

## Shri V. S. Aggarwal

### Recipient of Jamnalal Bajaj Award for Application of Science and Technology for Rural Development-1994

Born on 16.2.1916, Shri Aggarwal studied up to BA and was for long engaged in his family business of monopoly procurement of wheat and rice milling before he migrated to Calcutta after the Partition of India.

When the Bharat Chamber of Commerce, Calcutta started its rural development programme in 1978-79, Shri Aggarwal was nominated as its Chairman. Rajarampur in Kulpi Block about 65 Km from Calcutta was selected as the venue for the programme. This area was saline, rainfed and cyclone prone. It was a one crop area of traditional paddy of long duration and low yield. On account of lack of winter rains, cultivation in the second season was negligible. Senior Officers of the Agriculture Department of West Bengal had practically written off this area as a "Black" District.

With a view to enthusing the farmers to take to improved agricultural technology, the Chamber initially took steps to improve the economic conditions of the villagers by providing employment in village industries, tailoring, irrigation by small pumps and public health measures.

After this programme had been in operation for 2 years, Shri Aggarwal realised that the soil was now fertile for the adoption of improved agricultural technology. With seeds supplied free by the Chamber, 25 acres of farmers' plots were taken up for cultivation of High Yielding Paddy. The yield was 80-125% more than normal. Within the next two years the subsidy on seeds was reduced to 50% and the programme extended to 400 acres with the same result. The area kept on increasing steadily and villagers from all over the Rajarampur Block took part in it.

With the assistance of the National Seeds Corporation, Shri Aggarwal arranged for the supply of foundation seeds of suitable varieties of paddies at reasonable cost to the farmers for multiplication of the same on their fields. By 1989, 10,000 acres were under this crop. Since the land was cleared after harvesting about 4-6 weeks earlier than in the case of traditional varieties and moisture still remained in the 'soil, a second crop of production of several vegetables through seedlings prepared in the community nursery was undertaken. This was extended to oilseeds and pulses and the income of the farmers rose from 2-4 times.

Shri Aggarwal enthused the farmers to buy seeds of Tomato from the Indo-American Hybrid Seeds Organisation at a cost of Rs. 10,000/- per kg. These farmers cultivated the same in their fields and yields per acre were 65 to 70 tones which amounted to about Rs. 50,000/-. With an average price of Rs. 2.50 per kg. for tomato and Rs. 10/- per kg. for capsicum, the income of the farmers amounted to Rs. 50,000/- to Rs. 70,000/- per acre. Other value added crops, pan (betel leaf) which provides income of Rs. 50,000/- to Rs. 70,000/- per acre were taken up in due course.

Enthused as a result of these improvements, some new technologies were introduced, the more important of which were: (i) 12 Green Houses were installed in Kulpi Block where robust and disease free seedlings of costly vegetables under controlled temperature were produced; (ii) More than 10,000 saplings of banana, guava, sapota and coconut were produced and supplied at 50 % of the cost to the villagers; (iii) Deoiled Neem Cake which is cheaper and a good natural insecticide were popularised; (iv) Small canals were desilted and excavated.

During the year 1993-94, along with village organisations he concentrated on extension of cultivation of hybrid vegetables in the post monsoon season, specially on fields to which irrigation facilities had been provided. Even the farmers realised that for the same quantum of water available to them from the new project they could irrigate 3 times of land if it was put under vegetables.

The most significant feature of this scheme of rural development initiated by Shri Aggarwal is the ready and voluntary contribution of the beneficiaries towards the cost of implementing the various programmes.

The programme for cultivation of tomatoes, capsicum and several hybrid vegetables which was first introduced by the Chamber in 1985 has spread to the Districts of North-24-Parganas in Southern West Bengal and to Siliguri and Jalpaiguri Districts in Northern Bengal. The programme in fact has spread even to areas as far away as Gorakhpur and Delhi.

Kulpi, where all this transformation has taken place, has shown the way for others to follow towards making India a land of abundance and prosperity.

