

Cultivating Prosperity through Fungi: Inspiring Success Stories of Mushroom Farmers in Chhattisgarh

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ARTICLE ID: 73

Mushroom cultivation has emerged as a powerful tool for rural transformation in Chhattisgarh, offering a low-investment and high-return pathway to agripreneurship. This article presents compelling success stories of five mushroom farmers: Mrs. Namrata Ghai, Mrs. Girija Kunjam, Mr. Arjun Sawlay, Mr. Charandas Sahu and Mr. Nedy Navin Sahu. These farmers have not only created profitable enterprises from limited resources but also empowered communities through innovation, value addition and training. From producing spawn and developing value-added products like mushroom coffee, pickles, and powders to integrating mushroom cultivation with organic practices, these agripreneurs demonstrate how scientific training, institutional support, and entrepreneurial spirit can reshape rural livelihoods. Their journeys reflect the transformative potential of mushroom farming in achieving nutritional security, economic resilience, and sustainable development.

Keywords: Mushroom cultivation, Agripreneurship, Value Addition and Sustainable Farming.

Introduction

India's agricultural industry is undergoing a quiet revolution due to the diversification of farming systems and alternative businesses, in addition to technological advancements. Among these, growing mushrooms has become a viable agribusiness endeavour that requires little capital and yields large profits. In rural India, a once-specialised farming method is now

changing lives by empowering smallholder farmers, women, and young people. This article highlights the remarkable tales of a number of Chhattisgarhi mushroom farmers who have effectively transformed mushroom farming into a lucrative and sustainable source of income despite having little land or resources.

1 .From Chemistry to Cultivation: The Journey of Mrs. Namrata Ghai

Mrs. Namrata Ghai's journey from college lecturer to leading mushroom entrepreneur exemplifies determination and adaptability. A postgraduate in chemistry, Namrata left her job in 1997 to pursue mushroom farming full-time. After receiving training from premier institutes like Indira Gandhi Krishi Vishwavidyalaya (IGKV), Directorate of Mushroom Research (DMR) and Haryana Agricultural Infrastructure Corporation (HAIC), she started her venture with just 100 bags in a 10×10 sqft area. Today, she manages an integrated mushroom farm spread across 1 acre and cultivates over 50,000 oyster mushroom bags annually. Her venture has expanded well beyond mushroom cultivation to encompass spawn production, value-added products such as mushroom powder, pickles, and *badi* (dried lentil dumplings), along with a dedicated training-cum-research facility. She now produces 15-20 tonnes of spawn annually, over 1 tonne of mushroom pickle and has achieved an annual turnover exceeding 1 crore. Her story is more than a tale of personal achievement and serves as a blueprint for large-scale agripneurship, rooted in training, innovation and value addition.



Mrs. Namrata Ghai



Mushroom bags



Mushroom Pickles



Mushroom Badi

1. Mrs. Girija Kunjam: Empowering Women through Mushrooms

From a remote village in Rajnandgaon, Chhattisgarh, Mrs. Girija Kunjam has emerged as a true symbol of women's empowerment. Beginning in 2016 with just a 20×20 ft room, a few bags and a small group of women, she ventured into mushroom cultivation with determination and vision. What started as a modest effort gradually transformed into a thriving enterprise, with Girija now producing hundreds of bags annually. Her income, ranging between Rs. 30,000 and Rs. 55,000, has not only strengthened her household economy but also set an example for her community. Her real success goes far beyond financial gain. By sharing knowledge, creating employment opportunities and proving that even limited space and resources can generate sustainable livelihoods, she has inspired many women around her. Her journey powerfully demonstrates how mushroom farming can serve as a gateway to both social and economic upliftment, particularly for rural women.



Mrs. Girija Kunjam



Mrs. Girija Kunjam with Mushroom Bags

2. Mr. Arjun Sawlay: From a Modest Start to Market Innovator

Another shining example is Mr. Arjun Kumar Sawlay from Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh. With just 450 sq. ft. of cultivation space and 500 mushroom bags, he began his farming journey in 2018 after receiving training from Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) Bilaspur. Initially, his focus was on fresh and dry mushrooms, earning him a modest net profit of Rs. 1.5 to Rs. 1.6 lakh annually. But Arjun soon realised the potential of value addition. With innovation at the core of his strategy, he ventured into creating mushroom-based coffee, protein powder, papads, and badi. These products not only enhanced shelf life but also diversified his consumer base. Mushroom coffee, sold in 100g packs at Rs. 100, has garnered attention for its health benefits and novelty. Today, his enterprise yields an annual profit of Rs. 6 to 7 lakh. His story underlines the critical importance of processing, branding and market expansion in unlocking the full potential of mushroom cultivation.



