

# Roots and Tubers Festival

## EMBRACE THE DIVERSITY OF ROOTS AND TUBERS

30<sup>th</sup> January 2025

Killoguda, Alluri Sitharamaraju district,  
Andhra Pradesh

In Collaboration with



Jointly organized by





Roots and Tubers Festival

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On **January 30, 2025**, the **"Embrace the diversity of roots and tubers"** festival was held in Killoguda village, Sagara Grampanchat, Dumbriguda Mandal, ASR District, Andhra Pradesh. This vibrant event was jointly organized by **Sanjeevini** and **WASSAN**, in partnership with **Rainforest Alliance**, **RySS**, **CTCRI**, **RRA Network** and **Keystone Foundation**. The festival aimed to celebrate and promote the rich diversity of indigenous and traditional root and tuber crops, while raising awareness about their importance.

The objectives of the festival were multifaceted, including highlighting the occurrence of these crops (whether cultivated or wild), their nutritional benefits, medicinal values, and potential for integration into rainfed agriculture cropping systems and biodiversity conservation efforts. The event drew a significant crowd, with over 300 participants, including men, women, and children, as well as representatives from esteemed institutions such as the Central Tuber Crops Research Institute (CTCRI), Biodiversity Board, Agriculture University, Biodiversity Management Committees, and students. This gathering provided a unique platform for knowledge sharing, exchange of ideas, and community engagement, ultimately promoting the conservation and sustainable use of root and tuber crops.

## “Dumpala Metta” PUJA CEREMONY

The festival commenced at 11am with a traditional puja ceremony, graciously performed by Chedda Jagithrai, Killo Narsing, and Korra Pandanna. A striking display of various tubers and roots, encompassing both wild and cultivated varieties, were arranged to resemble a small hill, aptly named "Dumpala Metta". This sacred ritual marked the beginning of the mela, embodying a profound commitment to conserving and sustaining the diversity of these vital crops. The ceremony not only honoured the time-honoured agricultural wisdom of the community but also served as a poignant reminder of the collective responsibility to preserve and protect indigenous food traditions, which are an integral part of their cultural heritage. By invoking the blessings of the divine, the community reaffirmed their dedication to safeguarding the rich biodiversity of tubers and roots, ensuring their continued availability for future generations.





## Opening Session

**Mr. Killo Ramchander** from Sanjeevini welcomed the gathering and invited the esteemed speakers to the dais. He then led the traditional lamp-lighting ceremony to inaugurate the festival before handing over the stage to Mr. Devullu as the session's anchor.

**Mr. P. Devullu**, with his extensive experience and knowledge, shared his thoughts on the significance of the festival, highlighting its importance in promoting the conservation and celebration of indigenous root and tuber crops. He also reflected on his 15-year journey of leading seed campaigns in the area, sharing his experiences, challenges, and successes.

Additionally, Mr. Devullu spoke about his association with WASSAN, emphasizing his work on promoting indigenous seeds and livestock breeds as a means to enhance local livelihoods. He shared his insights on how these initiatives have contributed to the betterment of the community, showcasing the positive impact of conserving and promoting indigenous varieties on the local economy and ecosystem.



# PERSPECTIVES FROM ESTEEMED SPEAKERS

## **MR. SEETHARAM, SAGARA GP SARPANCH**

Mr. Seetharam expressed his delight at the organization of the Tubers festival in his Grampanchayat, and he took a nostalgic trip down memory lane, sharing his childhood experiences of consuming a variety of tubers that are no longer readily available today. He reminisced about the seasonal harvesting of tubers and how certain varieties were intricately linked to local festivals, highlighting the deep cultural significance of these traditional foods. He stressed the need to educate the younger generation about tubers, regretting that children now prefer junk food over these nutritious options. He suggested creating innovative recipes to make traditional tubers more appealing to them. Mr. Seetharam hoped that events like the tubers festival would inspire traditional communities to explore and appreciate the naturally available food resources in the region, promoting a renewed interest in the rich culinary heritage of the area. By conserving and promoting the traditional knowledge of tubers, he believed that future generations could benefit from the nutritional and cultural wealth of these often-overlooked foods.



## **MR. DR. P. MURUGESAN, PRINCIPAL SCIENTIST (CTCRI), KERALA**

He discussed the nutritional and health benefits of tubers such as sweet potato and tapioca, highlighting their role in lowering the glycaemic index (GI). He cited the example of Taro root, emphasizing its potential for value-added products and its market significance. He also shared insights into advanced technologies available at CTCRI for assessing the nutritional quality of tubers. Additionally, he stressed the urgent need to conserve traditional root and tuber varieties, as many are rich in medicinal properties and hold great potential for health and sustainability.





