

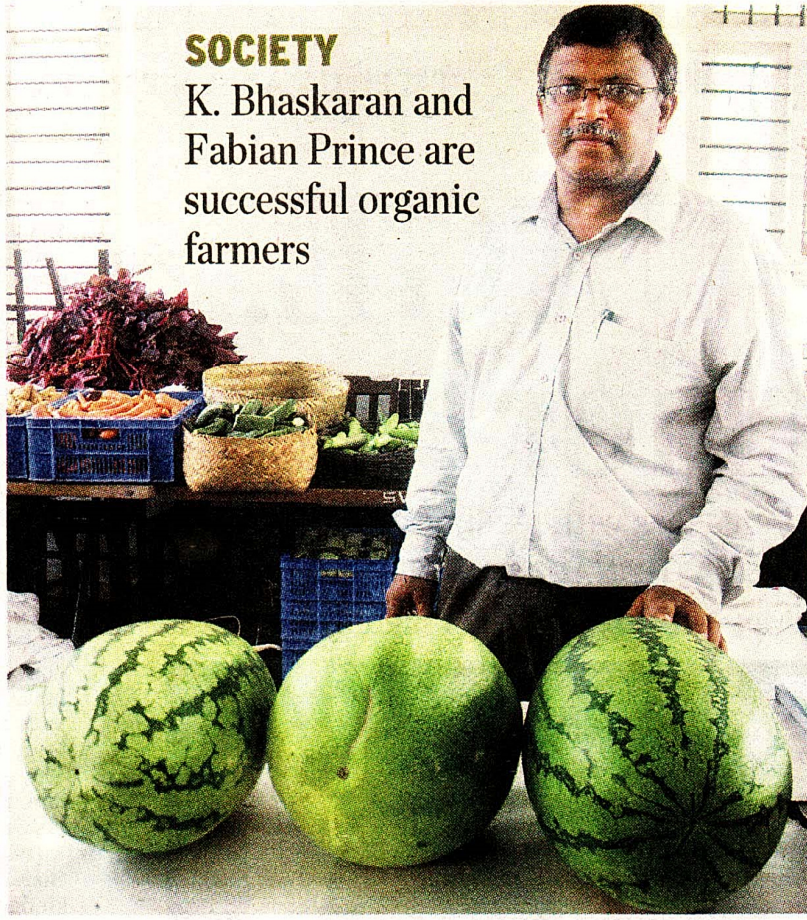
# BACK TO NATURE

With organic food finding a permanent place on the plates of many health conscious residents in the city, the demand for organic produce is burgeoning everyday. The trend has encouraged some to discover their green thumbs and practise organic farming. Meet two farmers who have reaped a rich harvest by being eco-friendly.

## Befriending the good earth

A mechanical engineer, Fabian Prince could easily have stayed back in Dubai where he worked for seven years. Instead, he chose to return to Kerala and become a farmer. Today, on nearly five acres of land near St. Xavier's College, Thumba, he grows vegetables, plantains and, hold your breath, watermelons.

"Although I come from a coastal area (Kannanthura near Shanthumughom), I have always loved farming. In fact, when I was doing my engineering at College of Engineering Thiruvananthapuram, we used to have 12 cows at home and used to supply milk regularly to the college hostel. Once I returned from Dubai, I decided to take up organic farming. I took a certificate course in organic farming from Mahatma Gandhi University. Later on, from the Livestock Management Training



**SOCIETY**  
K. Bhaskaran and Fabian Prince are successful organic farmers

**REAPING RICH BENEFITS** Fabian Prince and (below) K. Bhaskaran with their organic produce PHOTOS: ATHIRA M.

Centre, Kudappanakunnu, I learnt dairy farming and goat/rabbit rearing. I also learnt mushroom farming and bee-keeping from College of Agriculture, Vellayani. Afterwards I started cultivation in a joint venture with the Jesuit fathers of St. Xavier's," he says.

His land at Thumba is a coconut grove and he started off with cultivating plantain as an inter-crop, and then planted yellow cucumber in between. Amaranthus, cowpea, bitter gourd, snake gourd, ridge gourd, chillies, lady's finger, brinjal and the like followed.

Watermelon cultivation just happened. "We used to dump food waste under the coconut trees and one day we found that the watermelon seeds in it had sprouted. We took good care of the

plant and, to our surprise, we got a great yield as well. We got over 100 watermelons in the first round and in the second, even more, of which one of them weighed 13.6 kg!" he says with pride. Watermelons need enough sunlight, water, sandy soil and base manure which includes cow dung, food compost and coir pith.

"We even tried to grow vine tomato, which is used to make pizzas. I plan to start bee keeping later this month," he adds. He also had a flourishing mushroom business, which was stopped sometime ago.

Now that he is working in Kochi in a



design firm, Fabian shuttles between the two cities twice every week to supervise the cultivation. "Farming is a stress-buster for me. I unwind once I walk into my farm and see the yield," he says with immense pleasure. Contact: 9349323959

ATHIRA

## BUMPER YIELD

"He will be back from the fields on the evening...He doesn't use a mobile." We had called up K. Bhaskaran's home for an interview and he had already left for the day's work at six the morning.

Bhaskaran toils alone on his one-acre land at Thennoorkkonam near Vithinjalam from dawn till dusk. Organic produce from his field reaches households in the city through Thanal's organic bazaar and some shops in Chakkal market.

"It was circumstances that forced me to become a farmer. Though I took to farming at the age of 15, I left behind when I got a job at a spinning mill in Balaramapuram. I worked there for 22 years, but it was closed one day and we were asked to quit. We had to find another option for survival. Two years later, I went back to farming," says Bhaskaran.

It has been his bread and butter for the last nine years or so. Red amaranthus, yams, snake gourd, lady's finger, long beans, chilli, bitter gourd, bananas (nendran, kappa, robusta, pulayamthodan and rasakadali varieties) ... he cultivates them all.

"I took to organic farming after attending a meeting organised by Vithinjalam Krishi Bhavan and Thanal. I began with amaranthus and gradually moved on to other crops and vegetables," he says.

He vouches for the quality of organic produce. "Definitely, the dishes made with organic vegetables are tastier. Most of the vegetables we buy decay very easily. But it is not the case with organically grown products. Most of them stay fresh for many days, provided they aren't rotten inside," he says.

Bhaskaran admits that organic farming is not always a lucrative business.

"It is true that there is a huge demand for organic products. But we don't always get the profit. In addition, there is the huge loss we suffer due to climatic variations. There is no government fund or other agency to help us in those cases. All said and done, I'm always happy to be doing this," he says.

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