

3. THE TALE OF AN INTEGRATED FARMER



Shri. Jakarius Sangma is a practitioner of “Integrated farming”. Hailing from a moderately well to do background, Shri Sangma’s family had traditionally been engaged in paddy cultivation. He himself had learned about paddy cultivation methods from his parents. Shri Sangma owns 13 bigas of land in addition to the land that he utilises as paddy fields. His wife works with him at farming their fields. Very hard working and driven, she is the one to take the lead in contacting government offices for any kind of assistance or training under various schemes. The couple have four children of which three are in school and the eldest one is in college. While the paddy cultivation initially allowed Shri Sangma and his wife to support their family, over time it became apparent that engaging in a single livelihood activity would not provide adequate income for the growing needs of their household.

Shri Sangma gradually started learning more about ways in which he could introduce other food and cash crops into his existing farm. In around 2011 or 2012, he started becoming serious about the practice of integrated farming. Right from the beginning, he decided never to take a loan to start these new activities but to manage with whatever resources he already had.

He started integrated farming by initiating a cashew nut plantation. He started growing pineapples, arecanut and local varieties of jackfruits and citrus fruits soon after this but his key target for income generation were to start and scale his cashew nut harvest and sales. He knew he would have to be patient, because these crops yielded harvests only after a few years. So he put in the effort and waited. He had to wait for 7 to 8 years for harvests from his cashew and arecanut crops. Pineapples were easier, and took just over 3 years. Now that this expanded farming venture has stabilised, he has also ventured into livestock. More recently he has also bought cows, pigs, ducks, and kroiler chickens from the profits of his integrated farming or “Multi Cropping”.

CASHEW NUT PLANTATION

Shri Sangma first got interested in the cashew sub-sector when he started hearing from people about how highly in-demand it was. He did not have much knowledge of how to go about taking care of his cashew plantation and there were no government interventions that he knew of. Luckily he came across IFAD representatives and got to know about some of their training programmes. As a result he got the chance to attend cashew nut “binding” training for a week at Tura.

PINEAPPLE

Shri Sangma initially grew pineapple mainly for his household consumption but slowly started expanding his pineapple farm through interventions carried out under the Horticulture Mission. Manpower is required for working on this farm as well, and Shri Sangma typically hires 10 - 15 people to tend to the farm. While working on the pineapple farm is very time consuming,

pineapples yield lower profits for Shri Sangma who sells it at the nearest market or to traders and vendors from Tura at about Rs 10 to Rs 15 each (the prices depend on an individual fruit's size).

ARECANUT

As with pineapple, Shri Sangma already had arecanut plants on his farm primarily for his household consumption. But now he has slowly expanded arecanut production as well and currently sells at the rate of Rs 25 per kilo.

VERMI COMPOST PRODUCTION

Shri Sangma received training and exposure about vermi-composting methods from a Block Development Officer about 5 or 6 years ago. In fact it was not Shri Sangma but his wife, Smt Esta S Sangma who went for vermi-compost production training at Guwahati for a week with the support of an IFAD intervention. The couple have a vermi-compost pit on their farm into which they regularly deposit all the dry leaves and waste organic material from his pineapple, arecanut, cashew and other plantations. The vermi-compost takes about 3 months to form after which the couple package it in a simple plastic packet and sell it for Rs 10 per packet.

RICE MILL

A few years ago, Shri Sangma purchased a rice milling machine from Mankachar, a town close to Tura. The idea of procuring a rice mill occurred to him and his wife when they thought about how difficult it was to take their paddy harvests to a far off village for milling. Now they not only meet their own milling needs but also get some extra income by doing this business. For example on market days and during the harvest seasons he easily earns Rs 1000 at the very least. He charges Rs 20 per tin or Rs 80 per 4 tins (i.e. 1 quintal). Shri Sangma runs the machine himself so no extra cost is incurred by hiring manpower for the work.

PIGGERY

At the time that Shri Sangma first acquired pigs – around the year 2012 – he lost 3 out of 5 pigs to disease as he did not know much about pig rearing at the time. As his experience increased, so did his knowledge. Today even without having received formal piggery training, Shri Sangma rears enough pigs to sell and generate a fair income. Of course as he himself notes, pig rearing is a traditional livelihood activity in a Garo community which is why he naturally took it up and which is also why he found support for his piggery activities and a ready market for his pigs in the local region. Today Shri Sangma sells a 2 year old pig from his farm at Rs 8000 - Rs 9000, and his piglets for Rs. 1000 or sometimes more.

COWS

Shri Sangma also breeds cows to sell. Once a cow has given birth and is large enough, he sells it for around Rs 7000; the price can be higher during the festive season.

DUCKERY

In addition to rearing pigs, cows (and even goats), Shri Sangma and his wife also keep a few ducks on their farm, though this is for household consumption and not for the market.

CHALLENGES & LOOKING AHEAD

In his conversation with members of the Knowledge Management Unit under IBDLP, Shri Sangma admitted that it had been very difficult to start multi-cropping and that it was still a night and day struggle. Owning land was not sufficient to feed the entire family adequately, and it took time for them to understand how to viably utilise the land that they owned. Shri Sangma discussed that while they had always been prepared to work hard, lack of knowledge and exposure to new ideas for farming had a lot to do with their initial struggles, perhaps even more so than finance.

Despite these challenges, Shri Sangma remains positive and optimistic about the future of his farm. He is happy that his cashew, pineapple and arecanut plantations are doing well and he

intends to strengthen these areas first. He thinks of himself as an entrepreneur, but is not very keen on identifying a business partner at present. It is just him and his wife who are in this farming business for now, and he sees them becoming even more successful in the near future. Very enterprising, very hard working, and full of grace, Shri Sangma and his wife are leading the way for more success stories out of the Garo Hills in the future.

(Courtesy: www.mbda.gov.in)