

DRAFT DECLARATION OF FARMVERSITIES - for comments

GIVEN THAT, our modern education system has always been anti-farming, anti-farmer and anti-village and romanticizes industrial urban life. The neo-colonial curriculum is constantly pushing us towards an aspiration where we are told to yearn for the 'urban life' and 'white-collar jobs' leaving behind their community, land and culture which are often deemed as 'backward' and 'old'. Youth develop an innate sense of shame and disconnect towards farming when they step out of the education system. In addition, over the past few decades, there is a growing trend for farmers to not want their children to follow the same path as farmers both due to economic hardships and a loss of dignity of being a farmer. There is very little commitment to building a sense of dignity in village farming life, particularly for small farmers.

GIVEN THAT, the agricultural universities of India continue to boast of the green revolution benefits and promote large scale agriculture while shunning sustainable traditional processes of agriculture, dismissing local knowledge systems. Their knowledge systems are heavily based on western monoculture and corporate-controlled, fragmented science. Organic and natural farming subjects and research are marginalised and underfunded. There is very little commitment to building contextualised local knowledge systems around food, farming, water, soils, seeds, forests and appropriate technologies.

GIVEN THAT, the relationship gap between farmers and consumers is growing, particularly with the emergence of online shopping and the breakdown of local markets. While our farmers can support an entire village, it will take a village-like community to support our farmers during these times. Consumers have to be sensitized and better organized to support their farmers. There is a need to create mechanisms to reduce the role of middlemen and build more direct relationships between farmers and consumers. Online technologies should be re-oriented in this direction of ensuring the maximum benefit goes to the producer. There is very little commitment to building up local markets for farmers.

GIVEN THAT, there is a larger game of corporate control over agriculture in India which involves monoculture cash crops, the scientific establishment, land mafia, certification industry, overwhelming debt, genetically modified seeds and huge corporate subsidies. This has led to farmer's suicides, health risks, loss of biodiversity and extreme water shortages over the past few decades. It has also led to organic food being unaffordable for most of the population. There is a need for a shift of power over farming out of the hands of global corporations. There is very little commitment to building up sustainable localized agriculture models for small farmers and local communities.

GIVEN THAT, there are many looming challenges like climate change, artificial intelligence and genetically modified seeds on the horizon which may even further shake up the lives of farmers and village scenario. There is a need to build more support structures and policy support for small farmers and their land and animals.

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WE COMMIT TO LAUNCHING FARMVERSITIES ACROSS THE INDIAN SUB-CONTINENT

Farmversities is a radical holistic response of reimagining the education system, the agricultural system, the larger political-economy and even our notions of spirituality. It is inspired by Gandhiji's Hind Swaraj and years of explorations trying to meaningfully address the question of rural to urban migrations, depleted biodiversity and ecosystems, breakdown of local markets and spiritual void. It comes from the understanding that engaging with the problems of rural India begins with decolonizing our minds and reclaiming our understanding of local knowledge systems and relationships.

Farmversities are committed to restore the dignity of farmers and the integrity of local food systems. It is also committed to liberate the field of farming from industrial corporate agriculture and monoculture. Farmversities belong to farmers (both human and more than human) – the farmers are the core faculty. It is a platform that aims to take the larger natural organic food movement to every village and city of this country by creating knowledge generation centers and living learning programmes for reclaiming practical farming wisdom which is relevant to diverse ground realities. There will be 4 key areas of action:

- **OFFERING LEARNING PROGRAMMES:** A Farmversity will have learning and capacity building programmes on different themes such as (not limited to): soil, water, forest, agroecology, seed saving, composting, food processing and value addition, farm tools and equipment, action research, labor management, marketing, farm entrepreneurship, community building, digital technologies, decoding the global economy and decolonizing our mindsets. Courses can be validated by Farmversities Network and Ecoversties Alliance.
- **BUILDING LOCAL MARKETS AND POLICIES-** Farmversities will focus on rebuilding local community markets, alternative currencies, reducing the distance of food miles and strengthening trust-bonds between farmers and communities. We will support efforts of marketing, investment, branding and social media. As a network, we will seek to re-define the system of economic profit, money and unlimited economic growth with a vision of building a thriving local economy and regenerating local commons of real wealth. They will also develop local policy frameworks for supporting a regenerative food ecology. Local policies will include regulations, subsidies, taxes, insurance, loans and resource mobilization.
- **CONDUCTING ACTION RESEARCH -** Farmversities are envisioned to be spaces of active action research. Each Farmversity will specify specific areas of action research which they are engaged in their local context. They will be supported to make films and podcasts and publish papers related to their research. They will also be encouraged to redefine what 'research' means. We will work towards regenerating open source local knowledge repository rather than private patents. This enables us to reshape and rebuild the creative commons where we share openly with each other, challenging the corporate way of copyrighting and patenting knowledge systems.
- **COMMUNITY ECOSYSTEM WEAVING -** Farmversities will explore various community-building processes and the regeneration of social wealth through practices like community festivals, pop-up cafes, community arts, gift culture and spiritual farming. They will work on healing and re-weaving the local rural and urban social fabrics of young people, farmers, politicians, doctors, healers, spiritual leaders, chefs, sustainability practitioners, local government officials, etc

How do I start or declare myself a Farmiversity?

- Do you have a farm or rooftop garden space where you have been growing natural organic food for at least 5 years?
- Do you conduct capacity building learning programmes on subjects related to natural organic farming?
- Do you carry out action research and on-ground experimentation at your farm or garden space?
- Are you committed to rebuilding local markets and community spirit for your farm produce and for your consumption needs?

If you have felt a resounding yes as you read through the above sections then you are ready to take the next step forward!

Becoming part of the Farmiversity network will support you to become part of a larger network of like-minded practitioners and dreamers, who are working towards an ecologically sane world and regenerative food systems.

Some steps to declare yourself a Farmiversity:

- Choose a powerful name (preferably from your local context) and declare yourself an Farmiversity by posting a board on your farm and on your website.
- Get together at least 3 friends who are excited to learn/unlearn together and host the Farmiversity
- State your purpose and vision for your Farmiversity. Be clear on who your starting learners will be.
- Invite 3 well-respected elders in your area to serve as trustee-guardians of core spirit and values.
- Decide on what courses you feel excited to offer.
- Identify at least 5 inspiring mentors who are willing to share their knowledge/skills.
- Frame at least 3 action-research questions or focus areas which are important for you, your community, the world.
- Find a convenient meeting rhythm and meeting space.
- Take steps to build a local community ecosystem.
- You can issue letters of recommendation or Farmiversity certificates to your learners.

QUESTIONNAIRE - How do I start or declare myself a Farmiversity?

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- What is the special name of your Farmiversity?

- Who are your target learners (such as farmers, youth, women, professionals, consumers?)

- What specialized knowledge areas can you design courses around?

- What are at least 2 action-research questions or focus areas which are important to you right now?

- Who are your local organizing coordinators to work with you on Farmiversity (at least 2 names, emails and numbers)?

- Who are 3 well-respected elders in your area to serve as trustee-guardians of your Farmiversity who can help promote and protect the project?

- Who are 5 inspiring farming gurus who are willing to share their knowledge/skills?

- Do you have a meeting space?

- How many people can you currently accommodate for food and stay?

- Are you able to employ learners who graduate from Farmiversities?
Or do you know potential employers?

- Do you prefer to offer long or short courses?

- What challenges do you need assistance with?
 - Financial?
 - Infrastructure?
 - Organizational?
 - Curriculum and Pedagogical?
 - Team Building?