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The silt just got real

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Around 1,500 farmers tilling around 5,000 acres of land between them are keen to use Varthur Lake's silt as manure for their fields

All the silt produced while rejuvenating Varthur and Bellandur lakes is creating fresh challenges for the Bangalore Development Authority on how to dispose it of. However, if all goes well, around 1,500 farmers will take some of the silt from Varthur Lake off BDA's hands, to be used as manure. This will not only reduce BDA's bills of transporting silt to quarries in Mallasandra, which is 30 km away, it will also provide free manure to farmers.

The farmers, who attended a meeting convened on Monday by the NGT Monitoring Committee on Bellandur and Varthur Lakes, say they want to use the silt as manure on 5,000 acres of land in the 10 km to 25 km radius of Varthur Lake.

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— Prof T V Ramachandra, a member of NGT Monitoring Committee.

“We had a good interaction with farmers on Monday. They have submitted a list of farmers and the quantity of silt they need. I have been telling the farmers that silt at Varthur Lake has a lot of nutrients and it will be good to use it as manure,” said Prof T V Ramachandra, a member of NGT Monitoring Committee.

Prof. Ramachandra also added that one of his students had already tested the quality of silt and found it to be viable as manure. “My student used the silt as manure to propagate coriander and found that it has no heavy metals,” said Prof. Ramachandra.

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He said the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) engineers have also tested silt's quality and found it useful as a manure. "Farmers were using the silt from Varthur as manure for many years. They have to stock the silt at their agricultural lands for two to three months before using it as manure," he advised.

Venkata Reddy M, a farmer from Varthur, said that he has already used silt from Varthur Lake in January 2020 and found it good for crops. "Farmers will have to rest their land for two to three months after mixing silt with the soil. It is not advisable to sow seeds as soon as the silt is mixed in," said Venkata Reddy.

He said that around 20 tipper truckloads of silt would be required for one acre of land.

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Anjani Reddy, a farmers' leader from Sarjapur, appealed to the BDA authorities and NGT Monitoring Committee to help farmers at Varthur, Sarjapur and other areas by transporting the silt to their lands free of cost. "It will be better to supply silt to the farmers from nearby villages instead of dumping it in quarries situated at distant places," said Anjani Reddy.

According to Jagadeesh Reddy of Varthur Rising, the meeting between NGT and the farmers was to clear all ambiguities with respect to soil composition and ethical disposal of manures/silt from the lake, which is another milestone.

"Our team of volunteers consisting of farmers and civic activists worked tirelessly to reach out to the farming community for three years and it has paid off," he added.