

Together Towards Diversity

ConFarm (Consumer – Farmer Compact)

June 16, 2018

On Saturday June 16, 2018, in a celebratory event the consumers from Hyderabad participated with farmers in sowing their fields. For the first time in the history, urban consumers signed a formal agreement with peasant women for a partnership in a formal function at Pastapur, Zaheerabad, Sangareddy district, Telangana.

This heralds a new movement of consumers and farmers said PV Satheesh, Director, Deccan Development Society, the three decade old NGO in Telangana working with more than 5000 women farmers practicing millet based biodiverse agriculture in Zaheerabad region.

Introducing the unique concept ConFarm (Consumer – Farmer Compact), he explained how the Society's association with Disha, a consumer movement based in Hyderabad led to conceive this common dream of securing health and environment for both farmers and consumers. 'Beyond Organic' is one of the efforts of Disha Consumer Movement, a voluntary group based in Tellapur, Hyderabad who for several years have been creating awareness among consumers on the aspects of food, environment and health' he said.

Through 'Beyond Organic' Disha members started exploring the enlightened consumers who are ready to look beyond organic food and understand other dimensions of food; farmers who grow their food and the lifestyle that is ecological.

'Organic has become a big trap, However Disha consumers through this effort of theirs are finding a way for those who are seriously worried about procuring authentic organic food while they are also contributing to soil health, environment, and a solution for climate change. They have come here to sign the compact with the ecological women farmers of DDS Sanghams.'

'As members and supporters of Disha consumer movement we state that we are happy and committed to support sangham women farmers and their biodiverse agriculture upto Rs 10,000 per acre. We are grateful that you are repaying our cash support in the form of invaluable grains, ecologically raised on your farms.' pledged the consumers as they signed the agreement with farmers.

In response to this the women farmers entered into the agreement by stating ' We are very happy that you are partnering us in our centuries old practice of raising diverse crops without chemical fertilizers, pesticides or irrigation. We are sure that together we will ensure the health and safety of our food, our soil and our environment. In return for your financial assistance, we promise to offer you healthy diverse crops grown on our farms.

'To the best of our knowledge this is unique for the fact that this is probably the first time in India [and perhaps in the world] where a group of consumers have decided to look beyond organized markets for their organic food and are

prepared to partner peasant women in the very production process of such foods by directly establishing a *compact* with them by financially supporting their agriculture thereby lowering farmers dependency on state sops and market lending. According to this compact, each consumer will support a group of farmers upto Rs.10,000 per acre for their farming needs. In return the farmers will sell Rs.10,000 worth of their produce after the harvest. This association between consumers and farmers is expected to continue season after season.'

I am very happy that you all came to our fields and took part in the sowing. We will send all the 30 varieties of crops we are growing on our lands to your homes. We eat healthy food cultivated without chemicals and I am now happy that you will all be able to eat the same food from now' said Chakribai, farmer from Arjun Naik Thanda addressing the consumers.

'DDS women farmers give us a hope to face today's crises in food, environment and society. We want to learn from and support Millet Sisters who have been quite boldly fighting the forces all alone to protect their traditional food crops and farming practices. By consuming millets we hope we can help expand the millet area and as consumers who eat the food the farmers grow, we want to take equal responsibility to protect the biodiverse agriculture and thereby the soil health. This step will be a guiding force for the younger generation who can escape the emerging issues around them.' said Mr D Raju, Convenor of Disha Consumer Movement.

'This is an alternative socio-economic model in agriculture' said Dr Vinod Pavarala, Professor from University of Hyderabad talking about the unique initiative of consumer - farmer compact.

'We are really happy that you have heard our problems and came forward to support us. Now we have become a family' said Mogulamma another millet farmer addressing the consumers.

'This is a historic Saturday in our life said Sneha Magapu an IT Professional from Hyderabad who has signed up for the program.' As urban consumers we are very conscious about what we eat and we are very to have found the real farmers who can give us authentic organic food.'

'This is an opportunity to understand the life of farmers and integrate our lifestyle with theirs. We have to move beyond being a normal consumer who buy food from market and instead understand what it takes to cultivate it. We will be eagerly waiting for rains just as farmers and be part of the their happiness and sorrows.' Together we are paving a path for several such initiatives to start across the state and country said Jhansi, TV anchor and actor who is also supporting the farmers through this initiative.

I have been writing about agriculture and issues of farmers for several years now, but every time I see DDS farmers, I get a new hope. They have found solutions for all their problems and it is better if governments stay away from them.' said Lata Jishnu , a senior agriculture journalist.