

## Karnataka: Agriculture Research Station growing 64 varieties of paddy

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KOPPAL: Increased use of chemicals and pesticides in its production has resulted in the popular 'Sona Masoori' rice brand, developed in Gangavathi – the 'Rice Bowl' of Karnataka – being rejected by several countries, thereby resulting in its cultivation becoming an unviable proposition for the farmers since it is no longer a preferred choice of the grain for export.

In order to fill this gap, the Agriculture Research Station (ARS) in Gangavathi attached to the University of Agricultural Sciences (UAS), Raichur has identified as many as 64 other varieties of traditional paddy, which will be cultivated on the varsity premises. Many farmers are contemplating returning to varieties of rice that was once preferred by the likes of the Mysuru maharajas, the emperors of Delhi, et al.

Mahant Shivayogayya, a breeder at ARS, Gangavathi, said that Sona Masoori had been one of the most preferred varieties of rice in North Karnataka for nearly four decades. "However, the crop has faced rejection abroad since it is highly susceptible to attack from pests and diseases, not to mention the prohibitive costs involved in its cultivation. This has been accompanied by a growing awareness among consumers about the benefits of eating indigenous varieties of rice, which are more nutritious. Navara breed, for instance, is good for ulcer, pralaysis and controlling diabetes, while Kandasale has a rich aroma. Rajamudi was the preferred variety of the Mysuru maharajas," said Shivayogayya, listing the various breeds of rice being cultivated at ARS.

Admitting that interest among farmers for traditional varieties of rice was low at the moment, Shivayogayya said, "We are confident of the market for these breeds growing in the next four or five years."

Convener of SMEC India Ltd G Krishna Prasad said, "SMEC has been engaged by the Karnataka Neeravari Nigam Ltd to help modernise the Vijayanagara canals. We are supporting cultivation of traditional breeds of rice as part of this project."

Parvataiah Swamy Hosahalli, a farmer, said that cultivation of traditional variety of rice had helped reduce his expenses by 70%, otherwise spent on pesticides and fertilisers. "We are also switching to a method of cultivation that is free from chemicals and pesticides. Now, we need a market for our produce," he said.

Caption: ARS Gangavathi of USA Raichur sensitises farmers to grow traditional varieties of rice in coming days.