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By editorialteam – Posted on August 3, 2015

Producers and suppliers of exotic vegetables. Also procures veggies from contract farmers

Shreenath Agro started its operations in 2009 with exotic vegetables farming on 10 acres farmland at Dound near Pune, Maharashtra. Quality of the veggies was good that helped company to quickly establish itself as trusted supplier in the market. Uniform quality increased the sales but quantity produced at company's own farm was insufficient hence more farmers were included in the network on contract basis. Mr. Ravi Wagh, MD of the company along with his brothers Deepak Wagh and Vinayak Wagh founded the company.

Based at Pune, the company deals in 60-80 different varieties of exotic vegetables that are mix of continental, Chinese and Thai vegetables along with herbs, greens and sprouts. Mr. Ravi Wagh says, "When we started we were having 40 veggies in our product portfolio but later as we gained experience we kept adding more varieties." According to him across India almost all vegetables can be grown easily however it is crucial to find a blend between the climatic conditions and veggies' growth requirements. Clarifying further Mr. Ravi says, "Using years of experience we have paired the veggies and regions/cities based on the weather conditions. For example – we ask farmers in Bangalore to grow yellow and red bell peppers, Nasik for asparagus, Sangli for Broccoli and Babycorn, Ooty for Zucchini and so on." The crop – region based divisions were made after closely studying which areas in India offer which crop across the year.

Mr. Ravi also insists they establish contract farming agreement only in the regions from where they can procure the veggies within 24 hours. He says, "It is very crucial to have consistent supply of veggies in the market. Hence we are very particular about the travel period and crop-region based divisions when appointing the contract farmer." The main areas of contract farming operations are Bangalore, Ooty, Sangli and Nasik.

He also highlights, as crop wise regions are pre-decided so are the distributors. The distributor acts as a company representative. He is the link between farmers and company. "We give our requirements to our regional distributor then he selects the farmers, monitors the contract farmer's farm on behalf of Sreenath Agro, is responsible for delivery and finally is in-charge of payment distribution to the farmers.

When asked how company provides farming inputs as part of the contract farming module Mr. Ravi explains, "We provide the specific crop farming guidelines like when and how to grow, seeds, farming practices etc. All these guidelines have been standardized," he adds. "We provide guidelines like exotic vegetables grow well in acidic soil, soil and water pH needed is 7-8, EC in water should be below 1, seeds, 60% organic fertilizers are used for soil, 40% chemicals are used etc." Water and soil testing is crucial therefore company ensures every farmer gets these tests done and follows all the guidelines.

The guidelines are given to the region specific distributor who later shares with farmers. "We designed this arrangement in order to resolve the problems and provide assistance to farmers promptly. Without the distributor it shall be extremely difficult to attend to famers' tribulations with immediate effect." The distributor is the direct farmer himself who grows some quantity on his own farm and for the rest he asks his fellow farmers but company is updated on every minute detail.

Veggies reaches company's collection centre through trains and luxury buses in corrugated boxes. Quantity packed in boxes is mostly between 15-25 kgs. "We receive these veggies, re-pack in food grade polypacks, pre-chill in cold room and later send for distribution," shares Mr. Ravi. Price of the crops is decided based on the previous year market rates referred as fixed prices. Company also pays farmers on basis of open market prices. "Mostly all popular and high in-demand veggies (babycorn, zucchini, broccoli) are procured on fixed rates where as less-in demand varieties are subject to demand-supply ratio fluctuations hence are paid on open market price," he adds. Payments are paid monthly through NEFT transfer. "These days banking facility is much improved so payments are always made online," he shares.

Shreenath Agro is known for its business operations in exotic vegetables hence sometime farmers on their own also contact the company for selling their produce or shows the interest to be part of the company on contract basis. Most popular exotic veggies in India are iceberg, broccoli, red and yellow bell peppers, green and yellow zucchini and babycorn. The veggies that have good prospects in coming years are basil, herbs (thyme, rosemary), cherry tomatoes and lettuce.

Is exotic vegetable farming lucrative business, Mr. Ravi replies, "If it is handled professionally it is profitable. In case it is considered a part-time business like a weekend getaway then it is unfair to expect higher returns."

Wagh brothers are focused on growing, procuring and supplying exotic vegetables. Sharing further Mr. Ravi concludes, "In future we want to expand our operations maintaining the quality and delivery schedules. We do not want to diversify into exotic fruits because we want to work on our strength and now our strength is exotic vegetables. We also want to stick with our existing contract farmers. They grow we grow."

Mr. Ravi Wagh is an agriculture graduate by qualification. After working for 15 years in a company dealing in exotic vegetables he took the decision to be an entrepreneur. Knowing inside out about the exotic vegetables industry, production and marketing intricacies he decided to grow and supply these veggies. In addition, in order to do something more creative he opted for doing exotic vegetable business.

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