



Cash Crop Cultivation: Papu Devi's Tryst with Mushrooms



In Bhadohi, Uttar Pradesh where the sun scorches the earth and opportunities often wither, Papu Devi planted not just mushrooms but a dream. Today, she stands as the proud proprietor of Vishal Mushroom, a thriving enterprise born from grit, vision, and entrepreneurial spirit. A woman cash crop farmer in rural Uttar Pradesh? Yes, and she's reshaping the local economy with every harvest.

Life hadn't always looked this promising for Papu Devi. A mother of four and the backbone of a family of nine, she once worked in poultry farming. The returns were meagre, and the weight of financial insecurity grew heavier with time. But Papu never gave up. She continued striving for self-reliance, determined to script her own story of change.

Her turning point came when she enrolled in a mushroom cultivation training programme under the Women's Economic Empowerment initiative by Development Alternatives, implemented with the help of ground partners. For months, she immersed herself in learning this delicate and demanding craft, despite knowing that success would not come easy.

Setting up the farm was a six-month uphill journey. With no prior experience, Papu encountered challenge after challenge, from understanding temperature control to procuring suitable equipment. Mushrooms are notoriously fragile, and even a minor error could cost an entire crop. Yet, she remained undeterred, investing ₹2–3 lakh from her own savings and taking a ₹50,000 loan from Nariakta Cluster Level Foundation (CLF), where she is an active member. Her husband also supported the venture by securing a bank loan.

Running the farm is no small feat. Papu's day begins before sunrise and stretches well into the night. To keep her mushrooms thriving in the heat, she uses five air conditioners—a significant but crucial investment. She hires local Adivasi workers, pays them ₹50 per harvested box, and manages delivery and logistics with help from her children.

Her entrepreneurial approach extends beyond cultivation. In times of local shortages, she sources mushrooms from vendors in Lucknow to ensure that customer demand is met. She has even ventured into vermicompost production in collaboration with a neighbour, maximizing the use of available space and diversifying her income streams.

Today, Papu earns up to ₹100,000 a month during peak seasons, selling mushrooms at ₹200 per kilogram. Her sons contribute to the enterprise by managing its online presence, giving the business a digital edge.

What stands out, however, is not just her income it's her outlook. Papu continues to bet on herself and her community. She is not a beneficiary of a scheme, but a change-maker. Her farm is a hub of opportunity, a symbol of resilience, and a testament to the power of entrepreneurship to transform rural lives.

Papu Devi's story is not just about mushroom farming. It's about a woman who redefined her destiny and inspired her family and community to believe in their potential. She is one of many rural entrepreneurs driving a quiet revolution—where self-belief is the seed, and enterprise the harvest.

