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How KVKs have transformed to become farm incubators

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As they complete 50 years of operations, the Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs), the frontline technology demonstration and extension arm of the Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR), have transformed themselves incubating agri start-ups unleashing the entrepreneurship spirit among the farmers.

The first KVK was set up on March 21, 1974 at Pudukcherry under the administrative control of the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore, to provide vocational education in the agriculture and allied areas for the rural youths.

The number of KVKs have grown over the past five decades and at present there are 731 KVKs set up across the country.

Of these 731 KVKs, 507 are under the State Agricultural

tural Universities and Central Agricultural Universities, 66 under the ICAR Institutes, 103 under the non-governmental organisations, 38 under various State governments and the remaining 17 under the other educational institutions.

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS
From a humble beginning as a vocational training centre, the KVKs have evolved themselves as business incubators helping farmers to become agripreneurs by encouraging local value addition in sync with the changing dynamics in the farm sector.

“KVKs, which are serving as knowledge and resource centres, are also helping farmers to become entrepreneurs. Farmers are being trained in various aspects value addition such as grading, processing and packaging among others besides providing them with access to finance,” said US Gautam, Deputy Director-



BOOSTING ENTREPRENEURSHIP. A file photo of participants at a training programme for making value-added products from millets at the Krishi Vigyan Kendra in Ramanathapuram, Tamil Nadu THE HINDU

General, Agriculture Extension at ICAR.

“Our aim is to have one KVK in every district of the country and we have sent a proposal to the Government to set up 102 more KVKs,” Gautam said.

The transformation of KVKs from the technology demonstration, crop management and production-oriented approach to encouraging farmer to go for value addition and empowering them with entrepreneurial skills started since 2010 with the introduction of the National Agriculture Innovation Project, said V Venkatasubramanian, Director, ICAR-Agricultural Technology Application Research Institute (ATARI) Zone 11, Bengaluru.

The way forward is branding and helping farmers and agripreneurs reach consumers directly with their products, he adds.

VALUE-ADDITION
“We have got a strong mechanism at the grass root levels to identify farmers with potential entrepreneurial skills and a structured procedure to train them to be entrepreneurs imparting them with various required business skills,” he said.

The skill building and product development is location specific, Venkatasubramanian said.

Thousands of value-added products have come out from the ICAR’s KVK ecosystem from various crops – fruit, flowers and field crops, ranging from mushrooms to orchids, jackfruits, millets, coconut, coffee, sea-food based products, vermi compost and bio-formulations among others, Venkatasubramanian said.