



Rice cultivation 2018 - looking back

While writing this it seems we are having the last bits of the monsoon for 2018.

Surely not enough for the 3rd year in a row, but with the new increased pond capacity we could harvest enough rain water to irrigate our rice fields and hopefully have some left over for fruit orchard/plantation and fodder after the monsoon. Since the ponds are new and much deeper it is not so easy to calculate how much water we have in stock now. Also our rice acreage has changed.

Starting the rice cultivation this year was not easy after the dry summer. We did not have enough green matter and only a little water to start cultivating the fields. But then it was wonderful to get a few heavy late summer monsoon showers in the beginning of October which gave us a fair amount of inflow in the ponds and from there things were smooth. We had enough water to prepare the fields for planting and at last the green manure started to grow as it should.

When in November the Northeast monsoon became active all our ponds filled liberally and the work could go on as scheduled. As I wrote in the last news, we experimented with the new dairy effluent distribution system to make up for the shortfall of nutrients and the system is working wonderfully. We can now apply on any of the 110-odd rice fields a dose of liquid fertilizer (mix of cow urine and dairy waste water) to boost the crop when needed.

This year we planted 19 acres of paddy. Mostly for red and brown rice and some for parboiled rice. In recent years

Annapurna received 2 grants to extend its rice land by approx. 5.5 acres.

We foresee that we can add another 3 acres in the years to come once the standing casuarina crops mature; so we will be able to grow 22 acres of rice.

Preparing new rice land is an intensive task where the irrigation system has to be put in place, lands have to be banded and terraced. In the process of terracing a field, the earth is moved extensively to level the plot and the land takes years to recover its fertility. Rice land also needs to develop an anaerobe culture to become good rice land. The first years the yields will be much lower than the older fields and only after 3-4 seasons fields will deliver uniform crops. To be able to handle the work load we prepare a rice seedling nursery every 10 days which is enough to transplant seedlings for approx. 2 acres. This year we prepared 10 nurseries over a period of 100 days. We started in August and made our last nursery in November. The last seedlings were transplanted in the beginning of December.

The first planted rice has started to flower and the harvest will start after Pongal (middle of January). Harvest will be stretching until end March beginning of April.

Since weeding is a lot of work and becomes very costly, Tarun (our long-term volunteer) has been doing experiments to see if we can reduce weed population by applying EM at different stages of soil preparation. Results have not shown definitive trends and we will continue to look at ways on how to bring down weeding in the rice.

Latest news from the farm

Update on the New Cowshed

The construction of the new cow house got a bit bogged down by the seasonal activities. There is a lot to do to simply keep the farm functioning. In these times where machines are making overtime means also more maintenance to keep all up and running.

Since sand has become incredible costly Andre has been doing concrete strength tests with different mixtures to see what cement/substrate mix will be good for us. Of the 10 calves born this year, exceptionally 8 are females which we decided to keep. Now, somewhat urgently, the new space is really needed to grow them up properly.



A New Rosella

This season we grow a small crop of a special Rosella. This Rosella is less sour and more “fruity” than our local variety. They call it Andaman Rosella. We use the syrup as a topping on our rice pudding, and we make a jam and mix it in with some of our fruit compotes.

Since it is less sour we do not have to use so much sugar in it and we have received good feedback on it in general. These products are available in PTDC, Food-link and HERS. Enjoy!



Wildlife continued

This topic also keeps us occupied all the time. We have now an electric fence around the 19 acres of rice land and one around the guava orchard. These fences need to be maintained vigilantly because when weeds and grass are touching the line we lose electricity and the resultant shock is too little to scare the increasing pigs and deer population.



We are preparing a stand-alone system to be able to do some rain fed crops like sesame/mustard in the lands which are further out. It will be a simple system with an apparatus, small battery and solar panel. Since it is not really under control, we will have to secure the setup well and the wiring etc. should not contain anything interesting to steal. We will use wooden poles and special thin nylon line (with thin copper wire woven in) which will have no value on the scrap market. In the meantime we see more monkeys passing through and we were confronted with the first fruit theft recently.... they love papayas and bananas!



Visits

The cooler season brings also an increase in visitors and related activities.



Rakhal and his team came out with a group of Yucca participants. This is a group of pre-newcomers that are exploring to see if Auroville is their future place. Kyoung Hyoun Lee and her team made a wonderful lunch from locally sourced food which was rewarded with a hearty round of grateful applause!

Then we had a group of 13 students from Carleton College, USA. They had an accredited course titled “Sustainable Energy Principles & Practices”. The practice sessions were in Auroville with a 10-day program from which they spent 2 days at Annapurna.

Together with Debo and his team they set up a solar pump installation at one of our new ponds. They also experienced what it's like to weed the rice fields, and had a hands-on session of cleaning the rice of impurities.

The support group is looking for more hands and brains to help us with communication and other projects. Any skills and goodwill are welcome. We are happy to hear from you :-)
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