

# Veg puts rice growers on the road to better lives

## From subsistence to profits in one of India's poorest regions

**A young Agri-Entrepreneur (AE) trained by Syngenta Foundation India (SFI) doubled his income. He did so by helping farmers adopt profitable practices in a region synonymous with famine, hunger and destitution.**

Kalahandi district in eastern India's Odisha State is known both for its intense famines and its bountiful rice production. Efforts by both the public and private sectors have greatly improved Kalahandi's irrigation infrastructure. The district is now one of India's top 25 rice-producers. However, this leap has brought new problems: farmers often struggle to sell their rice profitably in a saturated local market. Many are still forced to seek work as labourers elsewhere during the dry months.

"That's ironic, isn't it?" says Bhagirathi Naik, 29. "I wanted to help small and marginal farmers in my village to earn a consistent living."



Bhagirathi used to support his family of six on a watchman's wage of INR3000 (approx. US\$44) per month. But he could see that local talents and resources were being wasted and families suffering. Bhagirathi decided to do something about it. In July 2014 he enrolled to become an SFI Agri-Entrepreneur. The Foundation's programme develops rural youths to help other farmers adopt profitable agricultural practices.

Three months later Bhagirathi set up a store to provide quality seeds and other inputs, and to act as a local agriculture advisory centre. He believed that livelihoods could be transformed if farmers grew high-value vegetables rather than rice. So he set up his own small farm to demonstrate best practice.

Results came quickly. Bhagirathi showed farmers that not only could they grow vegetables all year round, but their production costs would fall too. With savings of INR3000 (about US\$44) in a four-month season, farmers moved away from conventional crops and outdated practices. They used better techniques and technology to grow high-value vegetables.

Savings are a good start. However, access to reliable markets is another perennial challenge for small holders. So with the support of SFI, Bhagirathi and two other local AEs established a centre to which farmers can bring produce for collective marketing. This spares them the time and effort of transporting crops many miles by bicycle to markets. The three AEs also established links with traders who pay a fair price for the produce.

Bhagirathi now earns INR 150,000 (approx. S\$2200) annually from his store and farm. His work as an AE has not only improved his standard of living, but also made a positive impact on one of the poorest regions in the country.