

# Diverse groups and Practices of Urban Agriculture

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## Not reliant on government certification, farmers visit each other's farms and check

Afrin Kale, one of the farmers I met, explained that she does not rely on certification from the government to prove her credentials as an organic farmer. Besides being an expensive process, the certificate is also not entirely reliable, she says, as the production process is not regularly monitored once the certificate is issued. NGO INORA that sells organic produce like Indrayani rice, however, will only accept produce for sale from farmers certified by the government.



*AFRIN KALE IS AN ORGANIC FARMER WITH A DEGREE IN CIVIL ENGINEERING, A RESIDENT OF PUNE CITY, HER FIVE-ACRE FARM IS IN PIMPALGAON GHODE VILLAGE OF AMBEGAON TEHSIL OF PUNE DISTRICT*

Geeta Deshpande, a senior farmer mentor who runs a special programme at the Swadhaa Waldorf Learning Centre at Pashan, where she teaches children about growing vegetables and cooking a good meal, said the certification process is largely disregarded in the circles of farmers who work with her. "We visit each other's farms and discuss the work we undertake. We help each other in marketing, produce and work in collaboration. We do not need any external agency to offer certificates, we work closely, and we know about how the different farmers in our network operate. Geeta has a network of over 3,000 farmers spread across the state, and they collaborate in marketing their produce and planning the crop cycle.

At Patil's store too the produce is from farmers who are part of the network, bound by ties of trust of friendship. Besides the store, Patil and his partners conduct other activities -- "Annarai" or food forests is one operation, where customers can reach out for support in planning kitchen gardens in whatever space is available.

### **Senior citizens take to terrace farming**

Shilpa, who is in charge of this vertical, assesses the space available and offers suggestions. She says she has helped about 50 people in the nearly two years that she has been looking after this work. Among those who have begun to grow some vegetables and greens is Shridhar

Nagnoor, a resident of Sai Ganesh Apartments in Karve Nagar. Nagnoor, 83, retired after a long career with the Central Bank; these days, he serves as a financial consultant. On his terrace, he has spinach, mint coriander, methi or fenugreek leaves. "It gives me great pleasure to see them growing, and the taste and flavour of these leaves are far superior to what one might get in the market. We just plucked and made chutney with some of the mint leaves, and they were so tender, so full of flavour; I use it in my tea too. I am going to expand the little plantation on my terrace," he says.

Shilpa says Mr Nagnoor has served as a good agent for her work. "His friend called me the other day, saying he too was inspired. And he said to me, 'I'm only 90 years old!'"

## **Offering consultancy services for greening city spaces**

Patil and his partners are sometimes called upon to offer advice on how to manage spaces where plants can be grown. One recent client was the Indian Army for two acres in Koregaon Park that had been lying fallow. “We planted several indigenous species there, 600 saplings in all. The Army has its own rhythms, and they like to cut the grass – we recommended that they allow growth of grass, but that could not be followed there.”

## **Meetings and discussion spaces**

Before the lockdown was announced in March 2020, the Sustainability Store would also regularly host events where people could meet and exchange experiences about different topics. Those sessions have still to resume now; there is also a plan to start a kitchen, so people can get a sense of the range of items that can be cooked from the produce sold at the store. That plan, too, had to be put off with the lockdown. “We had chosen a chef, but that person is no longer available. Once we have found someone, we will set it up,” Patil says.

## **Strong community bonds**

The people engaged in natural farming without the use of chemical inputs in the city were bound together by strong bonds of community. There is a flow of information across social media through many of those I met, and they discuss, besides work, even personal issues – whole families are known to each other, and there is also an openness to accepting new members into this network that were introduced by this reporter.

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(This is an excerpt from the chapter “Diverse Groups and Practices of Urban Agriculture” in the report “State of Urban Agriculture in Indian Cities: Pune”. Read the full report [here](#).)