

For a slice of exotica

From broccoli to zucchini, exotic crops charm farmers

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For M. Kari, a farmer at Kookalthorai area in the Nilgiris, cultivation of broccoli and iceberg lettuce for the past 10 years has meant an assured income from agriculture. On his four-acre farm, he grows carrot, beetroot and also some varieties of exotic vegetables.

More than 100 farmers in this village of Tamil Nadu are into cultivation of exotic vegetables such as broccoli, zucchini, iceberg lettuce, brussels sprout, red cabbage and leek.

These are available at departmental stores and served cooked at star hotels.

The weather conditions at Kookalthorai are conducive for cultivation of these exotic vegetable varieties. Hence, the yield is better compared with other parts of the Nilgiris, Mr. Kari said.

"The duration of the crop is a maximum of 60-70 days and we are able to grow



three crops a year. Farmers get seedlings from Udhagamandalam or Bengaluru. There are also large companies that supply the seedlings and have entered into buyback agreements with the growers. This gives an assured price and market," he added.

'Low investment'

P. Ganesan, who cultivates broccoli at Kappachi, said farmers sell their produce at the wholesale markets and to traders as well.

The investment is not high compared with other vegetables and farmers

mostly do not incur losses. As a result, exotic varieties are increasingly finding favour with farmers.

The areas under exotic vegetable cultivation are increasing across the Nilgiris every year and the growth is steady, said Shiva Subramaniam Samraj, Joint Director – Horticulture (in charge), in the Nilgiris.

Premchand, director, Samberry Exotics Pvt. Ltd., an integrated grower and marketer of exotic vegetables, said farmers were switching over from tea and other vegetables to exotic vegetable varieties.

The buyers are from cities such as Mumbai and Kolkata and also include some well-known food chains. Though there are supplies from places such as Pune, Shimla, and Nashik, the demand from the Nilgiris is high, especially between May and October.

The government should support cultivation of exotic vegetables, he said.