

The Hindu 01 01 2015

# **An engineering graduate turns into a successful entrepreneur**

M. J. Prabu



PROTRAYS: The cost of one tray is Rs. 180 and has 72 saplings in it.



- 
- PROTRAYS: The cost of one tray is Rs. 180 and has 72 saplings in it.

## TOPICS

### Agriculture

### science and technology

### agricultural research and technology

Vagaries of the monsoon have forced a number of farmers growing traditional crops to seek viable alternatives.

Trees such as teak and casuarina are becoming popular since once planted, the trees require little attention and water and their wood fetches a good price in the market.

Casuarina is called Savukku maram in Tamil, Sarugudu in Telugu, Surve mara in Kannada and Jangli saru in Hindi.

A young engineering graduate, P. Sakthivel, from Vegakollai in Cuddalore district, Tamil Nadu, is proving how this tree variety is able to fetch good income for him. Presently his monthly income is Rs. 50,000 to Rs. 1 lakh.

#### **Different thinking**

Mr. Sakthivel's father is also a farmer and was concentrating on his nursery business, growing flowering plants. But Mr. Sakthivel (21 years) who is presently studying for a Masters in Electronics and Communication thought differently.

"I wanted to be my own boss and did not have the mindset to work under anybody. I realised that in agriculture both mind and body work equally during field work. And I can give employment to some rural people," he says.

He was not interested in growing shade trees but some tree, which could generate very good

income.

“I learnt, after a lot of searching, that Junghuhnia Casuarina variety can generate good income and started producing the seedlings in my nursery,” says Sakthivel. About 35 women and 15 men work in his nursery and more than 50 workers are engaged in indirect supply of inputs like sand and fertilizer needed for his farm.

The wood of this casuarina variety has a good demand in the market for making paper, ropes, and mirror frames. It is ideal for growing in dry lands and rain-fed areas.

### **Height**

It has long tapered roots, which penetrate deep into the soil. The tree reaches a height of 30-40 feet in 3-4 years of planting. The trunk of a full-grown tree measures about 40cm in girth.

For propagating the seedlings, stems are selected from one year old trees and are dipped in a root inducing hormone solution for two minutes and planted in pro trays kept under shade net for 50 days and then sold. The cost of one tray is Rs. 180 and has about 72 saplings in it

“There is very low risk factor in this type of cultivation. Hence it is always profitable to take this up as a profession. Farmers should bear in mind that the ideal time for planting the saplings is during April-May in Tamil Nadu,” says Mr. N. Madhu Balan, Horticulture expert in Dharmapuri.

### **Any soil**

The tree can be grown in any soil type and requires very little water. About 3,570 saplings are required for a hectare. Before planting it is advisable to plough the land well after applying farmyard manure. The saplings are to be planted either in straight lines or in triangles at a four feet intervals.

Weeding should be done once a week for the first three months and thereafter once a month.

Fertilizer application of about 100 kg of diammonium phosphate (DAP) and 50kg of urea must be done on the sixth and twelfth months after planting. Compared to other crops the return from this variety is very high.

“A farmer needs to spend about Rs. 35,000 towards cost of saplings, fertilizer and transport. One tonne of wood is priced at Rs. 7,500 in the market and farmers can earn about Rs. 4 lakh from one hectare in 4-5 years,” says Mr. Sakthivel.

### **Several industries**

There are number of paper industries in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh seeking raw material for their mills and hence the distributors immediately come and register with the farmers growing this wood, according to Mr. Madhu.

Moreover the straight woods of this tree have good scope in building houses which fetch more rate than the paper mills.

### **Marketing**

Mr. Sakthivel uses the facebook as a major marketing channel for his product.

His facebook page ‘santhinurseryplants’ has several hundreds of farmers from Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Maharashtra as customers.

“I have been able to make this venture a success balancing both my study and business. My future plan is to try the same in tissue culture banana,” says Mr. Sakthivel with a smile.

Interested farmers can contact Mr. P. Sakthivel at Santhi nursery, Vegakollai post, Panruti Taluk, Cuddalore district, Tamil Nadu; phone: 9159705868 and mobile: 887021973 and Mr. N. Madhu Balan, horticulture specialist and admin of Vivasayam karkalam face book group, mobile: 9751506521, Dharmapuri.

