Invest in Our Farmers

In the last 10 years debt and despair have driven 150,000 farmers to suicide in India. In the same period Indian farmers increased food production 1.5 times. They have delivered what the nation needs. But the nation has not delivered what they need to survive. Let us honor the 70th Independence Day by investing in our farmers. Read and listen to their stories at aidindia.org.

These farmers in Sitapur, UP have intercropped proso millet, black gram, sesame, and foxtail millet, with support from Sangtin Mazdur Kiran Sanghathan and AID.

You can help support:
• Families where a farmer has committed suicide
• Farmers facing drought and other natural calamities
• Transition to sustainable farming without toxic chemicals
• Programs that enhance income and reduce debt
• Advocacy to ensure government support reaches farmers

Your generous donation to AID will help farmers get out of debt and adopt practices that will increase their incomes and food security. Use the enclosed envelope to send a check or donate securely online at aidindia.org.

On the Frontlines

Farmers defend land, livelihood & food security

Narmada Valley: 40,000 farmers face the threat of submergence by Sardar Sarovar dam that would render them landless and homeless. Though the Narmada Tribunal Award and court judgements mandate rehabilitation prior to submergence, the governments have repeatedly flouted the orders, leading to the current impasse.

As Dishaa goes to press, 12 Narmada activists including Medha Patkar are in jail following a 17-day fast calling for dialogue with the chief minister of Madhya Pradesh and an assurance that the reservoir will not be filled and no one will be evicted until all of the affected people have been allocated land and amenities for rehabilitation.

Mandasaur: Farmers have faced repression for demanding that the government provide minimum support prices according to the recommendations of the National Commission on Farmers, chaired by Professor M.S. Swaminathan.

AID expresses solidarity with the farmers in Mandasaur and the Narmada Bachao Andolan.

Ready to Go Organic!
Women Farmers in Chittoor

In spite of being at the forefront of agriculture, women farmers face discrimination and invisibility. Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch (Women Farmers’ Rights Forum) is trying to improve the situation and also address the appetite among women in Chittoor to farm without the use of chemicals, to save on input costs as well as protect their families’ health.

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In February, with Meera Raghavendra, who coordinates the forum, I met farmers in their fields and learned how they plan to build upon a previous government program, Community Managed Sustainable Agriculture that aimed to help poor farmers adopt sustainable agriculture practices, to reduce the costs of cultivation and increase net incomes. They highlighted:

**Institutions governed by women farmers**

CMSA organized rural women at group, village, block and district levels and linked them to the mainstream banking system to avail financial services. The Women Farmers’ Rights Forum will train and mentor women through existing self-help group structures.

**Organic Farming Capacity Building**

The CMSA trained several women from within the community to be organic farming practitioners, trainers and to monitor the program. These frontline farmers will guide other women in practicing these techniques.

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Priti Narasimhan works in the field of regenerative agriculture and volunteers for AID in Seattle and with the AID Agriculture Cell.

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**Farmers Get Fair Price Consumer-Producer Links**

**Punjab:** With years of experience with farmers, Kheti Virsat Mission is organizing weekly *haats* (markets) to bridge the gap between organic farmers and consumers. Volunteers now manage markets in Panchkula, Chandigarh, Bathinda, Ludhiana and Jalandhar, where 40 organic farmers sell vegetables, fruits, jaggery, pulses, desi-cow ghee, pickles, organic paneer and more.

Gurpreet Sharma of Sangrur and Gurmeet Bhawalpur of Patiala, both organic farmers, are very happy these days while selling their produce at a price 1.5 to 2 times higher than that in a regular *sahij mandi*. Thanks to the Kudarati Kissan Haat, no more hassle with middlemen!

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**Kolkata:** Last year *Dishaa* reported on the efforts of AID partners and volunteers to get a fair price for organic farm produce from the Sunderbans. The organic farmers’ markets have grown in popularity and spread across Kolkata.

Three AID partners, Baikuntapur Tarun Sangha, Chethana Sangh and Mukti collect, grade and pack vegetables from 150 farmers to sell across 10 to 15 outlets. Local volunteers collect the orders and convey to the village over mobile phones. Sales today are nearly 5000 kg per month! For updates, please visit Facebook @organicbizr.

Sobini Paldey, senior scientist and volunteer for AID in Cincinnati and Somnath Mukherji, Development Coordinator contributed to this report.
Becoming a Farmer

Before: Low Wages, Migration

For as long as she could remember, Lakshmi Devi, like her parents, worked on other people’s farms for daily wages. While her husband was in bonded labor, she worked double shifts and just barely got enough food for the family. When he became free, both of them migrated to work in brick kilns for six months per year. Low and unequal wages were not sufficient to meet the entire family’s needs.

