

In Auroville's early years, when most of the community was engaged in stewarding land, land-use patterns were mixed: along with planting trees, people cultivated vegetables, fruits and grains. Over the years, as grow-

ing food was not easy, there was a marked emphasis on afforestation. And as farms were turned into forests, grains were the first to fall by the wayside.

Of the odd 20 farms in Auroville today only a few grow grains anymore. New farms often grow some grains in the first few years but then abandon them. For, growing grains is financially very challenging; the risks are high and it demands special management skills. Besides that, grain farming needs its own special layout and infrastructure for irrigation, storage, etc. Grains require processing which entails skilled labour and machinery.

2011 saw a decisive shift in the functioning of grain farming in Auroville: Annapurna Farm took on the additional task to function as a central granary where grains are dried, cleaned, stored and processed. Since growing grains needs substantial financial input at the beginning of the growing season, Auroville created a crop loan fund with City Services so that a farmer has enough cash flow, in the form of a loan, to cultivate a crop. Once the crop is harvested, it goes straight to the FoodLink granary, where the crop is dried, cleaned, assessed and stored. The value of the crop is determined and the balance crop value paid to the farmer.



If the crop has less value than the loan given, the farmer is asked to bring in additional crop at a later stage. New crop loans are only given when the previous loan has been repaid fully.

The crop is stored until

there is a demand from the community. This can be as long as one year later, and then, as per the demand, the grain is processed by Annapurna and shipped to Foodlink for distribution.

To improve standards and coordination, at the time of establishing the crop loan fund farmers also started the Grain Group. This working group meets once a month on a grain farm and discusses improvements in grain cultivation, does crop planning, determines prices, reviews crop loan applications and tracks planting and harvesting.

Today, we see that these efforts are bearing fruits: as farmers have finances available at the right time, crop yields are improving, grain quality has become better because of better drying, cleaning and storing facilities, and lastly, through experience, Annapurna has improved its grain processing techniques. Planning is smoother because of grain group members meet regularly and peer review helps all farmers to learn and improve their standards.

As a well-organized and functional setup is now in place, the Grain Group is ready to take the next step to expand the area of rice cultivation in response to an increase in demand.

The Grain Group comprises the following farms: Annapurna (Tomas), Ayarpaadi (Moorty), Siddhartha (Herbert), Kalpavruksha (Ramesh - a newly established farm, still on probation)

Tomas is answering questions from readers and supporters:

We have rain finally. What does that mean for the reality of the farm?

The southwest monsoon has been giving us good rains. We have already reached the average rainfall for this period. So when people ask me if this makes us happy, and they hear me grumble, they look at me and wonder. Let me try to explain the complexity of it all in a few lines; Yes, sure we need the rain but there are some "buts". For farming in general the rain pattern is more important than the quantity of water. Growing seasonal crops is very challenging and rains need to be there at certain times, and if they're not then opportunities are missed. These crops are very time-bound; sowing them too early or late has consequences. Here in Annapurna we have a heavy clay soil which has limited windows of cultivation possibilities. When the soil is too wet we can not come on the land to plow, weed or whatever, because everything sticks to the tools. Since the end of July we have had very wet conditions and have been struggling to get the work done.

I hope you can understand my limited happiness with all this water coming down several times per week since many weeks. When we started farming here I had sleepless nights about this, but over the years I have learned to surrender and flow with it, so to speak.



What are you planning to sow and grow this month?

"This month we have sown 3.5 acres of rosella. This crop is mainly meant for drying and is a standing order for Solar Kitchen. We have decided to give up on the millets for now. The peacocks make millet cultivation basically impossible. Besides that, rising labour costs have made the crop economically unsustainable.

Also we have started to sow rice. We will sow a seedbed every 10 days or so and progressively prepare fields and transplant seedlings. We hope to sow in the next few weeks some fodder sorghum and leguminous crops for green manure seeds.

Annapurna Support Fund

For more info: annapurnafarm@auroville.org.in



Paying homage to Luciano

Last month, after a long illness, our dear friend Luciano Gemo passed away in Italy. Luciano joined Annapurna as a regular volunteer in the early nineteen-nineties. He used to work with us from October to April and then return to his work in Italy for the rest of the year. At the end of the nineties he joined Annapurna fully and spent many years being involved in various activities. He was instrumental in introducing rosella juice (made with our dry rosella) in Solar Kitchen. He was also managing the drying of the rosella on the farm. This involved very large quantities

and needed sometimes acrobatics to keep it drying when un-seasonal rains would unexpectedly occur. For many years Luciano could be found delivering Annapurna's products throughout Auroville, driving around on the moped every morning, and taking with him Usha to be dropped at school. Besides all that, and for as long as I knew him, he was fully committed to a study of the Tamil language and he became quite proficient in 'high Tamil'. He left the farm in 2011 to live in Realization, in the centre of Auroville, and returned to Italy in 2014 because of health issues.

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