

# A golden harvest of sweetness and profit

Most Nagaland farmers are dependent, directly or otherwise, on pineapple cultivation

NINGLUN HANGHAL

Lhingnei and her husband Thongkeng work in a pineapple farm at Muolvom village in Nagaland's Medziphema division, a place famous for pineapples.

Monsoon being the peak season for harvest, the couple work tirelessly, from morning till evening, with a little rest over lunch which they prepare and have on the farm itself during a break.

Pineapple fruit has two seasons in a year, explain the couple – first from July to September and later in Autumn. The couple, like many others in the village, are engaged all year through with the pineapple farm. "We have no other job or occupation, we work round the year," says Lhingnei. During the off season, they weed the farm and take care of other things such as post-harvest management. The fruits are manually plucked from the farm and carried in a traditional basket. They pile up at the farm gate where the trader (mostly a middleman) from the town comes to collect the fruits in the evening.

Muolvom is about 30 km from main Dimapur city in Nagaland where the plucked pineapple is unpacked. It is marketed here. However, the bulk of it goes further to Assam, mostly Guwahati, from where it is transported to other parts of the country, either as fresh fruit or in other form such as juice or processed form.

## Magic in the soil

Pineapple farm owner Letthang Misao, proudly showing the harvest, asserts, "these are the sweetest pineapples in the world. They are purely organic – not a pinch of fertiliser or chemicals, either on the soil or the plant, is used". As proof for his claim, he says that the Total Soluble Solid (TSS) – the measurement of sugar content – is highest in Muolvom pineapples.

Muolvom and surrounding villages in Medziphema division of Nagaland are famous for growing the "sweetest" pineapples in the world. The agro-climatic conditions of the State are highly favourable for pineapple cultivation on a large scale. Misao proudly states that the soil in Muolvom-Medziphema is so favourable for pineapple that saplings (or crown/cap with roots that are removed from the tip of the pineapple fruit for plantation) brought from elsewhere produce the same, best, pineapples when planted on this soil. Misao states that he himself has experimented with a variety of saplings/caps brought from elsewhere to grow on his farm and found it to be so.

Misao, who is in his mid-sixties, says he inherited the farm from his father –



**Juicy story** Plucked pineapples from the farm being taken to city markets NINGLUN HANGHAL

and naturally the occupation. "Our family has been into pineapple farming for generations" he says. Misao owns about 5 hectares of pineapple farm. According to Misao's random calculation, a hectare of pineapple farmland produces about 20,000 fruits. His annual harvest comes to about a lakh fruits, he says.

## Pineapple passion

Village Muolvom is about 200 households. Most of them own a farmland or work at the farm as employees. Pineapple farming is their basic source of livelihood and sustenance. All families in the village are either directly or indirectly dependent on pineapple farming. It is either a primary or a secondary occupation – for both men and women.

Not surprisingly, unlike other villages in North-East India where most women are into weaving or handloom as an important activity – traditionally or otherwise, women folk in Muolvom work full-time or are into related activity in the pineapple farm.

For instance, Ngainiehat runs a roadside hotel where she also sells pineapples from her family farm. She manages her time between running the farm in the morning and the hotel during the day.



**The Total Soluble Solid (TSS) – the measurement of sugar content – is highest in Muolvom pineapples, says farmer Letthang Misao**

Misao and other pineapple farmers are gearing up to maximise their produce and take it to a new level – both in fresh and processed form. About a hundred pineapple farmers in Medziphema have formed a society called 'Muolsang Organic Pineapple society' of which Misao is a founding member.

Misao says, in future, "we are looking forward to food processing and producing pineapple and its products on a larger scale".

With support from the government Misao and farmers in Medziphema hope to produce more pineapple products in different forms and commercialise them at various levels.

## From paddy to pineapple

There are interesting facts about Nagaland and its passion for pineapple. The average yield of pineapple in Nagaland is estimated to be 50-80 tonnes/ha. The varieties of pineapple grown include Queen, Kew and Giant.

Currently, 3,700 hectares are being used for pineapple cultivation in the entire State. Earlier, pineapple cultivation was random and scattered over the years, progress has been made in terms of improvement in pineapple cultivation and commercialisation.

Farmers in rural Nagaland have shifted from paddy cultivation, an age-old practice, to pineapple production. In the present situation, pineapple has become one of the most important commercial crops in the State, drawing rural populations to its cultivation, thus providing a huge livelihood and employment opportunity.

Nagaland is also favourable for growing different varieties of tropical and sub-tropical fruits such as banana, papaya, passion fruit, jackfruit, grape and orange. But the sweetest story has been the pineapple, one could say!

The writer is a Manipur-based journalist