

## **‘Barefoot extension’ could add to families’ land**

Training offers enterprising youth a path to additional income



Bhagirathi Naik lives with his parents and younger brother in the Kalahandi district of Odisha. Now aged 28, he studied up to Class 12 at school and today works in agriculture. His family farms three acres, of which one is under vegetable cultivation. The remaining land is for rice and watermelon.

Until a few years ago, the Naiks’ average annual income was 60,000 rupees (approx. \$1000). Since partnering with Syngenta Foundation India (SFI), this has increased to 150,000 rupees. Bhagirathi attributes this jump to SFI help in lowering his outlay and linking him to better markets for the vegetables. “My motto is ‘minimum cultivation cost and maximum profit’”, he says.

Keen to learn more, Bhagirathi recently joined 30 young people from rural Kalahandi for three months’ training on modern agricultural techniques. The SFI-supported course provides brief but ideal knowledge about local crops. As well as benefiting their own family farms, this enables the participants to become “Barefoot Extension Workers” and advise their neighbours.

Bhagirathi now aims to gain six to twelve months’ experience as a field agent in seed production or ‘market-led extension’, and then become an entrepreneur. He plans to establish his own polyhouse to produce and sell seedlings; he also wants to retail seeds and crop protection products. He is confident that he can earn up to an additional 150,000 rupees annually by serving 300 - 400 farmers in and around his village. “By doubling my role, I can double my income”, Bhagirathi declares. “Then I could fulfill my dream of buying more land for our family.”