



Thanal Newsletter

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THALIR
Summer Camp

**THRIVING AGAINST
THE SUMMER HEAT**

Farmers in Manivayal
cultivate Success

Thalir

Summer Camp



In the month of May, Thanal hosted a summer camp for children aged 10 to 16 from May 6 to May 10. Since its inception in 1986, Thanal has been dedicated to fostering environmental consciousness among students and reconnecting them with nature. There were several sessions ranging from how to resist climate change to empowering kids to conserving nature. Sri John Baby , an environmentalist, led a session on making toys with coconut leaves and Ms.Rosa Abraham of Kosava, on making clay forms. Director , Thanal and Ornithologist Sri Raju, and Conservationist, Forests and Wildlife, Dr Miriam Abraham, led the group on a journey of birdwatching and forest trek . C. Jayakumar (Executive Director, Thanal) took a session on how climate change affects nature and how we can act to mitigate the same. Ms. Usha, Director, Thanal took a session for children on safe and healthy eating habits. 20 kids between the age group 8 to 15 joined the camp which was held at Thanal office premises. On the last day, the team visited the meenmutty waterfall. The kids enjoyed the sessions immensely . Younger ones were more captivated by the coconut leaf forms/ toys made by Sri John and they tried to emulate the same with much enthusiasm. For those who couldn't , he patiently made it for them to take home. Ms. Rosa's clay modelling session brought out the creative talents among the youngsters. Similarly medicinal garden and biodiversity sessions by Anju M Nair and waste management sessions by Ajay saw them running around Thanal to find different varieties of beetles and

ants keeping our team on their toes. Snacks and drinks were all organic, made by Pramila chechi , our sous chef . Lunch was also served daily. It was heartening to see these kids enjoying the local delicacies. Afternoons were generally filled with games or outdoor activities like preparing potting mixture and planting saplings or storytelling / public speaking activities . Kids enthusiastically participated in each of them. On the final day of the camp, the entire participants with the thanal team went on a trip to meenmutty waterfalls. Raju and Maria took them to another world introducing them to forest, its sounds and inhabitants - flora and fauna, however small they might be. Though many have been there before, they said it was the first time they were actually experiencing the forest. After the short trek, kids played and frolicked in the river with the team members always keeping a watch over them while letting them enjoy themselves. It started raining which really led to many enjoying rain for the first time in their life too.

There was a short closing ceremony on the same day back at the office with certificates and saplings distribution and kids feedback. Almost all of them including their parents have requested that this be continued every year. The kids waved goodbye, some left teary eyed and all of them hoping to come next year. It was indeed a wonderful experience for our team members too who were with the kids throughout looking after their comforts and safety. It was a very daunting responsibility making sure that these kids enjoy the most outdoors and they get to know and love nature, while also taking care that they stay out of danger. Though we all heaved a sigh of relief after the camp in sheer exhaustion, everyone agreed that Thanal felt empty without the fun and laughter of the children and decided that henceforth we shall do it every year and even maybe a day camp twice a year or so.. According to

one of the parents, Ms.Lakshmi, the camp which hosted around 20 kids was a great experience for the children and an opportunity to know and preserve nature. Another parent thanked us for giving her daughter environmental awareness and mental refreshment. All these good words and wishes give positive reinforcement to the Thanal team who is trying to inculcate and encourage healthy habits and lifestyles, nature love and awareness through our camps.

We cherish our moments with these kids and so we plan to publish a Thalir summer camp magazine by next month featuring the camp photos, articles and also creative works of our young participants. This shall include drawings, poems , stories , essays , articles or anything else connected to nature. To the kids and parents, pls send it ASAP and let us make a beautiful memoir for all of us.



THRIVING AGAINST THE SUMMER HEAT

Farmers in Manivayal Cultivate Success



In a remarkable feat, a group of farmers in Manivayal has defied the challenges of the summer season by cultivating vegetables profitably. With technical and financial support from Thanal and the cooperation of Meenangadi Grama Panchayat, this 16-member farming group has harvested approximately 195 kg of vegetables in various phases. Notably, six dedicated women farmers are integral to this group's success.

