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Ginger farming killing biodiversity in Malnad

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Bangalore, July 27, 2014, DHNS:

Ginger cultivation and extensive use of pesticides are driving the rich biodiversity in Malnad areas to extinction, while the perennial water resource is depleting at a rapid pace, says a study by Centre for Ecological Sciences (CES), Indian Institute of Sciences (IISc).

Releasing a survey report, 'Ginger Cultivation in Malenadu: Massive use of Pesticides- Barren land formation and poisoning of water resources,' Prof T V Ramachandra, senior scientist, Energy and Wetland Research Centre, CES, IISc, told reporters here on Sunday that most of the Western Ghat taluks have adopted ginger cultivation and also increased the practice of spraying pesticides. The study was conducted by CES for Vrikshalaksha Andolana Karnataka (VAK) headed by Ananth Hegde Ashisara, who is also former Chairman of Western Ghats Task Force.

Pointing out that about one lakh acres of land is under ginger cultivation in Malnad area, the study says that at least 5,000 acres are under ginger crop in each taluk and the annual turnover of the pesticide is over Rs two crore. "More than 1,000 acres of forest land is used for ginger cultivation. Farmers know paddy fields are becoming barren after three to four years.

The migrants, especially from Kerala, who began cultivation of ginger in Kodagu, Dakshina Kannada and Shimoga districts have extended it to the entire Malnad area. Using the land leased from the owners for one year, they leave it barren. The original land owners acquire fertile land close to forest for their next crop. Since the forest department officials do not make any attempt to take any action against unauthorised ginger cultivation in forest areas, this is leading to man- animal conflict," Prof Ramachandra quoted from the report.

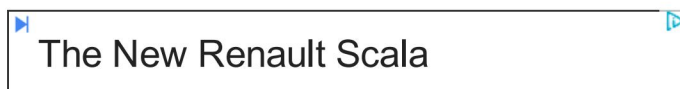
He said in the process, the grassland in the region is being converted into barren land and this has taken its toll on water resources in the Western Ghats. "Earlier, the streams would be brimming with water throughout the year, now the water does not last for even seven months," he noted.

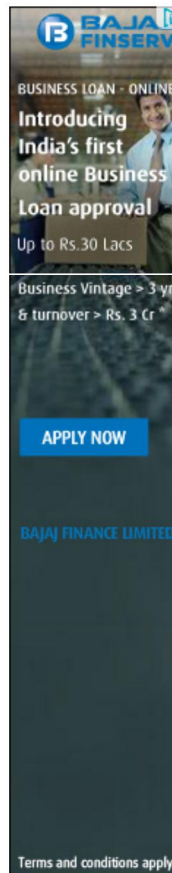
Pointing out that several banned pesticides have found a market in Malnad area, the report says that ginger requires more pesticide than any other crops. Citing the example of Banavasi in Uttara Kannada district, where Ginger growers use about one lakh litres of pesticide for the crop cultivated in about one thousand acres of land, the report says that the pesticide has polluted the river waters in the region and eventually the water in rivers like Varada, Kumudvati, Tunga and Bhadra are found to be polluted. The water of Varada river is considered to be unfit to drink.

Explaining how the aquatic life like fish, crab and toads are disappearing from streams and other water bodies, the report says that there is a need to take immediate measures to mitigate hazards due to poisonous pesticide and form an expert committee to exact ginger crop area. Advocating the prevention of sale of banned pesticides, the report says that only ginger farming through organic farming should be promoted.

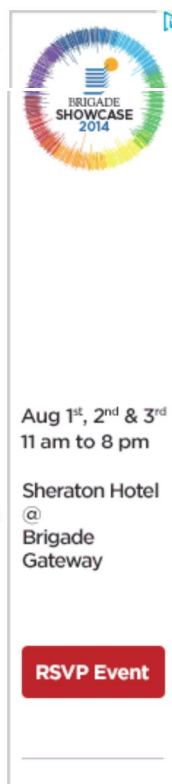
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