### **MRS. BHAGYA LAXMI, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, WASSAN**

She emphasized that there is rich biodiversity in the Araku region and the importance of documenting the traditional knowledge of elders on cultivation practices and health benefits to conserve it for future generations. She highlighted the need to explore uncultivated root and tuber species and integrate them into farmland agriculture. Understanding their nutritional value is crucial, citing the example of Africans who rely on them for sustenance. She also stressed the significance of technical expertise from research institutions and expressed gratitude for CTCRI's collaboration. Additionally, she called for the retrieval of indigenous varieties from gene banks to revive them in fields and conserve biodiversity. Lastly, she underscored the necessity of establishing market linkages for roots and tubers, as without proper marketing, all efforts in conservation and cultivation would be in vain.



### **MRS. SALOME YESUDAS, NUTRITION EXPERT**

She emphasized the need for a deeper understanding of how climate change impacts the cultivation of roots and tubers.



### **MR. P. DEVULLU, SECRETARY, SANJEEVINI**

Mr. Devullu highlighted the importance of not just seeds but also tubers in tribal agriculture. He noted that while seed festivals were celebrated annually, tubers, an essential part of the tribal diet, were now gaining market value. With increasing urban demand for their nutritional benefits, tubers were providing farmers with better income and financial security. He urged the community to conserve and promote indigenous tuber varieties, emphasizing their role in both sustenance and economic stability.

**DR. K. LAXMINARAYANA, SCIENTIST (CTCRI),  
BHUBANESWAR, ODISHA**

He expressed that organizing small programs and activities, such as exhibitions and melas, can have a significant impact in raising awareness about the health benefits and market potential of roots and tubers.



**DR. ML SANYASI RAO, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR WASSAN.**

Mr. Sanyasi Rao emphasized that Sanjeevani, as a locally rooted organization, initially organized a seed festival to celebrate the rich diversity and integrated food systems of the Eastern Ghats. Building on this success, the tuber festival naturally followed, further strengthening these traditions. He highlighted that WAS-SAN's collaboration with Sanjeevani ensures that local communities take the lead in these efforts. Beyond just conserving diversity, the focus is on a broader perspective. Tubers are not seen only as crops but as key elements of a larger food system. With CTCRI bringing scientific expertise and value addition, alongside nutritionists and other experts, the festival represents a holistic approach to reviving and enriching traditional food systems.



**DR. SRIDHAR KOLLURU, BIODIVERSITY EXPERT, RAINFOREST ALLIANCE**

He highlighted the wealth of knowledge that the community holds on traditional roots and tubers, stressing the importance of conserving and passing this wisdom on to the younger generation.

Given their nutritional advantages and historical importance, he underscored the urgent need to revive their cultivation and ensure their continued presence in agricultural practices.





**MR JANAKI RAO, RETD DFO,  
REGIONAL COORDINATOR FOR STATE BIODIVERSITY BOARD**

Mr. Rao expressed his admiration for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in conserving local germplasm and expressed his willingness to collaborate on biodiversity planning and conservation initiatives. He emphasized the significance of indigenous tubers over popular ones like potatoes, highlighting their unique qualities and cultural importance. Acknowledging the need for further research and documentation of traditional roots and tubers, he advocated for their conservation and sustainable use. His support reflected a strong commitment to biodiversity preservation and sustainable agriculture in the region.



**MR.PANDANNA, AN EMINENT FARMER**

He spoke about the traditional importance of tubers, yams, and roots in tribal diets. He recalled how their forefathers actively collected these from the forests for both nutrition and traditional medicine. However, over time, many of these foraging practices had been lost, and people had shifted to buying market potatoes, which, he noted, lacked the same nutritional value. Pandanna stressed the need to revive these lost traditions and make tubers a regular part of their diet once again.









## SHOWCASING TUBERS DIVERSITY

One of the festival's main attractions was a stunning exhibition showcasing an impressive array of over 200 varieties of roots and tubers, spread across 14 colourful stalls. The stalls were managed by passionate farmers and civil society organizations (CSOs) from the ASR district, Malappuram, and Odisha, highlighting the remarkable agricultural diversity of these regions. The exhibition featured a wide range of species, including both commonly cultivated and rare uncultivated varieties, many of which are renowned for their exceptional medicinal and nutritional properties. Furthermore, some stalls showcased value-added products, demonstrating the significant economic potential of these crops and the opportunities for income generation. A comprehensive list of the diverse varieties exhibited at each stall can be accessed here ([LINK](#)). Additionally, more information on the medicinal and nutritional properties of the exhibited species can be found here, providing a deeper understanding of the importance and benefits of these incredible crops.