The harvest festival at Manivayal Field was inaugurated by the President of Meenangadi Grama Panchayat, Sri. Vinayan, who praised the group's achievement. During the event, the President highlighted the production of healthy, organic vegetables on around eight acres of land. This achievement has brought smiles and hope to the farmers and is expected to inspire the expansion of new agricultural initiatives, such as regenerative farming.



Manivayal Field is now a vibrant landscape with an array of crops, including okra, spinach, cucumber, green chilli, and jackfruit. The area also showcases a pioneering model of regenerative agriculture: using solar energy to pump water into the fields, which then flows back to the source after meeting the agricultural needs.

This is a significant contribution to the Meenangadi Grama Panchayat's 'Carbon Thulitha Meenangadi' project. The farmers of Manivayal Field are optimistic that this positive intervention will strengthen their livelihood, and they will be able to combat climate change effectively.

ENHANCING SOIL HEALTH BY CUTTING WEEDS AT THE STEM



Weeds are often dismissed as nuisances, yet in organic farming, they serve crucial roles. They enhance soil health, promote biodiversity, and support carbon sequestration. The best plants for any particular soil are often native species that we might overlook because they lack edible parts. Studies have shown that native plants significantly improve soil structure, increase microbial activity, and boost nutrient cycling. For instance, research published in the journal 'Agriculture, Ecosystems

& Environment' found that native weeds contribute to higher soil organic matter and better water infiltration rates. Recognizing their value can transform agriculture into a more resilient and productive system. At the same time, we should also keep in mind that they do not outgrow and destroy the crops. The article explains a simple, yet effective way of organic weed management which helps to enhance soil health which in turn produces healthy and nutritious food.

A sustainable approach to managing weeds can be cutting them at the stem and leaving the roots and lower stem intact. This method provides several benefits, including enhancing soil activity and its health. When weeds are cut at the stem, the upper parts decay on the soil surface and enrich the soil with organic matter. This decaying plant material improves soil fertility by becoming nourishment for the microbial populations which would process and create the organic matter 'humus' that makes up the difference between sand and soil.

The remaining stems and roots left in the soil contribute to soil structure. As the roots decompose, they create channels in the soil, improving aeration and water infiltration. This enhances the overall soil structure and helps prevent compaction. The presence of decaying material and intact roots boosts microbial and macrobial/faunal activity in the soil. Biological activity happens at a balance when there are both dead (weed stalks) decaying on topsoil while the root systems still try to restore the whole of the plant body. However the regrowth is typically less vigorous than if the weeds were whole. The cut weeds act as natural mulch, suppressing the growth of new weeds by blocking sunlight. This reduces the need for additional weeding, helps maintain soil moisture, and provides shade for the topsoil. Additionally, leaving the roots and

lower stems intact helps control soil erosion. The root systems of the weeds help bind the soil together, preventing it from being washed away by rain or blown away by wind. This contributes to the overall stability of the soil, reducing the risk of erosion and loss of valuable topsoil.

By adopting this approach, farmers can achieve a balanced, sustainable system that promotes soil fertility and reduces the labour plus resources needed for weed control and if done properly, fertilising too. All one would need is a hand tool like a long

(about 2-3 ft) sickle/saw type sword, and the cost for making one would be long covered by the benefits it would deliver the farmer. These tools were commonly used in traditional Indian agriculture. This practice intends to achieve zero tillage on soils since ploughed agricultural soils is the number one cause of soil degradation on the planet (largest land use is for agriculture), and would render food security systems useless. This method involves way less input but more of manicuring, paired with a decent level of observation from the farmer.

HANDICRAFT TRAINING AND DISTRIBUTION OF MACHINERIES



NABARD's livelihood development project which is executed by Thanal four years ago is planned across five adjacent hamlets of Adichipuzha, Cholanavayal, Karikulam, Kurumbanmoozhi and

Manakayam in Ranni block in various phases. We aim to empower the community through animal husbandry supply and training and skill development. The idea is to handhold them during the 5

year project period so that they are able to earn a sustainable regular income once the project is completed.

