

Yongchak finds a new home in Ukhrul

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Imphal, November 11 2011: Manipuri's favorite delicacy - Yongchak (stink or tree bean) trees which has already dried up in many parts of the state, finds a new home in the highlands of Ukhrul district due to rise in temperature. Last year Yongchak almost disappeared from the Imphal markets after thousands of trees both in hills and valley dried up due to the insects attack due to climate change in the recent past. Yongchak Eromba, prepared with fermented fish, is one of the most delicious and sought after dish of Manipuris during winter. In the recently concluded Ningol Chakkouba festival-Yongchak was sold at Rs 50 per single stem in the market. "Even if there are reports of widespread drying up of Yongchak trees due to pest invasion and climate change, Ukhrul highlands climate seems to be comparatively safer for its cultivation", says Solei Luiram, 38 specialist (Horticulture) of Krishi Vigyan Kendra Ukhrul. "It must be because of climate change". The climatic conditions of Ukhrul villages such as Nungbi, Phungjam, Paorei, Halang and Khalang etc under the Chingai sub-division have been undergoing change. "The average temperature of these hill villages, a decade ago were in between 20-25 degree Celcius. But now the temperature has gone up," the horticulture specialist and resident of Nungbi village said. "Rise in temperature has thus helped this tree variety to grow fast besides bearing fruits etc". However, the specialist had been facing a strange situation in dealing with pest and insect invasion in their Ukhrul fields. Thus they are trying to introduce integrated pest management and integrated nutrient management programs in order to control pests. "So far so good. There has been no report of an insect called American long horn beetle in our area", he added. The insect is responsible for drying up of Yongchak plants in Manipur. Five years ago, the villagers couldn't make money out of their Yongchak trees as most of the trees failed to bear fruits. But now they can at least fetch a minimum of Rs 5000 per Yongchak tree. "We've been experiencing this change in the tree since the last 4/5 years. So now we've a stable income from Yongchak trees unlike in the past," shares Sochanphi Horam, 33 year old cultivator and owner of five Yongchak trees of Pushing village, also under Chingai sub-division. Her Yongchak trees grow on the river side of the village. Earlier Sochanphi and most of her village farmers depended only on paddy (Rs 150 per tin) and other integrated crops. "Besides Yongchak, we've also witnessed coming up of Kiwifruit plantation in a traditionally cold place like Ukhrul district", Dr Subhra Saikat Roy, Indian Council of Agricultural Research, Horticulture Scientist observed. "This shows that temperature is rising in the area". Otherwise Ukhrul which is traditionally known for its large scale lemon cultivation in Kachai area, now becomes a suitable place for growing kiwifruits too.