

It's a story of rice to riches for Kerala farmer

When others moved to cash crops to cut losses, he brought Gujarat and Punjab varieties to Wayanad

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India's traditional rice diversity has brought riches to a farmer in northern Kerala.

Praseed Kumar from Thayyil at Sulthan Bathery went against the tide, when his peers in the loss-hit farming community in Wayanad switched to cash crops such as plantain and areca nut a few years ago.

The 43-year-old progressive farmer got a small packet of rice seeds from a friend in Gujarat, which stood out with its violet-coloured chaff. He decided to propagate this variety. Initially, it was on



Against the grain: Praseed Kumar with his children in his progressive farm at Sulthan Bathery.

just one cent of land, but later, it was expanded to one hectare.

Mr. Kumar has been conserving the 'Krishna Kamod', a basmati rice

variety from Gujarat known for its taste, colour and aroma on one hectare for the past seven years.

Last year, he harvested nearly 2,500 kg of this

paddy and sold it as seeds to farmers at ₹ 200 a kg, rather than in the open market.

"While farmers procure the rare rice variety as seed, others buy it as a gift, or keep it in their pooja rooms and offer it to temples," Mr. Kumar said.

Fights drought, pests

He spent ₹ 85,000 as costs and earned ₹ 5 lakh. The Agriculture Department, which finds the rice attractive, chipped in with ₹18,000 as incentive.

"It seems quite suitable for Kerala and its pest and drought resistance are plus points," said M.K. Mariyumma, Agricultural

Officer, Krishi Bhavan, Nenmeni. Many farmers coming under Krishi Bhavan are eager to cultivate it.

The farmer has become famous for growing 15 varieties of rice. These include Mahamaya, a hybrid with an average yield of 4.3 tonnes an acre, Ramli, a traditional Punjab rice, Navara and Rakthashali, with medicinal properties, Black Jasmine, a violet medicinal Assamese type, two basmati variants from Jammu and Kashmir, besides Valichoeri and Adukkun, both indigenous varieties.

Mr. Kumar is looking at rented land now, to grow even more.