



Panchayat and Economic empowerment of rural women by hands on Training

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Abstract: Panchayat Raj is deeply steeped in tradition and culture of rural India and is by no means a new concept. Panchayati Raj Institution is the grass-roots units of self-government – have been declared as the vehicles of socio-economic transformation in rural India. Effective and meaningful functioning of these bodies would depend on active involvement, contribution and participation of its citizens both male and female. A range of issues are affecting economics of social sectors in India since economic reforms began in mid-1991. The impact of reforms depends on economic empowerment of women towards education, health and nutrition. For women, empowerment means that they gain the power to express and fulfil their needs, gain greater self-esteem and control over their own lives and relationships. Rural women entrepreneur succeeding as an entrepreneur in today's world is vastly different from what it was earlier. Indian rural economy is also experiencing behavior of entrepreneurial. Empowering women by enhancing their livelihood by adopting simple technology of post harvest management of fruits and vegetables, is a step forward in this direction. A case study at Bulandshahar district, encouraging the women to become an entrepreneur is not simply adoption of new technology but it is transformation of technology to rural sector.

Key words: Panchayat, women empowerment, post harvest technology, training

I. Introduction

Panchayat Raj Institutions is said to be the first formal democratic institution under the active principle in the Indian constitution. Panchayats are constituted considering their income, population and area. There is a provision for reservation of seats for women, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. The panchayat has tenure of five years and is directly elected. It has income through taxes to perform its functions. To teach a man, you teach a person to teach a woman is to teach the whole family and the whole society. Our program is focused on teaching women entrepreneurs to learn the value addition technologies for horticultural produce, form self help groups and work towards their own economic empowerment and betterment of their families. With economic empowerment and better sources of income generation these women will be in better position to take decisions for their own family. India, as a country has grown considerably in terms of production of fruits (76.42 million tons) and vegetable (156.32 million tons). Unfortunately, a considerable amount of this valuable produce is lost due to improper post harvest management and lack of processing facilities. A large section of the rural people of India is deprived of food security, better nutritional status and economic welfare, which reflect a major deficiency in their quality of life.

II. Objectives of the training

- Train the identified women farmers/entrepreneurs in low cost post harvest and processing technologies.
- Provide demonstrations, training programs and conduct adaptive research on innovative small-scale appropriate postharvest handling, food safety and food processing methods effective and appropriate for reducing losses and keeping perishable foods fresh longer as well as processing them into durable products to fetch better return.
- To promote the well-being of the rural population as a whole in order to improve overall rural economy.

III. Benefits

- Adoption of simple low cost technology for reduction in post harvest losses and processing thus enhancing income of women farmers
- By use of these technologies farmers can successfully store produce for short time and potentially gain better price due to retained quality and availability.

- Both producers and consumers can be benefited; farmers by storing the product longer with less marketing problems means better price and consumers by getting maximum nutrient contents in the products.
- Maximum utilization of the produce by proper handling and processing technology resulting into improved income
- Improvement of socioeconomic conditions of the rural community

IV. Methodology

The hands on training was given by Amity International Centre for Post Harvest Technology and Cold Chain Management under the Project of Department of Biotechnology, to the farmers by establishing common facility centres in three selected districts of Uttar Pradesh (viz., Ghaziabad, Gautam Budh Nagar and Bulandshahr) in India. The post harvest management of fruits and vegetables training-besides being exposed to simple technologies of harvesting, sorting and grading of produce, proper packaging and cool storage of produce to extend shelf life, participants were given hands-on training in minimal processing of fruits and vegetables and their conversion into value-added products capable of generating extra income. Participants learnt the skills for pulp extraction of fruits, preparation of whole tomato concentrate, juices, squashes and nectars along with their bottling and corking, ready for the marketing. Training was also provided in 100% utilization of plant parts and preparation of blanched and dehydrated leaves of cauliflower to obtain valuable nutrients. This program aimed to help the women self-help groups to earn their livelihood by organizing them into cooperatives and working towards production of nutritive and value added products to be marketed.

A. Work done under the project, a few example of Post Harvest Management and Value Addition is as under:

A1. Minimal Processing

Process of minimal processing in cauliflower and pomegranate was described to farmers so that they could get more benefit from their fresh produce. Process of minimal processing of cauliflower has been given in Fig 1.