A three days advance training program provided to Tanima, a micro-unit of handicraft, which had been working in Karikulam hamlet after a three week training in 2023 . The session was led by Green Fiber Society faculty members Mr. Sasi Janakala and Secretary Ajitha. 20 beneficiaries were attended the training session. The purpose of the training was to equip the unit members with the necessary skills to fulfil an order for 200 kitchen utilities.

During the training, the unit members learned how to operate various machines to produce items such as spoons and papad sticks. They were also trained in the polishing and finishing processes. Additionally, the unit explored the possibility of expanding their product line to include other

bamboo products using the machines available to them. Following the training, Rajesh was selected as the master trainer due to his exceptional craftsmanship. Under his guidance, the unit members successfully completed the production of all the ordered products. This training not only enhanced the skills of the unit members but also allowed them to diversify their product offerings and increase their production capacity. Handicraft machineries distributed to four micro units operating in four hamlets following the completion of MEDP training. Machines and accessories were provided to three units under the Tanima unit in Karikulam as part of a three-day advanced training session.

This month, Mr. Reji Varghese (AGM, Pahanamthitta) and Mr. Vishnu H. Das (DDM, Pathanamthitta) oversaw the distribution of handicraft machinery to the members of the Vismaya unit. As a result, machines have now been distributed to all four micro units currently engaged in handicraft production.

THE INSPIRING STORY OF SUJITHA A HOUSEWIFE'S TRIUMPH

Sujitha, a beloved figure in the village of Karikulam, is a woman of many talents. She is known to answer any call for help with unwavering determination. Trained in tailoring and handicrafts through the NABARD TDF scheme, Sujitha has emerged as a beacon of hope and inspiration in her community.

Just a few months ago, Sujitha discovered her true potential through the skill training provided by the project. Two years prior, she had embarked on tailoring training under the tribal department, only

to be forced to abandon it halfway due to life's challenges. However, her spirits soared when sewing classes were organized in five hamlets as part of the NABARD TDF project.

“Attending the training at the Karikulam Community Hall was a transformative experience for me. I honed my sewing skills to perfection, and soon after, I began stitching women's blouses, churidars, nighties, skirts, and children's clothes from the comfort of my home. This newfound talent has allowed me to support my family and provide for my

children's education. I am immensely grateful for this opportunity, which has empowered me to contribute meaningfully to my household”.

With her husband working as a wage labourer, the family often faced financial hardships, resorting to the MGNREGA program for assistance. Despite the challenges, Sujitha persevered, participating in both sewing and handicraft training sessions of-

ferred by the project.

Reflecting on her journey, Sujitha credits the NAB-ARD TDF project for not only providing her with goats, chickens, and valuable skills but also for granting her a sewing machine that has truly transformed her life. Through sheer determination and hard work, Sujitha has emerged as a shining example of resilience and success in her community.

TRIBUTE TO DEVI AVVA



Devi Avva was a vibrant and essential presence at the Thanal Agroecology Center, especially during harvest times. We fondly remember her energy and the warmth she brought, as she and the other “Avvamas” worked with smiles and resilience, despite their own ailments. Devi Avva was not just a harvester but a teacher, sharing her vast knowledge of agriculture with many, including those of us who were new to the field. Her passing is deeply felt by everyone at Thanal and the Agroecology Center. We extend our heartfelt condolences and join together in mourning the loss of Devi Avva.

Your donation, regardless of its size, holds the power to catalyse positive change towards a greener and more equitable future.

Your support will enable us to extend our outreach to a wider range of beneficiaries, including farmers, indigenous communities and children. With your contributions, we can provide essential assistance to disadvantaged farmers by giving them training, supplying organic seeds, saplings, manures and buying and other resources that are crucial for sustainable agriculture and safe food. These resources often come at a higher cost com-

pared to conventional alternatives, making your support even more invaluable.

Together, let us work towards creating a planet where environmental health and justice are prioritised. Your donation will play a vital role in realising this vision. For your convenience, we have provided our account details below:



Account Details Account name :Thanal
Account number : 21780100017799
Bank name : Federal Bank, Sasthamangalam
IFSC code : FDRL0002178