Six years ago, along with the agricultural workers union, Lakshmi Devi began the process of identifying government land and applying for it. In 2015 she and 18 women in Cherukuvaripalli, AP obtained land with titles in their names and formed a seed bank where they collectively manage native seeds of minor millet and lentils, thus ensuring their own food security.

After: Livelihood and Food Security

Since obtaining land, Lakshmi Devi has transformed her life. She cultivates ragi, jowar, lentils, vegetables, pulses and groundnuts. The ragi and lentils she grows are enough to meet her family’s needs for the year. Moving from hunger to self-sufficiency in food production is great. In addition the social status upgrade from landless “coolie” to farmer is a big jump for a Dalit woman.

AID extends solidarity to the Andhra Pradesh Vyavasaya Vrttidharula Union (APVVU) which upholds the rights of farmworkers. AID also supports Sahanivasa, which promotes sustainable techniques in agriculture and health.

Anjalatchi’s story

From Disaster to enterprise

My name is Anjalatchi and I am from a village called Keeliruppu in Cuddalore district of Tamil Nadu. We have 2 acres of land that is our main source of livelihood. When disaster struck in 2015, we lost our thatched-house, goats, poultry and our entire land. Everywhere we looked, we saw dead animals floating on water where once was our village. After a week, when we went to look for our land, we saw 5-10 feet of sand and massive unevenness of land. It was as if part of the land was taken away and we lost all hopes of recovery.

When AID partner Inspire’s team came to visit, we wondered if they would, like the government, just visit and go away. Within a couple of days, they called for a meeting of farmers and assured us that our land could be recovered and asked us not to lose hope. We decided to cooperate. The Inspire team worked hard for over 70 hours to get our land back – we couldn’t believe our eyes when we saw our land! They taught us how to make the land cultivable again using green manure seeds that could be plowed back again when grown.

In our land, we grow ¼ acre of spinach varieties and ¼ acre of vegetables using organic methods. In the other 1.5 acres, we grow crops such as paddy, sesame and urad dal in different seasons based on crop rotation patterns. We have seen at least a 60% increase in income overall.

As told to Arun Gopalan, an IT director in Malvern who volunteers for AID Agriculture cell.

With AID support, Inspire has helped 3000 farmers in Cuddalore reclaim 5000 acres of land and initiate organic agriculture techniques.
Recently Approved Projects


**The Other Media**: Pollution Control. Cuddalore, Cheyyur & KodaiKannal, Tamil Nadu ($14,950, Seattle). Researchers conduct health surveys; residents test soil and water, document pollution and campaign for compliance.

**Vennela Rural Development Society**: Millet Processing. Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh ($12,450, Seattle). Entrepreneurs create a model millets processing facility to serve small farmers.


**Chintan Environmental Research and Action**: Voice for Waste Program. Delhi ($8000, DC-Metro). Wastepickers unite against child labor and for livelihood security; get trained in environmental policy to reduce waste.


**Sangtin Kisan Mazoor Sangathan**: Community Empowerment. Sitapur, Uttar Pradesh ($10500, Boston). Community mobilizes and advocates for entitlements and public services including health care and rural employment through MGNREGA.

**Jharkhand Vikas Parishad**: Women’s Empowerment. Pakur, Jharkhand, ($5000, Dallas). Tribal, Dalit, and Muslim agricultural workers and marginal farmers form women’s groups to advocate for food security, livelihoods, health and education.

**Mohammad Bazar Backward Class Development Society**: Education, Dumka, Jharkhand ($7554, East Bay). Children from low-income families pursue education and integrate into mainstream higher education.

**Nisarga**: Education, Vishakapatnam, Andhra Pradesh ($9000, DC-Metro). Children from Particularly Vulnerable Tribal communities attend schools; resource persons train teachers in playful and interactive classroom techniques.

**Inspire**: Model Farms, Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu ($18000, Common Pool). Farmers set up models of shade net farming, quail farming, mushroom cultivation, and apiary for interested farmers to visit and learn.

**Center for Sustainable Agriculture**: Outreach to Farmers. Ambala, Punjab ($3000, Cincinnati). Resource persons publish books, posters and technical resource material on ecological agriculture and sustainability in Punjabi Gurumukhi language and reach out to farmers.