

FAILED CROP TAKES A TOLL

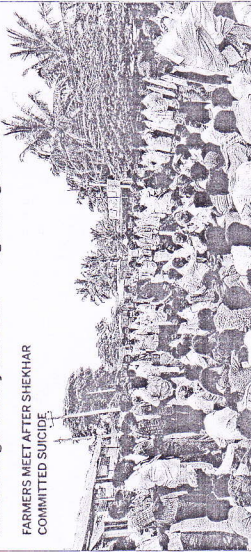
Debt-ridden farmer ends his life due to the agrarian crisis

He was just 27 years old, but farmer Shekhar of Sagare, H.D. Kote taluk in Mysore district, was so distressed by the drying up of his sugarcane crop, that he committed suicide on April 21.

His mother and two brothers are still in a state of shock at the untimely demise. "He called to tell me how upset he was and I counseled him. But he didn't listen," Shantakumar told INDIA TODAY.

Shekhar took the step after the local sugar factory refused to

FARMERS MEET AFTER SHEKHAR COMMITTED SUICIDE



PEOPLE SAY THE ONLY MEASURES NEEDED ARE MINOR IRRIGATION AND RAIN-HARVESTING PROJECTS LIKE WHAT ANNA HAZARE DID IN RALEGAN SIDDHI.

tanker, which can fill 30 pots, from a borewell near local MLA C. Sudhakar's house. "I pay the borewell owners Rs 40 for a full tank and I sell it for Rs 3 a pot," he says.

The drought has meant business for others too. "All contractors and ruling party workers make money. If 100 tankers supply water, the bill is made for 1,000. If 100 kg fodder is given to farmers, it is shown as 1,000 kg," says Kurubur Shantakumar, another farmer leader.

Politicians and bureaucrats insist they are doing all that is possible to help the people. Ministers Suresh Kumar and Shetkar point to successful multi-village water supply schemes, fodder banks, goshalas

and new plans to provide additional

rural employment through a proposed state-funded scheme in drought-hit areas (see box).

People say the only measures needed are minor irrigation and rain-harvesting projects like what social activist Anna Hazare did in Maharashtra. "The government should make rainwater harvesting mandatory," says Balappa, 68, of Chintamani town. Lawyer Nagendrappa, 60, also says it is possible to transform taluks like Pavagada through this.

The Centre has, so far, cleared Rs 186.68 crore in aid and released Rs 70.23 crore. The state government has also released Rs 369.69 crore for immediate relief.

GUJARAT

GUJARAT REAPS A RICH HARVEST



SHANKAR MANSA 35
Village: Ramapur
Land holding: 7 acre
Switched to drip irrigation in 2008.
Crops added: Chilli, wheat, cotton and tomato.
2011 income: Rs 92,600, up from Rs 11,000 in 2008.



GANESH PATEL 60
Village: Kumbhalner
Land holding: 35 acre
Switched to drip irrigation in 2004.
Crops added: Pomegranate and cotton.
2011 income: Rs 43 lakh, up from Rs 2 lakh in 2006.

New agricultural techniques have changed the lives of farmers in arid Banaskantha

By Uday Mahurkar

Until a few years ago, Ganesh Patel had very little to do with pomegranates. But in 2011, the 60-year-old farmer from Gujarat produced 20 tonnes of pomegranate worth Rs 15 lakh on 35 acres of land in Kumbhalner village in the arid Banaskantha district bordering Pakistan. In six years, Ganesh has taken his land holding from 10 to 35 acres. Shankar Mansa, 35, has a similar tale to tell. A tribal farmer from Banaskantha's Vrampur village, Mansa's income from his seven-acre farm increased from Rs 11,000 in 2008 to Rs 92,600 in 2011 after he added new high-yield crops such as fennel, chilli and cotton to his normal crop of maize and wheat, and switched to the drip irrigation technique. This also helped in

producing more fodder for his two cows and a buffalo, increasing his dairy income from Rs 18,000 to Rs 41,000.

Ganesh and Mansa are among thousands of farmers from Banaskantha who are part of a unique agricultural revolution. Less than a decade ago, the district, 70 per cent of whose area is either totally arid and saline or

partially arid and rocky, was one of the most backward districts of western India. Today, with over 70,000 acres of land covered under drip and sprinkler irrigation, it tops the country in the use of this technique.

The switch to micro-irrigation was accompanied by the cultivation of horticulture crops such as pomegranate, papaya and other high-yielding varieties. The results are evident. In 2011, Banaskantha produced pomegranates worth Rs 90 crore from 10 lakh trees and papayas worth Rs 50 crore from 14 lakh trees. Even the production of potato, isabgol and oil seeds, common crops in Banaskantha for years, has seen a four-fold rise in production value

farmers about Gac's schemes. "What Banaskantha is witnessing is an agricultural miracle brought about by the dynamism of both the farmers and the state government. This revolution is touching the smallest of farmers. The way things stand, the district will continue its agricultural leap for many more years to come," he says.

Shankar Mansa's rise is an example of how poor tribal farmers are benefiting by adopting modern irrigation methods. Before he switched to drip irrigation in 2008, Mansa could irrigate just four of his seven acres of land. His borewell used to yield water for one hour every seven hours due to low groundwater reserves. Now he only needs 60 per cent of the earlier quantity of water to irrigate the seven acres.

A training stint at Dandiwada University taught him ways to add new high-yielding varieties of crops. Gac laid the drip irrigation network at his farm for Rs 1.50 lakh. With subsidy, he had to pay only Rs 37,500.

Ganesh was one of the first farmers to adopt drip irrigation. He was also one of the first to cultivate pomegranates after the fruit was introduced in the district by an NGO. "I now save more than 40 per cent of groundwater, yet grow much more," Ganesh says.

Dipak Chaudhary is another beneficiary of drip irrigation. The 30-year-old farmer owns 14 acres of land in Chaudhara village. In 2004, his annual income was Rs 1 lakh. This changed in 2011. He earned Rs 18 lakh in 2011 with a new crop pattern. This year, he is growing papayas for the first time and hopes to earn Rs 12 lakh.

Golap village, on the Gujarat-Pakistan border, has also benefited

from Banaskantha's agro revolution story. Here, it is not the drip or sprinkler methods that have worked but shallow borewell programme. Nagibhai Rathia Rajput, 60, is an example of the village's quantum leap. His income from his 15 acres is Rs 3 lakh, up from Rs 25,000 in 2004. Rajput also added cumin, castor and mustard to his earlier favoured crops: millet and pulses.

With one success story after another, Gujarat's green revolution shows no signs of slowing down.