

Farmers reap benefits of farm ponds during low rainfall

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Coimbatore: Unlike the rest of the district, Udumalpet did not receive heavy rainfall last year – just two spells of rainfall.

Under normal circumstances, wells and borewells go dry by January-end in Udumalpet.

But water can still be seen in R Raghunathan's well, thanks to a large 80ftx80ft farm pond he created in August 2019.

A coconut farmer, Raghunathan is now confident that he can manage till the next south-west monsoon with the water available in the pond and the well.

Though agricultural experts and the government have been advising farmers to create small farm ponds in their lands for years, as an effective method of rainwater harvesting, it is only now that farmers in the Pollachi region seem to be experimenting with the idea.

"It not only holds the rainwater but also allows it to percolate into the soil, recharging the groundwater table in the area up to 1km radius," Raghunathan says.

In the last two-and-half years, nearly 590 farmers between Kinathukidavu and Udumalpet, as part of Marico's Kalpavriksha project, have either created farm ponds, bunds or trenches to save the rainwater that their land receives. "While at least 135 farmers from August 2018 have created farm ponds of different sizes, around 458 farmers have created trenches or bunds," says Marico's executive vice-president



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Udayraj Prabhu.

As per the project, 80% of the cost to create a pond is borne by Marico and the rest by the farmer.

It costs between Rs 50,000 and Rs 1 lakh based on its size to make a farm pond.

Though they don't have numbers to prove improvement in groundwater table levels, farmers say the fact that their dry borewells have begun yielding water is proof that these ponds are serving their purpose.

S Subramani, a coconut farmer in Kinathukadavu, who created a 20ftx16ft farm pond in his land says he has drilled borewells twice and they have come dry even at beyond 100ft. "We have had to buy water to water my trees and then ended up cutting down many of them during the drought," he says. "For the first time, I can see water standing in the pond and the borewell yielding water," he adds.

"A farm pond does take away the cultivable space of at least seven to eight trees, but by giving up this space, we are sa-

ving more than 250 of our remaining trees," says Gopalsamy, a farmer from Kolapatti.

Urdhvam and Bhungroo are the other initiatives being tried by farmers in the region.

While Bhungroo is a system where they inject harvested rainwater straight into an empty aquifer to store it and lifts it out for use during dry spells, Urdhvam is a system where they slit the casing of an existing borewell from the side, for enhancing higher water recharging in the borewell.

"However, Bhungroo is expensive, and water needs to be shared with nearby farmer. If they agree, the system works," says Prabhu.

R Amritharaj, in whose land a Bhungroo was created as a pilot project, says he had previously dug borewells twice only to find them empty. "However, my 100-ft deep borewells are now yielding water due to the Bhungroo," he adds.

The Tamil Nadu government has also launched a farm pond scheme, where farmers can get a 50% subsidy on their pond creation costs.