

## Bio-shield protects banana crop from monsoon fury

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A banana plantation covered by casuarina plantation in a private farm land in Narasimha Naicken Palayam in Coimbatore district.

### Casuarina plantations at farm serve as a natural wind-breaker

Monsoon always brings cheer to farmers. But, when accompanied by gusty winds, monsoon rains pose a grave threat to banana plantations and often plants ready for harvest are uprooted. Now, there is a ray of hope for banana growers, as a pilot project implemented by the Coimbatore-based Institute of Forest Genetics and Tree Breeding (IFGTB) has proved to be a relief.

By planting casuarina, a natural wind-breaker, the institute has successfully saved banana plants in Coimbatore.

Giving details to *The Hindu* about the 'Windbreak Agro-forestry System' that protected the banana plantations, institute director N. Krishnakumar said crop damage caused in Coimbatore and adjoining areas during monsoon was very high. Banana is the third important commercial crop in the State and the loss for banana growers in the western part of the State is estimated to be around Rs. 5 crore annually. In Coimbatore and its surroundings alone, banana is cultivated on 30,000 hectares with an annual production of 11 lakh tonnes of fruit.

In order to help farmers, the institute on a trial basis took up planting of casuarina in four different banana plantations owned by private people on a total of four hectares of land spread in Narasimha Naicken Palayam, Bodi Thimman Palayam, Idigarai and Royarpalayam, he said.

Sharing his experience, N. Velusamy, a farmer from Bodi Thimman Palayam in Coimbatore district around whose banana plantation the institute raised the casuarina as a natural barrier, said he had raised banana crops on five occasions. But, the yield was affected due to monsoon winds.

"The institute raised the bio-shield in my banana plantation in January 2012 and by November, I harvested one crop. This time the yield was more than the previous occasions," he said.

Mr. Krishnakumar said his organisation had chosen the species of casuarina that is normally grown in the inlands for windbreak system. Casuarina trees increased the revenue to farmers and could be harvested in three years and sold to pulp wood industry. Even in the second year, fully-grown casuarina plantation could be harvested as there is a great demand for this wood in gasifier units of the energy production companies. Thus, bio-shield provided dual income to farmers, he said.

The role of the institute does not end with providing saplings. It also provided the technical knowhow on raising it. Scientists from the institute also make periodical visit to the model farms to check for pest attack and disease on the planted casuarina, he added.

Keywords: [Institute of Forest Genetics and Tree Breeding, banana crops, bio-shield, Krishnakumar, Windbreak Agro-forestry System](#)

Source: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/bioshield-protects-banana-crop-from-monsoon-fury/article4941968.ece>