

THE HINDU METROPLUS
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SELL LIKE HOT CAKES

- Eight women from Buffalo Back organic farm collective had travelled with produce from Karnataka's Anaikatti to give Chennai a taste of their cuisine.
- The traditional food — akki and ragi roti, jowar or kambu dosa, thina halwa, rice varieties and more — sold out quickly.
- "I was keen on introducing these women, who have never stepped out of their native land, to a city that appreciates their way of cooking," says Buffalo Back founder, Vishala P.



The two-day Safe Food Festival showed visitors the benefits of eating traditional and staying connected to the land



Good earth The festival covered agriculture, pottery, handlooms, traditional food and more; (below) at the release of Ashish Kothari's book, *Alternative Futures: India Unshackled* • USHA RAMESH AND VIVEK TRIPATHI



He now lives in Navadarshanam, a eco-spiritual community, where he focusses on community-based agriculture and provides organic food for urban consumers.

"The theme of Navadarshanam being sustainable happiness, inhabitants are completely off the grid and self reliant. Less dependent on power supply, we use biogas and firewood for cooking and permaculture practices ensure food sustainability. My motto is to enrich the land for the next generation, and once this idea gets into our minds, we will be headed in the right direction. Food has to be eaten closest to its original form, therefore avoid processed food as it robs all the nutrients. For those moving to farming from IT, try to understand that your lifestyle has to be changed drastically, as it will depend on your family income from agriculture."

In defence of sustainable living

CHITRADEEPA ANANTHARAM

The recent Safe Food Festival, organised to mark the 10th year of reStore, brought together panel discussions, workshops and even a colourful market.

A city-based volunteer organisation, reStore has been supporting organic farming, safe and traditional foods and garments by tirelessly interacting with and educating consumers. Not surprisingly, the festival brimmed with good ideas. Looking for ways to simplify your life? Try these.

Return to roots

According to environmentalist Ashish Kothari, the founder of Kalpavriksh, "Whether it is energy, housing or farming, we are looking for alternatives, and the transformation process has begun. And in this process, we are going back to traditional practices."

He reels off a list of examples to support this idea, "Architects are now integrating bamboo and mud in their structures. There is an increased awareness on avoiding unnecessary packaging materials."



He then adds, "The transformation must happen in politics, economics, culture, social justice and economy."

Living off the land

IT professionals-turned farmers Sujatha Mahesh and her husband cultivate traditional crops in their three acres of farmland in Villupuram.

"We learnt by trial and error, and later were guided by organic farming pioneer, Bernard Declercq. Living within our means is directly related to living off the land," says Sujatha, adding "Farming is a collective activity for the entire family and eliminates inequalities. For women, it is a great career, unhampered by any

ANCIENT WISDOM

Indians developed genetically diverse varieties of paddy seeds. Certain types of paddy are drought, flood, submergence and salinity resistant. Traditional agricultural knowledge guides farmers about which crop to cultivate.



break they take. There is a good balance of free time and working time."

Happily disconnected

Former technologist Gopi Shankara relocated to India from the US eight years ago.

Traditional wisdom

M Balasubramanian, writer and State coordinator for Organic Farming Association of India, says, "Diseases have taken over as we have reduced or completely done away with wild food in our diet. The concept of traditional food and seasonal food is non-existent in today's lifestyle. Our traditional rice varieties such as *mappillai samba* and *kattuyanam* were highly nutritious. *Arundhaniyams* (millets) are rich in protein and fibre. Include cold pressed oil and karupatti for cooking."

Former chartered accountant Vishala P is the founder of Buffalo Back, an organic farming collective, which aligns the requirement of the urban with the traditional knowledge of the tribal community living in the fringes of Bannerghatta National Park, Karnataka. For her, safe, traditional and seasonal food are all interconnected.

"Did you know that eggs, milk and meat are also seasonal produce? Ghee and cheese was made to preserve excess milk. Apples and carrots and broccoli are considered healthy as they are high on vitamin C. The supermarket era has made it possible to eat watermelon in all seasons, not just summer. Local food has ingrained connection to our body. In my farm, I tell the families to first make a local dish with the gooseberry that is harvested, and only use excess for pickling, just to educate them about seasonality."