

Erode organic farmers set to take the sugarcane plunge

Target 1,000 acres for cultivation; may get ₹3,600 for a tonne

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Going organic seems to be yielding rich dividends for the *Erode Uyir Iyyarkai Vivasaijal Sangam* (Erode Uyir Natural Farmers' Society). So much so that its members are raring to go a step further and bring into their fold about 1,000 acres of land in Tamil Nadu for organic sugarcane cultivation.

The 64 members of the society have already undertaken organic farming on about 400 acres in the State.

Formed two years ago, the agricultural society has secured group organic certification for most of its members and also runs a retail outlet in Erode to sell their organic produce including pulses, vegetables, turmeric, sugarcane jaggery powder and processed food items. Most of the value-added products are made by the farmers with the resources available with them.

In its latest effort, *Uyir* is try-



ing to bring together about 1,000 acres of land under organic sugarcane cultivation across the State.

"This year, the rains have been good. So, if not 1,000, we can have at least 500 acres of organic sugarcane with us in another three to four months," said R. Ravichandran, the president of the society. At least 25% of the farmers with *Uyir* are into sugar cultivation.

Asked about the scope of bringing in such a vast extent of land under organic sugarcane cultivation at a time when

large sugarmills in the State are hit by low cane production due to drought over the last four years, Mr. Ravichandran said the number of farmers going organic was on the rise because of better awareness. Further, organic sugarcane jaggery powder has high demand.

Better returns

"Even I was supplying cane to a sugarmill before I switched to organic farming. Now, I get better returns," he said. Under the initiative, *Uyir* plans to pay farmers ₹3,600 for a tonne of sugarcane. "We sell about two tonnes of sugarcane jaggery powder at our outlet for about ₹65 a kg. We plan to buy cane from farmers who register with us and start making sugarcane jaggery powder," he said.

"There are small scale units that make the powder. If the demand is good, the society will explore setting up a common unit. Otherwise, it will use the existing facilities."