

Emerging Civil Society Initiatives in Agriculture

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This article analyses the initiatives by Padma Shri awardee farmers and agriculturalists who are paving the way forward for policy making towards better incomes for the farmer community and nutritional security.

Agriculture of today is witnessing several sustainable initiatives by farmers to improve farming techniques and to prop up their livelihoods and income. This is novel as the state generally takes care of agricultural extension and the standard development theory does not often find private involvement in technology dissemination and awareness building on best agricultural practices. The Government too has, in a way, recognised this changing landscape of agricultural development. The recent conferment of *Padma Shri* awards to 12 such farmer-leaders in 2019 is a case in point. All the awardees have been encouraging fellow farmers through their own practices as well as structured trainings.

Innovations in Agriculture

Experiences of both developed and developing countries show that incremental innovations by the users of technology viz., factory workers and employees play pivotal role in improving technology and productivity.¹ juxtaposing this to agriculture, farmers can contribute similarly to agricultural development through innovation in theory. The achievements of some of the awardees endorse this hypothesis. One of the Padma Shri awardee

farmer, Vallabhbhai Vasrambhai Marvaniya, has been doing innovation in carrot farming since late 1940s in Junagadh of Gujarat. Subsequently, he developed 'Mudhuvan-Gajar' by decades-long selection for better yield, size, and shape. This variety is also amenable for processing. The Rajasthan Agricultural Research Institute tested this variety and endorsed its cultivation. It is popular in Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan.

Experimenting with cauliflower cultivation since 1970, Jagdish Prasad Parikh from Rajasthan developed 'Ajita Nagar Selection' variety for better size and quality. It can be cultivated without much chemical use and the crop tolerates heat wave conditions.

The definition of innovation indicates that the use of practices not followed so far in the region and development of new products and services.² Other awardees also introduced innovation in their respective crops. Ram Saran Verma from Barabanki of Uttar Pradesh shifted to cultivating tissue-culture banana in 1988 and developed better crops each following year by developing suckers from the best banana plant with the help of tissue culture. Sultan Singh demonstrated use of re-circulating aquaculture systems (RAS) for fish cultivation in adverse climate with very limited use of water in Karnal of Haryana. Another innovation in dairy farm management by Narendra Singh from Panipat of Haryana was also awarded.



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