Bird perches, a nature friendly pest control method
Nature friendly, integrated pest management practices gains ground in Rajur, Maharashtra
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Many farmers have experienced the disappointment of carefully raising a crop only to have it damaged or destroyed by an invasion of pests. The practice generally carried out by farmers in such situations is to spray crops heavily with pesticides. This results in significantly higher input costs for farmers, not to mention health and environment hazards. Thus, there is a need for more environmentally friendly pest control methods. One such system is the Integrated Pest Management (IPM), which is an eco-friendly approach that aims at keeping pest population at manageable levels, with minimal use of pesticides. Instead, it employs a combination of alternate pest control methods and techniques with emphasis on use of bio-pesticides and pesticides of plant-origin like Neem formulations.

One village that is seeing this kind of transition to the use of nature friendly bird perches is the Chincholi village of Jalna district, Maharashtra.

Agriculture is a mainstay of the village and cotton is the main cash crop. Gajanan Hiwale, a farmer from the village owns four acres of land on which he grows soybean, cotton and chickpea. The story of Gajanan focusses on the issue of farmers’ distress due to the exorbitant price of chemical pesticides’.

Prior to WOTR’s intervention, Gajanan grew soybean, cotton and maize on his field, but his crops suffered much due to the attacks of leaf-eating caterpillar and girdle beetle on soybean, sucking pests on cotton, white grub on maize and pod borer on chickpea. He says, “I used to spend around Rs. 9-10,000 on chemical pesticides for my 1.5 acre chickpea plot. To buy pesticides, I had to go to Rajur market i.e. 10 km away from my village. I have also heard about the health issues due to these chemical pesticides which made me even more apprehensive, but I was not aware of what I could do.”

PYRAMID OF IPM TACTICS
Schematic representation of Integrated Pest Management
Source: Adapted from Sustainable Landscaping Initiative, Vancouver (http://www.sliv.ca/)
To address this issue, in 2015 WOTR, with support from GIZ, started the Pro-Soil project in Rajur cluster. It was found that farmers were using chemical pesticides to an excessive degree. It was leading to deterioration in the soil health. For the next few seasons, WOTR gave a number of demonstrations and training sessions on the use and benefits of intercropping of bird perches in 10 to 12 ‘demo plots’ of farmers in every village. But, the project was not just limited to the use of bird perches. The use of biocontrol agents, bio-pesticides and integrated pest-disease management techniques were also taught in farm field schools (FFS). In 2017, WOTR started a second phase of the same project, the Pro-Soil+ Project.

Gajanan, had attended the FFS of WOTR in 2016 and after learning about the bird perches, he grew sorghum (bird perches) with chickpea (main crop) in his field. He says “Earlier, I use to spray chemical pesticides three times a year; but now I just spray it two times or sometimes less than that also, rest of the pests are taken care by sorghum (bird perches) grown in my field. The birds who come to eat the Sorghum, also end up eating the pod borer pests, thus controlling their spread. I feel that WOTR gave me an apt solution for my pest problem because, my annual expenditure has reduced by about 30% for my chickpea crop since I started using the bird perches”.

In Jalna district, the problems of pod borer and army worm infestation are severe, and hence both organic practices and bird perches farming are needed to reduce the frequency of chemical spraying.

For the WOTR staff, changing the mindset of the people was a really difficult task as the farmers depend heavily on pesticides. But when farmers saw the benefits of using bird perches with their own eyes, they themselves started taking it up. Currently, over 40 farmers in Chincholi village are practicing integrated pest management.