

The spirit of “Yes, we can”

Tomato seed transforms smallholder livelihoods

A shift into seed production tripled Shubham Ingole’s income. His example inspired an agricultural turn-around in a drought-stricken area of western India.

In 2015 the rains failed in Nanded, Maharashtra State, sending profits from farming tumbling and plunging families into debt and hunger. As the water supply dried up again in 2016, farmers lost faith in agriculture as a dependable source of income. More than 1000 committed suicide.

Shubham Ingole cultivated soybean on his six acres of land, and lost about 80% of his production. With climate unpredictability in the region growing, he knew something had to change.

Syngenta Foundation India (SFI) sensed both a crisis and an opportunity. Staff promoted SFI programmes across the region, offering training on progressive farming techniques suited to local conditions. Shubham was quick to sign up for the SFI Agriculture Training Assistant (ATA) programme. Inspired by what he had learnt, and seeing the potential of running an agricultural enterprise, he later also joined the Agri-Entrepreneur (AE) programme.



After his training, Ingole decided to go into tomato seed production. He established a cultivation unit on a quarter acre of his land. The SFI project team facilitated a buyback programme to finance the starting phase. The seed-buying company initially bore half the project cost of INR80,000 (approx.. US\$1,100); Shubham was able to pay this back slowly through deductions from his sales.

With expert guidance from SFI, Ingole produced 27kg of high-quality tomato seed; the highest yield ever seen in the district. Done well, seed production is highly profitable: At INR8500 (about US\$125) per kilo, these seeds earned Ingole an impressive INR230,000 (approx. US\$3,400), a threefold increase on his previous earnings.



Shubham has become a role model for youth in his village. More than 30 local people have now enrolled in the AE programme. Six farmers have learnt seed production techniques from him. Perhaps even more importantly for future food security, nutrition and employment, Shubham has helped restore faith in agriculture as an enterprise.