

Keeping locusts away, the herbal way

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Is there an effective – and that too eco-friendly – solution to the menacing problem of locusts that has left authorities splitting their hair?

An Erode-based farmer innovator, GV Sudarshan, felicitated by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) last year, thinks that a herbal concoction that he has developed after a few years of research can serve as an anti-feedant that will keep away these migratory pests, which have affected several lakhs of hectares of croplands in many States, particularly Rajasthan.

Limited trials carried out by a Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) in Hanumangarh district of Rajasthan last month found that cotton fields sprayed with this biopesticide were spared by locusts, indicating its efficiency. Anoop Kumar, KVK in-charge, confirmed to *BusinessLine* that fields sprayed with the herbal extract were left untouched by the pests while those in the vicinity were affected. “But to gauge its effectiveness more trials are required in fields at different locations,” Kumar said.

“This could be the world’s first effective biocontrol agent against locusts,” said Sudarshan, who subsequently wrote to the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) requesting for a more elaborate testing of the product. He said he was happy that the PMO responded promptly and the task has now been forwarded to officials engaged in locust control in Jodhpur through the Ministry of Agriculture.

Called HerboLiv+, the product developed by Sudarshan’s firm Mivipro Products Limited and validated by Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU), Coimbatore, is found to have a much bigger role in solving man-animal conflicts in an environment-friendly manner. “We have worked with a number of agricultural and forest officials in different States – from Kerala to Jammu and Kashmir from Ra-

jasthan to Uttar Pradesh. All of them have given us positive feedback about its ability to repel wild animals. While some animals find it difficult to stand its odour, some the taste,” said Sudarshan.

Herboliv+, made of extracts of a few herbs and cow byproducts, is found to be anti-repellent for a wide variety of animals, including boars, elephants, monkeys, nilghai, peacocks and rodents. KK Sunilkumar, Divisional Forest Officer at Mannarkad forest division in Kerala, said that limited trials conducted by forest staff and farmers living in the vicinity of the forest found that it was “effective in controlling intrusion by wild elephants and peacocks”.

“But the concern was that even birds and flies were avoiding the fields,” Sunilkumar told *BusinessLine*.

R Murugesan, former director

of agribusiness development at TNAU, which provided holdhold support to Sudarshan, however, said studies have shown that pollinators like honeybees are not affected by Herboliv+.

A biochemistry graduate from PSG College in Coimbatore, Sudarshan developed this product way back in 2015 to protect his ancestral 45 acre farm in Kongahalli, in Satyamangalam. “As our farm was very close to the forest area, herbivorous wild animals used to forage on our crops, leading to untold crop loss. This was what prompted me to develop this product,” he said.

When it was found effective in keeping animals away, he decided to get it validated by experts at TNAU in 2015. Since then, several KVKs in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh have tested it, which documented several other properties of Herboliv+.