The exhibition was a multifaceted platform that not only celebrated the richness of traditional crops but also sought to educate visitors about the vital role they play in ensuring food security, enhancing climate resilience, and promoting sustainable agriculture practices. Throughout the exhibition, experts and farmers interacted with visitors, sharing their expertise and experiences on indigenous tuber farming methods, conservation techniques for tubers and roots, and the significant cultural importance of these crops in local culinary traditions. The impressive display served as a testament to the wisdom and knowledge of generations of farmers who have carefully nurtured and preserved these traditional crop varieties. By highlighting the importance of conserving these crops, the exhibition underscored the need to protect them from the threats posed by changing agricultural trends and environmental challenges, such as climate change, soil degradation, and loss of biodiversity. By promoting the conservation of these traditional crop varieties, the exhibition aimed to inspire a new appreciation for the importance of safeguarding our agricultural heritage and the role it plays in ensuring a sustainable food future.

## LIST OF THE STALLS WITH THE NUMBER OF TRADITIONAL VARIETIES (TVS)

8

FES, Odisha

12

CTCRI, Odisha

27

SABAL, RA

12

Velugu, Kothuru

107

Sanjeevani

18

WASSAN, Odisha

45

Sovva Unit

27

RySS, Arma

**SOIL & SEED  
INFORMATION CENTRE  
KILOGUDA**

SANJEEVINI & NATURAL FARMING  
FARMER PRODUCTION ORGANISATION  
94401 19789

22

CEFHA,  
Lammasinghi

10

Adhivasi Mitra

8

Pragathi,  
Koraput

16

Odisha

64

RySS,  
Dumbriguda

69

RySS,  
Gondhuvalsa





## Celebrating the Cultural Folk dance

Traditional folk performances of the **Dhimsa dance**, representing unity, joy, and festivity, were showcased by the indigenous communities. Enthusiastic participants eagerly joined the dance, immersing themselves in its vibrant rhythm and rejoicing wholeheartedly.



## COMMUNITY SEED EXCHANGE

Traditional Community seed exchange took place through stalls representing various locations and organizations, along with direct farmer-to-farmer interactions. The display of diverse tubers sparked interest among some farmers unfamiliar with certain traditional varieties, leading to exchanges. Alongside seed sharing, discussions on cultivation, health benefits, and storage practices enriched knowledge. These exchanges will promote crop diversity, conserve traditional crops and knowledge, and strengthen community connections.

## GROUP ACTIVITY

As part of the session, a group activity was conducted, dividing participants into three groups. The discussions included various aspects of tuber cultivation and usage:

- Explored seasonal availability of tubers based on duration (short, medium, and long-term crops) and checked for the possibility of cultivation accordingly.
- Examined culinary applications and practical benefits of different tuber varieties.
- Highlighted the medicinal properties (humans and cattle) of various roots and tubers and their role in daily nutrition and livestock feed.
- Shared traditional and modern culinary innovations involving tubers.
- Discussed economic opportunities and value addition for tuber-based products.
- Explored ways to integrate tubers into sustainable poly-cropping models within Natural Farming (NF) systems.



## SUPPORT FROM CTCRI: GERMPLASM SHARING & NUTRITIONAL ANALYSIS

- CTCRI scientists agreed to share germplasm that has market potential, so that the farmers can cultivate these profitable varieties that enhance the livelihoods and boost the economy of the community.
- While several wild tubers have high nutritional value, the presence of toxic elements needs assessment. CTCRI will assist in analyzing both the nutritional content and potential toxicity of roots and tubers.



## HONOURING THE BEST DISPLAY

The organizers extended special appreciation to the groups **Sanjeevani, RySS (Gondhuvalsa),** and **RySS (Dumbriguda)** for showcasing remarkable diversity in roots and tubers. Additionally, participation certificates were awarded to all groups that set up stalls at the event.

## CHALLENGES & AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

While the mela was well-received, certain challenges were noted:

- Limited awareness among urban consumers about the nutritional value of tubers highlights the need to expand future events to reach wider audiences, including school children and policymakers.
- Need for better marketing strategies for traditional crops and value-added products.
- Changing food habits and the influence of processed foods have led to a decline in the consumption of traditional tubers.
- Agricultural policies and extension services often focus on staple grains, neglecting the promotion and research of traditional root and tuber crops.
- Seed production and storage is one of the major concerns.

# Way Forward

1. Need to document the local recipes with roots and tubers and community claims.
2. Prioritize the list of roots and tubers which are consumed, have economic value - work with ICAR-CTCRI for nutritional profiling, value addition,
3. Establishing Crop Diversity Block (CBD) - get the germplasm from ICAR-CTCRI
4. Capture photos and document traditional and modern recipes.
5. Standardize recipes and promote local market linkages.

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