

## Tamil Nadu Farmers Innovate to Overcome Fodder Shortage

They are reinventing the way their cattle are fed while fodder shortage and increasing cost of fodder has led to large-scale distress selling of cattle across India.



Gnanasekaran finds mesquite pod powder a good cost effective cattle feed that also helps increase milk yield (Photo courtesy Gnanasekaran)

### Mesquite pods

Gnanasekaran (26), from Meenakshipuram in Coimbatore district, is constantly on the lookout for healthier feeds for his cows. So, when he heard that powdered pods of wildly available mesquite trees could be used as nutritious feed, he decided to try it.

“I got samples from Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), Thoothukudi and I found my cows were healthier after feeding on them,” Gnanasekaran told *VillageSquare.in*. “This feed is cheaper and milk production also increased by at least one litre per cow.”

In Thoothukudi district, farmers are generally wary of mesquite trees as they are considered weeds in farmlands and are believed to absorb groundwater. Srinivasan V., senior scientist, KVK, Thoothukudi explained how they took advantage of this invasive wasteland tree to benefit dairy farmers.

“Normally farmers cut down these trees but their pods could be used as an alternative nutritious feed for animals. If the cattle eat them as such then it might result in more propagation of mesquite trees, so we did a trial through Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) in 2014,” said Srinivasan.

The scientists asked cultivators to dry the pods and grind them. They were able to sell about 30 tons of mesquite feed to dairy farmers. “As these trees are widely available, the cost of cattle feed comes down,” said Srinivasan. “Milk productivity also increases by 10%.” While farmers who collected the pod were paid Rs 150 for three hours of work, cattle owners were able to save up to Rs 5 a kg on cattle feed.

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