

## FOOD FUNCHAYAT: CONNECTING PEOPLE TO GOOD FOOD 24<sup>th</sup> December 2015, Jaipur, Rajasthan

A step towards celebrating traditional good food practices and enabling farmers in India to achieve food sovereignty was made by way of organizing a good-food festival called Food Funchayat. This daylong event was organized by CEOEDECON with Kisan Sewa Samiti in collaboration with Oxfam India on 24 Dec, 2015



*Yajna* being performed to inaugurate the fair

at Shilki Doongri in Chakshu, Jaipur. The fair extended an opportunity to civil society, agricultural NGOs, agriculture research and extension centers, rural and tribal development organizations and above all the government to revisit indigenous farming knowledge and traditional food practices of small and marginal farmers and tribal agrarian communities.

The Food Festival was inaugurated with a small *yajna* to invoke and propitiate various deities (energies) for general well-being. The sacrificial food, the

*samagri* (mixture of seeds, plants, resins, grains, etc.) was offered into the fire keeping

in mind the ancient Vedic belief that as the offering burns, the subsequent vapours permeate into the atmosphere, destroying pollutants and purifying the environment. Post *yajna*, Rajasthani women sang folk songs of joy and celebration of local food. Following the cultural song and celebrations, the fair was declared 'open'.

Farmers from across the country, including states like Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar and Maharashtra participated in the fair. Each region had a beautifully decorated stall that exhibited local indigenous varieties of seeds and food products like pulses, millets, vegetables, tubers, spices all of which were grown with local knowledge passed from generation to generation, providing families with a balanced nutrition. Seeds of cereals put to display were of Basmatirice, Indrasan rice and Wheat 54 from Uddham Singh Nagar (Uttarakhand), Kalanamak rice from Maharajganj (UP- Nepal border), and more than



Farmer displaying 40 varieties of Paddy

40 local varieties of rice displayed by farmers from MP. Local millets and pulses exhibited from Bihar and UP were sawa, tagun, kodo, jowar and macca, alsidal, while from Uttarakhand were rajma, arhar dal, chana dal, gehat, soyabean, mandua, jhingora and the traditional multigrain atta made of 9 grains. Seeds of vegetables like spinach, radish, bitter gourd, bottle gourd, ridged gourd, ladyfinger, pumpkin and spices like turmeric and coriander were also displayed by various states. Farmers from Jaipur had put up organic vegetables varieties like goose berry, turnip, radish, black carrot, custard apple, groundnut and pickles. Farmers from Vidarbha put up local cotton seeds, jaggery, red chana, turmeric powder, and organic honey procured from forest. All seeds and food products were heirloom varieties, locally found, organically grown and defensive against climate change.



Organic vegetables from Rajasthan

The fair also revealed growing popularity of organically grown produce among all the farmers in the fair. A farmer from Uttarakhand, Chandrashekhar Chamoli, recalled memories of the way his ancestors use to cultivate traditional foods and the meaning it use to have in binding the society and its tradition together. Such local foods became rarer over the years. “However, as the impact of chemical laden foods are becoming evident, people are returning to what they discarded initially”, he said. A farmer from Rajasthan, Ramkishan Chaudhary, explained, “my family eats whatever is grown organically in the family farm, if pests attack the crop we rather not eat that, than use pesticide to protect it”.



Savouring cooked 'Kalanamak' rice

While the stalls were being decorated, seeds packed into transparent pouches and vegetables put up into baskets, a similar energy was found in the kitchen with each group cooking a different menu. The kitchen at the venue became not just a room for cooking; it revealed the teamwork that takes place when a group comes together. The efforts in the kitchen lead to more than 50 traditional foods varieties savoured by the guests and the general public. The local menu included the most appreciated litti chokha, rajma dal, chawal, vegetarian pulao, biryani, chana-masala, moong ka chila, mooth ka chila, 5 varieties of chutney, gheer, rabdi, siwai, ladoo, and many other dishes. The farmers enthusiastically served the hundred of visitors while acquainting them of its traditional significance and nutritive value.



A discussion titled 'Roti, Rozi aur Bazar'

While visitors were busy touring from stall to stall to buy organic products and taste local delicacies, the farmers exchanged their local seeds, showcasing and sharing their best varieties and acquiring new. Besides seeds, local products were also freely exchanged.

Later during the day, a discussion on the theme "Rozi, Roti aur Bazar" raised the question of food sovereignty, GM seeds, and cooperativization of agriculture. Ashok Mathur, Convenor of Sajha Manch, said that allowing cooperatives to control agriculture would not only wipe out the livelihood of farmers but also put the entire agriculture sector to great risk. He gave a clear message to farmers to defy control by market forces and demand *krishak swaraj*, i.e. complete sovereignty of farmer. Professor Rajendra Chaudhary of Economics from University of Rohtak made it clear that agriculture being a State subject under the Constitution of India, the Centre should not interfere with regard agricultural decision-making of the states. Equally important is to raise awareness among the youngsters about the toxicity in junk and frozen food and nutritive value of local food, held Justice V.S Dave, Chairperson.

At the end, the event underlined the need for a systematic action to address larger issues of food security and food sovereignty thereby using the legitimate space. It reminded community and political leaders of the value of neglected traditional foods and integration of traditional foods and agroecological farming into national food security plans.