

Better Life Farming Alliance launches new agri-entrepreneurship model

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With an objective to provide holistic and innovative solutions for smallholder farmers in developing economies, Bayer, International Finance Corporation (IFC, a member of the World Bank Group), Netafim and Swiss Re Corporate Solutions launched the 'Better Life Farming' alliance on April 20, 2018. In India, the global alliance was launched on July 23, 2018, along with additional local partners: Yara Fertilisers, DeHaat and Big Basket.



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In India, where 80 percent of farmers are smallholders who farm on less than two hectares of land, the Better Life Farming alliance runs two successful projects covering 1,600 green chilli farmers over 2,625 acres in Uttar Pradesh and 500 tomato farmers covering 500 acres in Jharkhand. The first project commenced in December 2016 with 20 green chilli farmers across 20 villages in Uttar Pradesh. The second project started in June 2017 with 37 tomato farmers. Chillies and tomato were chosen after conducting a baseline study to identify regions where local crop yields were significantly lower compared to India's average national yield. Participating farmers received advisory on the use of good agricultural practices. As a result, farmers were able to double their yields and triple their farm incomes.

Speaking about Bayer's focus on smallholders, D. Narain, Managing Director, Bayer CropScience Limited, says: "Smallholder farmers play a key role in ensuring food security for our country. As a leading player in Indian agriculture, we want to support smallholders to earn incomes from their farm and not just use it as a means to survive. When smallholder farmers will succeed in generating higher incomes, it will also support job creation and increase the contribution of agriculture to the country's economic growth. This in turn will make farming an attractive profession for future generations and bring more

investment to the industry.”

In 2019, the Better Life Farming alliance has introduced an agri-entrepreneurship model for smallholder farmers. This will empower rural youth to be a part of the agri value chain and create local employment opportunities. The model will be run through the “Better Life Farming Centers” where agri-entrepreneurs will enable transfer of technology on topics such as seeds, crop protection, crop nutrition, drip irrigation, mulching etc. They will also deliver services such as market linkages, access to inputs and crop advisory. Each center will cover a group of 500 farmers from five to six nearby villages.

Currently, four Better Life Farming Centers have been set up in Varanasi. By the end of 2019, the number of centers in Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand will be scaled up to 100. By 2025, the alliance aims to serve 2.5 million farmers across India. In Jharkhand, the Better Life Farming alliance will pursue a gender-smart approach by promoting women agri-entrepreneurs to serve women smallholder farmers.

A key element of the agri-entrepreneurship model will be its scalability and long-term economic viability. That’s why Bayer has roped in International Finance Corporation (IFC) to promote financial literacy among smallholder farmers who aspire to be agri-entrepreneurs. “With a focus on resource-efficient agriculture for optimizing output from smallholder farms, the Better Life Farming alliance has the potential to transform smallholder agriculture. IFC is pleased to be a global partner in this alliance to build capabilities for smallholders for improvements in farm yields and incomes,” says Harsh Vivek, Lead Agribusiness Advisory, IFC, South Asia.

“My chilli plants used to suffer from diseases and produced only a small harvest, or none at all,” says Umakant Singh, a smallholder green chilli farmer from Varanasi. “With the interventions of the Better Life Farming alliance, I was able to double my green chilli yield and triple my income compared to previous years. This success helped me dream bigger. I am now working with the alliance as an agri-entrepreneur. My goal is to help my fellow farmers with the latest agronomic know-how and give back to my community by creating employment for the people in my village”, adds Singh.

Better Life Farming centers will expand smallholder reach through digitally enabled centers where agri-entrepreneurs will use technology to disseminate knowledge and train farmers from nearby villages on good agricultural practices. The centers will also work as mini collection centers from where offtakers can collect produce. At this stage, the partner organisations under the Better Life Farming alliance are helping smallholders procure the necessary Seeds, Pesticides and Fertilizers licenses, GST registrations and acquire digital expertise to set up their agri-entrepreneurship business.

Under the Better Life Farming alliance, Netafim is working with Indian smallholder farmers to create awareness about precision irrigation and other advanced farming practices that can reduce vulnerability to weather changes. Yara Fertilisers is educating farmers about balanced crop nutrition and maintaining soil health. DeHaat and Big Basket are working as offtakers to ensure that smallholder farmers get the right price and market access for their produce.

“Sustainability is at the core of all the initiatives under the Better Life Farming alliance and that means creating value for all the stakeholders involved. We will measure the success of our initiatives through the economic, social and environmental impact that we create for smallholder farmers and their local communities,” sums up D. Narain, Managing Director, Bayer CropScience Limited.