

**PPI Funded Go to Market Model – MLDMHI Farmer Group  
Six Monthly Report February – July 2019**

**Backdrop**

Subsequent to the PPI funds for Go to market Model, MLDMHI recruited a marketing/logistics manager based at Vikramgad. Since August 2018 farmers were operating in a changed market context where there was no one assured buyer to pick up all their produce. Multiple market channels had to be explored. Early efforts to directly participate in newly set up farmers markets at Mumbai did not yield satisfactory results. Customer footfall was too low to generate adequate volume sales. Cost of transportation and unsold produce rendered the operations unviable. Due to lesser rate last year & no marketing support, many farmers did not cultivate vegetables. Also, due to poor monsoons last year and consequent depletion in ground water levels few farmers had adequate irrigation to cover the rabi season and hence could not cultivate vegetables. Thus the number of active farmers reduced significantly from 45/50 to 25 in 2019 rabbi season.

**Marketing Efforts**

Marketing efforts got a fillip through the active involvement of MOFCA (Mumbai organic farmers and consumers association) and particularly Venkat Iyer a Dahanu based organic farmer who through his networking provided not just access to markets but helped in organizing and monitoring of the activity too. Through his network MLDMHI got a vehicle for transportation of vegetables donated by Green Earth Logistics from their CSR funds. The various market channels explored from January – July 2019 were:

- School at Mumbai where consumers were the parents who dropped and picked up their children
- Three large residential complexes – we participated in 4<sup>th</sup> but did not get permission to sell
- One buyer continued from previous year who picked up our produce at Bhopoli and had a stall in Mumbai farmers markets
- Added two new buyers but only continued with one who picked up produce from Bhopoli and is working with direct home delivery to consumers; with the other we ran into difficulties on volume and variety of vegetables and more important on payment front and hence within few weeks discontinued.

This year for the first time, farmers went to market and sold their vegetables. Started with a couple of farmers initially but by the end of the season almost 15 - 18 farmers went to the Mumbai markets, got trained to sell their vegetables, could speak to customers, explain the process of organic farming, benefits of seasonal- local-organic (SLO) farm produce. Some of the farmers sons too got involved in the sale activity. Coming face to face with consumers, understanding their expectations, sharing difficulties involved in organic cultivation were vital for orienting farmers to the Go to market model. Also this exposure to farmers is giving them motivation to do better.

Consumers too benefitted through interacting with those who produce their food, benefits of SLO and its positive effect on health. Consumers liked the taste of fresh vegetables especially the greens, could differentiate between taste of conventional and organic produce and looked forward to the arrival of the tempo on the appointed day. Gradually “Vikramgad Bhopoli SLO food” identity is being created.

Still with 25 active farmers we were able to achieve average rate Rs.38/kg and Rs.40/kg as compared to Rs.23/kg last year. This rate is computed net of expenses such as driver charges, fuel, daily wages to farmers going to market, maintenance expenses. All these expenses are borne by farmers from total revenue from vegetable sales.

	Total veggies sold	Average Rate per Kg	Earnings in Rs.(net of expenses)
Jan-March 2018	23620 Kg	23/-	543260
Jan-March 2019	8624 Kg	38/-	327712
April- June 2018	5189 Kg	23/-	119347
April- June 2019	1934 Kg	40/-	77360

For reasons mentioned above despite the reduction in quantity sold the rate obtained is higher and helps make the cultivation profitable for farmers.

Farmers are learning:

- when to harvest,
- how to store,
- how to keep veggies fresh,
- packing & arranging vegetables in the tempo.
- What should be the rate of various vegetables.
- How to answer tedious questions.
- Also journey of vegetables from farm to plate is my responsibility so veggies need to be fresh and clean, this realization was the success of exercise.

Farmers earned:

- Good rate for their vegetables. Efficient farmers earned around 10000/-pm.
- Some got around 3000/- to 3500/- per month as labor charges to go with tempo.
- Farmers paid 8000/-pm to driver who himself is a local farmer.
- From Nov-2018 to Apr-2019 total earning other than vegetables is more than 90,000/-. So those who could not cultivate earned through labor charges. This was local employment generation. If continued, can be sustainable too.

If the production of vegetables is planned as per market demand with focus on variety we can service more markets. We are planning to take training workshops for farmers. Those who went to city will share their market experiences. Through role-play and question-answer session new farmers can be equipped for Mumbai market.

### Impact

- For kharip season this year, almost 54 farmers have cultivated as compared to 21 farmers last year.
- Market planning and guidance to farmers helped increase in rate of vegetables to farmers.

- Just because farmers reached market, they could explain the importance of local, seasonal and organic produce to end customer and this movement created a hike in demand of regional vegetables/ local breeds.
- Many farmers got good financial uplift.

#### **Future Priorities**

- Farmer participation – increase number of cultivating farmers
- Produce variety and explore cultivation of newer vegetables/fruits
- Farmer ownership – at two levels. One, a team of farmers who can take leadership is constituted who meet periodically, take stock, review operations – in short start taking ownership for this operation. Its proving to be a tough challenge and farmers are preferring to sit back and get the Trust to take up these functions. Second, farmers recruit two persons who do the collection and take the produce to the market. Efforts are on to search for such persons. This will gradually help to transfer ownership to farmers.
- Yield improvement – a team of persons visited farms in April and have suggested to collect data from 5 farms so that we can establish baseline production.