

Organic Cashew Project in Cambodia

Dr. Varanashi Krishna Moorthy
Varanashi Research Foundation,
Adyanadka - 574 260 D.K., Karnataka
e-mail: info@varanashi.com
web: www.varanashi.com

Introduction

Varanashi Research Foundation a well known organisation from Karnataka for its work in organic farming received an invitation from German development agency; GTZ to advice Cambodian farmers on organic cashew cultivation. This paper briefly narrates the experience of the author who visited Cambodia several times in 2006 and 2007. The project is based in Kampong Cham and Kampong Thom provinces of Cambodia.

Country details

Cambodia is a tropical country. Vietnam, Laos and Thailand are neighboring countries. The climate is monsoonal with rains from May to October followed by cool dry season from November to January and hot dry season from February to May. Mekong river and Tonle Sap Lake form the life line of the population. Rain fed rice production and home gardens are dominant land uses. Cambodian culture and civilization are very much linked to India. The world famous Angkor Wat temples are the monuments of cultural relationship.

Cambodia is now emerging from the massive social and material destruction of the Indochina war, Khmer Rouge regime and 1972 Vietnamese invasion. The Paris Peace Accords of 1992 and subsequent development has brought peace to the country. The country is now well along the transition to a market economy.

Cashew in Cambodia

Cashew nut is a major cash crop for Cambodian farmers. According to a rough estimation Cambodia produces 50,000 tons of Raw Cashew Nuts (RCN) in about 1,20,000 ha. It has two processing units. But both are not functioning properly. Most of the RCN gets sold to the factories of Vietnam.

Cambodia has excellent soil and weather condition for cashew cultivation. Till recently only seed plants were used for planting. Due to ideal conditions these plants are giving fairly good yield in the initial years and later due to different problems, yield gets reduced.

About 6 years ago Vietnamese experts started visiting some large cashew plantations of Cambodia and grafting techniques got introduced. These experts also brought in modern package of practice including the use of fertilizers and pesticides in these large plantations. However, most of small and medium farmers are organic by default. The GTZ project is trying to teach better organic cultivation practices to the farmers and increase the productivity. Organic certification is also part of the project.

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Mixed farming models for organic cashew

To make farming activity ecologically and economically sustainable one should grow as many crops as possible in a given area. After studying different experimental models and on farm experience, models of mixed farming for cashew with other crops have been developed. In these models cashew is grown as main crop and other compatible perennial crops are planted as mixtures. Mango, Jack fruit, Dwarf bamboo, Sour sop, Custard apple, Lemon, Black pepper, Longon, Longkon, Tamarind, Amla, Silk cotton, Milk fruit, Sapota, Guava, Durian, Rambutan, Bread fruit, Dragon fruit and Mangosteen are the crops suggested to grow along with cashew. Farmer is suggested to plant cashew to the extent of 50% of the total population. Balance 50% will be 3 – 4 varieties of other perennial plants. These crops will be selected based on soil and weather conditions and also marketability. Farmers are also advised to grow inter crops namely Tapioca, Banana, Corn, Vegetables, Legumes or green manure crops during initial years. These farms use only organic inputs.

Farmer promoter approach to extend the information

During the last one year 40 farmers were given intensive training on organic farming. They have already started adopting better organic farming techniques. The author has visited the farms of each one of these farmers and given on-spot advice. Further, they will be provided with plants of grafted high yielding cashew and other fruit crops to develop half hectare model farm. These farmers are named as farmer promoters. They are expected to regularly interact with their neighboring farmers and advice them on organic farming techniques. This project is monitored by organic field officers. The scientific staff of Royal University of Agriculture are monitoring and recording scientific part of the project.

Cambodian experience to Indian context

Cashew is a major industrial crop in India. Raw cashew nut is always on shortage. Government is putting all the effort to extend the cultivation. However, spread of cashew as pure crop with chemical inputs will harm the ecology. So it is better to promote organic cashew adopting suitable mixed cropping models. “Hand book on organic cashew cultivation” authored by Varanashi Krishnamoorthy, Yadukumar N. and Shankar Raj N. S. published by Varanashi Research Foundation covers all aspects of organic farming. Cambodian cashew is rated fairly high. So, Indian cashew processors can import Cambodian organic as well as conventional cashew nuts.