Mr. Arjun Sawlay



Mushroom Coffee powder



Dry mushroom



Mushroom Badi

3. Mr. Charandas Sahu: A Veteran Farmer's Legacy of Learning and Leading

Mr. Charandas Sahu, a resident of Rajnandgaon, Chhattisgarh, has turned mushroom farming into both a sustainable livelihood and a thriving enterprise. With over 25 years of experience, he began cultivating mushrooms in the early 2000s after receiving training from the Agriculture Department and KVK Rajnandgaon. Initially working with just 100 mushroom bags and earning Rs. 400 annually, he steadily scaled up his operations. Today, He cultivates 500 to 600 bags annually and earns over Rs. 2 lakh per year. He has mastered spawn production and value-added processing, producing dried mushrooms, pickles, papads, and mushroom powder. By efficiently utilising waste materials and adopting modern preservation techniques, he has successfully minimised post-harvest losses and expanded market access. His dedication and achievements have been recognized with the prestigious Krishi Ratan Award, underscoring his role as a model for integrating traditional farming knowledge with modern agribusiness practices. His journey exemplifies how vision, innovation, and persistence can turn small-scale farming into a sustainable and profitable enterprise.



Mr. Charandas Sahu with Mushroom badi



Mr. Charandas Sahu with Mushroom bags



Mushroom Pickles



Mushroom Papad

4. Mr. Neki Navin Sahu: Integrating Mushrooms with Organic Farming

With a background in dairy technology, Mr. Neki Navin Sahu from Mahasamund took a scientific approach to farming. After attending training at IGKV, he began cultivating mushrooms alongside vermicomposting. Initially managing 50 to 70 mushroom bags, his enterprise has expanded to 20,000 bags and a cultivation area of over 2 acres. His integrated approach helped lower input costs and raise profitability. Now he earns an additional Rs. 2 to 2.5 lakh annually from mushroom cultivation alone. He aims to set up canning units and adopt further value addition strategies to increase product shelf life and reach new markets. His farm showcases how integration of composting and mushroom cultivation can improve soil health, reduce waste and create a sustainable farming economy.



Mr. Neki Navin Sahu (Mushroom Agripreneur)



Mushroom Bags



Mushroom Badi



Dry Mushroom

Innovative Mushroom Entrepreneurs: Scale, Impact and Achievements

Farmer Name	Background & Training	Initial Setup	Current Scale	Value Addition / Innovations	Annual Income / Profit	Key Impact
Mrs. Namrata Ghai	Chemistry postgraduate, trained at IGKV, DMR, HAIC	100 bags in 10×10 sq. ft	Over 50,000 bags annually	Spawn production (15 to 20 tonnes), Mushroom Powder, Pickle, Badi and training facility	Over Rs. 1 crore turnover	Blueprint for agripreneurship women entrepreneurship, training hub
Mrs. Girija Kunjam	Rural woman farmer, Rajnandgaon	Small group, few bags (2016), 20×20 ft room	Hundreds of bags annually	Focus on fresh mushrooms and small-scale processing	Rs. 30,000 to 55,000 per annum	Women's empowerment, livelihood generation for village women
Mr. Arjun Sawlay	Trained at KVK Bilaspur (2018)	500 bags, 450 sq. ft	Diversified into branded products	Mushroom Coffee, Protein Powder, Papads & Badi	Rs. 6 to 7 lakh per annum	Innovation in processing & branding, expanded market reach
Mr. Charandas Sahu	Veteran farmer, 25+ years farming experience, trained at Agri Dept. & KVK Rajnandgaon	100 bags annually	500 to 600 bags, annually	Spawn production, dried mushrooms, pickles, papads, powder	Over Rs. 2 lakh per annum	Awarded Krishi Rattan Award, traditional farmer adopting modern practices
Mr. Neky	Background in	50–70	20,000	Integrated	Rs.2 to	Circular

Navin Sahu	Dairy Technology, trained at IGKV	bags annually	bags in 2 acres	vermicomposting + mushroom farming, plans for canning unit	2.5 lakh (additional income)	farming economy, soil health improvement, organic integration
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Economics

Mushroom cultivation has proven to be a transformative, low-investment, high-return opportunity for rural entrepreneurs in Chhattisgarh. Many farmers start small, working with just a few hundred bags in basic rooms, yet through dedication and innovation, they scale up their operations and achieve remarkable results. Income levels vary widely, from modest earnings to several lakhs annually, reflecting the potential of the sector. Profitability grows significantly when farmers embrace value addition, vertical integration, and smart marketing strategies. By producing mushroom-based powders, pickles, coffee, and other processed products, they not only diversify their income but also expand their reach to new markets, turning small-scale cultivation into sustainable and rewarding agribusiness ventures.

Conclusion

The story of rural development is being rewritten by the mushroom farmers of Chhattisgarh. From young housewives and entrepreneurs to retired professionals, their experiences show how innovation, sustainability and empowerment are convergent in Indian agriculture. Growing mushrooms is not just a side business; it is now a significant component of rural entrepreneurship, nutritional improvement, and livelihood security. Their experiences serve as a reminder that even a tiny plot of land may produce profit and pride in addition to mushrooms if the proper information, institutional support, and market access are available.