Cauvery basin flooded with chemicals, thanks to Green Revolution

BY VINAY MADHAV

Bangalore, Feb 26: Early 1970’s. There was an abundance of high-yielding varieties of paddy and sugar in the Cauvery basin area, heralding the beginning of the Green Revolution. Food productivity increased, but so did the use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides to support the new breed of crops. Years passed by.

Today, the chemical legacy of the revolution is posing a severe threat to local fields, poisoning soil and food.

Organic manure, which plays a supportive role in enhancing productivity and cutting the chemical effect, seems to be a long forgotten thing in the irrigated areas here.

Mandya, Mysore and Chamarajnagar districts – major beneficiaries of the Cauvery basin irrigation – are now flooded with chemical fertilisers and pesticides. Though the use of chemicals in the Cauvery basin has been less compared to Punjab, the continuing fertiliser usage pattern suggests similar trends here as well.

“We recommend the application of a judicious mixture of organic manure and chemical fertiliser. Post-green revolution, the farmers are using more fertilisers. This will result in high acidity and loss of fertility. No steps are being taken to delineate chemical residues from soil after the harvest,” says Prof Srinivasa, head of the Soil Science and Agro Chemistry department at the College of Agriculture near Mandya.

The blame does on lie on fertilisers alone. Pesticides and herbicides also share an equal role. Monopotophos, Endosulphane, Butachlore, Carbon Dyzyme and
Cauvery basin flooded with chemicals, thanks to Green Revolution

Dimethoate are being used in both sugar cane and paddy fields.

"The problem with both pesticides and herbicides is that the mixing proportion usually goes wrong, leaving behind a long residue in soil. This affects soil fertility," Prof Srinivasa points out.

The State Agriculture Department has introduced green manure seeds – diercha – to control chemical menace in the soil. In Chamarajnagar district, the experiment is working well, where over 150 quintals of 'diencha' seeds are sold through the Raitha Mitra Kendras.

"We introduced 'diencha' in Chamarajnagar, Bellary and Raichur districts as pilot projects. We are receiving good results. For cotton and paddy fields, diencha can work well. But it is not the case in sugarcane. Once a farmer cultivates sugar cane, the land is committed for five years," Agriculture Commissioner Dr Subramanya says.

However, farmers in Mysore and Mandya district seem to take the menace in their stride.

"It is a question of immediate survival. To survive, we have to depend on the next crop. We know that we can ensure crop survival only with water, fertiliser and pesticide supply. The organic manures are not working to our advantage," says Kurubur Shantha Kumar, a farmers' leader.

(Concluded)