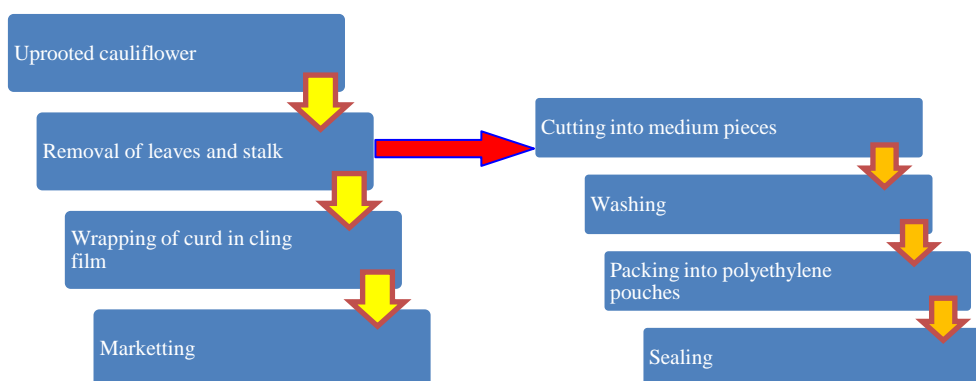


Fig. 1: Minimal processing of cauliflower

A1.1. Benefits

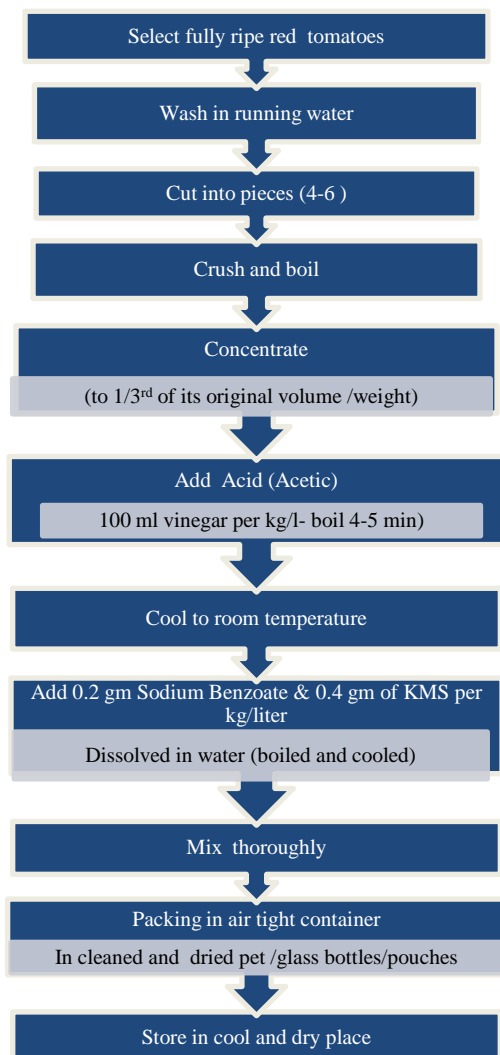
- Hygienically packed curds managed single handedly
- Save on transportation cost
- Less amount of waste in the market
- Utilization of the nutritive produce at farm itself

It is quite obvious that removal of leaves on-farm and wrapping of cauliflower curds in cling films will not only provide protection to the curd but also reduce the transport cost by 40%. The discarded leaves can be converted into value added product or serve as organic manure besides preventing accumulation of garbage in the wholesale yard /retail market.



A2. Preparation of Whole tomato Concentrate (WTC)

In this part of training sorting and grading of tomatoes was described firstly. To prepare this product ripe tomatoes were cut into two or four parts (depending on size), crushed and then boiled to prepare WTC. The procedure adopted for preparation of WTC has been given below (Fig. 2).

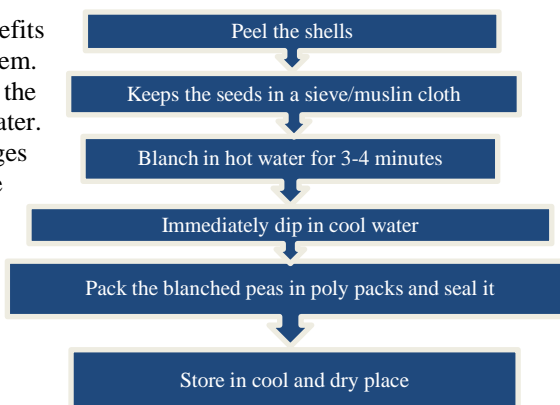


A2.1 Benefits

- Best substitute for tomato when the prices are high compared to puree as it also contain peel and seed which are the most nutritive portion.
- Better market price.

A2.2 Blanching

The process of blanching was demonstrated to the farmers. Benefits of blanching in processed products were also explained to them. Green peas were peeled and kept in a sieve and dipped in the boiling water for 3-4 minutes followed by dipping in cold water. Demonstration for making potato chips/French fries/wedges followed by blanching were given to the trainees. The difference in blanched and un-blanched samples was also shown to the trainees.



A2.3 Benefits

- Colour retention
- Long shelf life
- Usage in off season
- Better market price

A3. Sustainability of the Action

The implementation of a set of postharvest technologies were cost effective and appropriate for reducing losses by keeping perishable produce fresh for longer period or processing them into durable products to fetch a better return. An integrated post harvest management approach helped in achieving, for the target population the following:

- (i) Better market access
- (ii) Nutrition Security
- (iii) Poverty alleviation
- (iv) Employment generation
- (v) Environment protection
- (vi) Economic transformation of rural population

In fact, every farmer can utilize a substantial amount of fruits and vegetables by adopting simple techniques of storage, preservation and processing to uplift their livelihood.

SUCCESS STORY OF RURAL WOMEN

- A women (Mrs. Tyagi) at Bulandshahr district learned under the DBT training how to blanch peas and store and market it.
- They used to grow peas. Till year 2011 the excess peas grown were either sold at a very low price or given to the animal as a feed.
- After taking the training, in the year 2012, the peas were blanched and stored for 9 months and she fetched good amount.
- This year in the training she came up with another five women to learn more about simple technologies.
- She was so happy expressing the amount of income gained by simple technology and the level of confidence she has gained among her family members.

V. Conclusion

An innovative aspect involving development, demonstration and hands on training allowed for integration between the educational and organizational components of the learning process. Combining these two layers provided for coherent and meaningful organization of the education which meets both the individual and organizational needs. Panchayat Raj system gave significant progress in the fields of primary and secondary education, communication, agricultural extension, cooperation, health, etc. People could get drinking water. In some places people had protected water supply, Village streets, electric light provision, village sanitation, etc., had enough resources. Rural awakening was brought up among rural people; as a result villagers became conscious of their rights and improved their standard of living.

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