture that is not economically gainful, vegetable production has become an important source of income for local farmers. The most commonly cultivated crops include garlic and maize. All households in the area are engaged in the cultivation of seasonal vegetables, producing over ~750 tons of different vegetables, out of which nearly ~570 tons are sold in the market. A household generally sells ~500 kg of different vegetables depending on the plot size it puts under cultivation earning a cash income of around 20,000 INR per household per year.

AT India, with the help of HDFC Parivartan, intends to boost farmers' capability to increase vegetable production and profitability, particularly by engaging them in off-season vegetable cultivation using organic inputs. Off-season vegetables have a lot of potential to bring in additional income as they sell at much higher prices. To do this, the project organises farmers into groups, promotes organic and environmentally friendly farming practices, and facilitates the distribution of high-quality vegetable seeds. In addition farm machinery banks to perform field operations are provided at village level. In addition farm machinery banks to perform field operations are provided at village level. Improved organic farming technologies, for example organic manure production are also being promoted in the project villages.

Through trainings, exposure visits, and the provision of experience sharing avenues, farmers are gaining skills in off-season vegetable production, particularly on principles of organic farming. Focus has been given to including women and the poor in value chain development by encouraging their participation in self-help groups (SHGs) and

building their capacities through training, exposure visits, and the provision of material and equipment. This is coupled with promotion of good practices for water conservation. Trainings on post-harvest and processing techniques have been held to improve product handling and packaging for effective marketing. 67 SHGs benefitting 650 households in all the project villages were formed and off-season vegetable cultivation was promoted. Further to this, on the basis of Produce Cluster Area Approach, two FPOs were formed and registered under State Self-Reliant Cooperative Act, 1968 for developing market relations, processing and value addition of on/off-farm produces, and to enhance to enhance common bargaining strength. A common aggregation centre cum processing unit has been established near the road head in Bechar Ka Bagh, the centre point for all the project villages, where collection, weighing, and grading of the harvested vegetables is planned and performed. FPOs are in charge of running the aggregation centre cum processing unit.

Case study

Prem Singh Atri, a progressive farmer from Bechar Ka Bagh village was keen to take part in the study. He had been practising agriculture using traditional methods that he learned from his ancestors. His major challenges in the cultivation of off-season vegetables were pests and diseases, which made his venture less profitable. He received technical training in using green techniques and inputs like organic manure and integrated pest management in off-season vegetable cultivation and went on exposure visits to agricultural universities and areas where off-season vegetable cultivation is carried out at a commercial level.



AT India provided high quality vegetable seeds and other inputs such as environmentally safe pesticides, farm machinery bank and trained Mr. Atri in preparing liquid manure. Mr. Atri benefited from this and increased his tomato growing area from 1.5 bigha to 5 bigha. AT India provided tomato seeds of Himsona, a high yielding variety. This has improved the production tremendously, and this year Mr. Atri had harvested approx. 13,125 kg of produce and sold it for a total of INR 3,28,125/- sell in the Nahan and Solan market. He also cultivates french beans, peas and chillies as off-season vegetables.