

# Commercial Mushroom Production in Cooperative Way

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## ABSTRACT

*Off-farm enterprise development in Giridih district of Jharkhand state, India needs to be considered as priority sector as rain-fed agriculture hardly provides desired return and employment opportunity to the farmers. Initiative of Krishi Vigyan Kendra located in the district to involve common farmers in mushroom production under the leadership of one progressive youth has not only brought prosperity in socio-economic condition but also infused the sense of cooperative farming to ensure equal responsibility and benefit sharing among the cooperative members. Training, input support and continuous encouragement on the part of Krishi Vigyan Kendra and marketing arrangement as well as financial support mobilized from National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development proved successful in turning 80 farm families into business-cooperative with assured income and employment opportunity.*

**Key words:** Mushroom, cooperative farming, progressive youth, training, Krishi Vigyan Kendra

Jitendra Giri has become a common household name in 18 villages of Giridih district, Jharkhand spread across 8 blocks. He has not invented anything of mass

benefit nor represented India in international forum, but infused the sense of cooperative farming among 80 farmers and farm-women to bring out that many household of abject poverty and unemployment.

Mushroom cultivation as an off-farm enterprise did not sound lucrative to Mr. Giri, a 30-year old farmer of Maheshmunda village under vengabad block at the first instance. But a training-cum-exposure programme of 14-days duration at KVK Giridih changed his outlook towards mushroom cultivation as a viable self-employment option. Technical knowledge,



Mushroom unit established with local resources skill and visit to other mushroom producing villages made him agreed to take up

mushroom production as an enterprise. KVK Giridih provided 50 bag each spawn of Oyster and Milky mushroom to start with his venture.

Mr. Giri arranged everything of his own for production of mushroom in a 10 X 8 sqft area and the KVK monitored his activity upto first flush of mushroom and harvest. To his utter surprise he harvested nearly 40 kg mushroom of both the species which fetched him Rs. 5000/- within a cycle of 50 days. In the same year he harvested mushroom for another 3 times and earned another Rs. 14000/- for a total return of Rs. 19000/- from that single unit. The beginning was so encouraging that in the next year he expanded the area and engaged a family member in mushroom production activity. The profit got increased manifold and Mr. Giri had to explore market as the demand and price of local market were far below than that of nearby towns/cities. The KVK came into his rescue and arranged for marketing of his mushroom to neighboring city Asansole (WB), Dhanbad, Bokaro and Hazaribag (Jharkhand). His monthly income was raised to Rs. 12000/- to 15000/-. The tale of his success started reaching in other parts of the district and in the same year KVK had to train more than 100 farmers and farm-women in mushroom cultivation. The service of Mr. Giri was utilized by KVK and the participants visited his mushroom unit also. Among the trained farmers, 80 persons established

mushroom unit with spawn supply by KVK Giridih in arrangement with neighbouring KVKs Dumka and Hazaribag and total production was far above local requirement. As majority of the mushroom growers was from far-flung areas, marketing of mushroom to other places was not at all feasible and the producers had to dispose off at a throw away price.

Intervention of Mr. Giri with the idea of forming mushroom growers' cooperative in consultation with KVK proved to be panacea for all the mushroom growers. Mr. Giri took up the challenge to change the



A member of cooperative in mushroom unit

attitude of 80 trained mushroom growers towards team work and cooperative formation to establish mushroom cultivation as a social business. Relentless persuasion and frequent visit to 18 villages finally paved the way for combining their capital and work-force to scale up production capacity in a joint manner. Once the cooperative was formed, the growers felt it convenient to sell their produce in the nearby cities and towns with monthly income of Rs.5-6 thousand. However, the effort of Mr. Giri did not end

here. Apprehending the lean period of mushroom production and sale, Mr. Giri again approached KVK for specialized training on value addition in mushroom. All the 80 mushroom growers (55 women and 25 male)-cum-cooperative members attended training at KVK on drying of mushroom and value addition in the form of powder and pickle. The members were divided into three groups to produce fresh mushroom, dry it under shade for 5-6 hours or under sun for 2-3 hours and make powder and pickle. As per prevailing market rate, dry mushroom is sold @ Rs. 400/kg and pickle @ Rs. 500-600/- per kg. An estimate indicates that 30 per cent of total mushroom requirement of Asansol city is met out with the supply from Giridih. The cooperative is in the process of branding its value added products of mushroom for its sale through malls and other outlets. NABARD, Giridih has come forward to extend financial support to the mushroom growers' cooperative.

Mushroom production has created jobs for all types of people in the villages alongwith providing stable income. It fits perfectly into the conventional farming system in the poor rural areas. It does not require a full-time labour force, so farmers can do other jobs while engaged in mushroom culture. As rice/wheat straw is mainly used as substrate, burning of straw has also been averted.

The endeavour of Mr. Giri in succeeding to bring so many mushroom growers under one umbrella is best described in his own words: 'after working

with my own local people, I can see how hard they are working daily to earn little money from their agriculture, elderly people (even 80 years old women) still go to the rice farm, young people flee away and struggle in cities for labour work, children have to paddle in shallow water for small fishes, snails and crabs, and many others. Therefore, I would love to continue to support my local people to sustain their livelihood as I think provision of only technical and knowledge know-how is not enough to help poor farmers to "exist" in such a world of competition now. To sustain local livelihood and enterprise, it is vital to



Mushroom ready to harvest

help them to build their capacities to cooperate, and apply technology for processing, package, and marketing their products. Ultimately, local farmers can establish and operate their cooperative to benefit the entire community'. It is needless to mention that Mr. Giri got an award of Progressive mushroom grower of the district in Kisan Mela by the Deputy Commissioner of Giridih district of Jharkhand.

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