7 DEVELOPMENT OF MEDICINAL AND AROMATIC PLANTS

MESSAGE OF HOPE

Young entrepreneurs lead the movement …

• In Wadvani taluka of Beed district, a young entrepreneur Shri. Ashok Jadhav & Shri. Trimbak Thorat took the plunge and cultivated 30 acres of land under geranium two years back. Today he sells geranium oil processed on his own field at a rate of Rs.3500/ kg to Reliance Industries under a contract farming agreement for three years. Many more farmers have already switched over to geranium cultivation and a new geranium processing plant is coming up at Ambejogai.

• Shri K.T. Vyavahare and Shri Basantrao Mahajan of Malkapur taluka of Buldhana district have organized 100 farmers cultivating more than 400 acre of land under Ashwagandha and Ran-Wangi which they supply for medicinal extracts to processors at Mumbai and Aurangabad.

• Young mechanical engineers at a village near Kopergaon in Ahmednagar district are growing and processing Citronella grass for extracting oil being sold for use in producing a mosquito repellent.

……….. and these are only few of such examples.

7.1 Maharashtra has different agro-ecological zones suitable for growing different medicinal plants, which are in demand. However, systematic efforts should be made to push this particular sector as per agro-ecological zone. The plant species should be identified and their package of practices should be developed. In addition to the medicines of plant origin for human use, there are large number of veterinary medicines which are also of plant origin. They should also be identified for promotion but keeping in view the agro-ecological situations in mind. Identification of species should be based upon criteria of their marketing potential.

7.2 Since availability of quality planting material will be essential for future development programme, the farms of the State Agricultural Universities and Department of Agriculture and nurseries of Department of Horticulture should undertake the programme of collection and conservation of different species of medicinal plants prevalent in the region and should take up their multiplication on a large scale. The help of KVKs and some of the NGOs will also be important in this endeavour. A special KVK should be established for organising Trainers’ Training programmes in Medicinal plants.

7.3 Many of the medicinal trees will need gestation period of 8-10 years for economic production. The farmers would need the cropping system, which will be suitable for giving them economic return from first year onwards. Therefore, inter cropping with species of shrubs and trees as a package should be developed through State Agriculture Universities.
7.4 The post harvest technology for medicinal and aromatic plants is necessary since the plants after harvesting in green stage, if stored unprocessed for want of purchaser may get contaminated with fungi which may impair the quality of the final product. Therefore, post harvest technology for plants, their grading and packaging and method of storage should be developed.

7.5 It is experienced that the farmers get convinced about the potential of profit from growing medicinal plants. However, once they enter into business they get frustrated because of disorganized market. Therefore, concerted efforts are needed to organize marketing of the product produced by the farmers. A cluster of villages for specified area under cultivation of some species should be identified so that the produce from all the farmers of such cluster will be collected at a central place. People interested in purchasing should be invited which will help in marketing the product efficiently through forward linkage.

7.6 Many a times as raw material of aromatic and medicinal plants being very bulky, the storage of such material becomes a problem more so in case of aromatic plants. Therefore, small processing units to serve the need of the cluster of villages will be a good idea. Small cost effective extraction unit should be developed and Government will have to support self help group of farmers for its establishment. Primary processing from the bulk material at village level will reduce the problem of storage and risk involved in the same. This will help the farmers to get more price for their produce.

7.7 Many species which are grown in various forests / regions have medicinal value. Because of the constant harvesting required of these plants, many of them have become rare. Therefore, concerted efforts will be needed for their conservation and multiplication. The help from NGOs and schools for massive campaign to make the people to grow some of the medicinal plants in their courtyard of residential premises or on the farm bunds will be a good project for conservation of endangered species.

7.8 For protection of different endangered medicinal plant species encouragement should be given to Government and Semi-Government tissue culture laboratories for multiplication of such species so that the planting material can be supplied on a large scale.

7.9 Four SAUs should be assisted to establish quality control laboratories so as to fix the quality parameters for various plant species and their varieties. There are many schemes of Government of Maharashtra including Employment Guarantee Scheme in which the provisions have been made for financial support to the farmers who opt for cultivation of medicinal plant. These schemes need further strengthening.

7.10 A survey conducted by the state for exploring the markets for medicinal and aromatic plants should be the starting point for the contract farming of medicinal and aromatic plants. A common approach towards medicinal and aromatic plants should
be dis-associated and the two should be dealt separately as the marketing related issues and various other problems associated with them are entirely different. However, it would be necessary to establish a high level steering or co-ordination committee at Government level so that efforts at conservation and development of medicinal & aromatic plants in different departments like forests, agriculture, veterinary, health are properly co-ordinated.