

LIFE LESSONS Suman More (with cap) and her friends with their solar dryer;(right) queue at the Sankalp 'milk ATM'in Urali Kanchan

Photographs by MANDAR DEODHAR



RURAL SALVATION

BAIF's work among the rural masses since the late 1960s, especially in dairying and women's empowerment, has helped lift thousands out of poverty

By **DHAVAL S. KULKARNI**

Uruli Kanchan village, located some 30 km from Pune, first emerged on the map in 1946 when Mahatma Gandhi came to start a nature cure ashram here. He selected Manibhai Desai, still in his 20s, to manage it. Desai was later involved in a raft of rural initiatives, such as India's first cooperative lift irrigation scheme in the 1960s, even a sugar cooperative, before launching Bharatiya Agro Industries Foundation (BAIF) in 1967.

In 1970, BAIF pioneered the doorstep delivery of artificial insemination (AI) services for dairy farmers. "This helped boost milk production from the two litres per animal then.... If cattle breeds had not improved, milk production in India would have stagnated," says Bharat Kakade, the current president and managing trustee of the BAIF Development Research Foundation, while pointing to its role in India's 'White Revolution'. BAIF has

WHY IT IS A GEM

BAIF's doorstep delivery of artificial insemination services for dairy farmers played a vital role in the White Revolution

BAIF's work now extends from women SHGs to climate-resilient farming to the 'Wadi' programme for tribal areas

3.9 mn families in 17 states have benefited from BAIF initiatives



BAIF DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH FOUNDATION, *Uruli Kanchan, Pune*

Key people: **Hrishikesh Mafatlal**, Chairperson, BAIF; **Bharat Kakade**, President & Managing Trustee **Year of inception: 1967**

created a cadre of technicians to help in AI procedures and animal healthcare, a model replicated by state governments and dairies, and has also developed a number of varieties of fodder. The organisation is also part of a consortium that has developed Single Nucleotide Polymorphism (SNP) chips for cattle and buffaloes, the DNA markers helping to identify superior quality animals. A few BAIF centres are now even furnished with unique 'milk ATMs' that dispense quality homogenised milk.

In 1982, BAIF launched the 'Wadi' programme to help boost incomes of families in the tribal areas of Maharashtra and Gujarat. Wadi combines agriculture, horticulture and forestry practices, and includes rejuvenation of village ponds and development of nurseries. Surveys, Kakade says, suggest it has helped increase green cover and reduce poverty in Gujarat's tribal districts. The programme is now being replicated in Maharashtra's Gadchiroli.

BAIF has also launched several

BENEFICIARY SPEAK
“**BAIF provides quality semen under its AI programme. I have six Holstein Friesian cows sired from it, and they give 25 litres of milk each on average. They have better disease resistance too**”

GANESH DHAMAL, Dairy farmer in Uruli Kanchan, Pune

self-help groups to develop entrepreneurship and provide livelihoods, some of which now have a national presence. Lata Sharma, who heads the training and community health programme, says that around Uruli Kanchan alone, they have 132 SHGs with 2,000 women members. Sankalp, an umbrella federa-

tion of 70 women from these groups, sells products manufactured by these SHGs. This has helped women like Suman Shankar More in Uruli Kanchan earn some extra money. She has a solar conduction dryer to make products like dehydrated onions and lemons, which retail at the Sankalp outlet.

Kakade says BAIF is also working on climate-resilient agriculture, especially in water-use efficiency, as well as soil and landscape management. The 65-acre BAIF Rural Innovation Centre (BRIC) campus at Uruli Kanchan features a range of innovations, including an agrivoltaic project, which generates solar energy while growing crops such as chillies, beans and bananas. Plans now include floating panels, windmills and even a hydrogen plant.

The BAIF president says that when working with a new community, their first challenge is breaking down barriers. There are times when local communities are fearful, especially if they have had bitter experiences in the past. Kakade cites an instance from 1997, when villagers in the Amraudha block in Kanpur Dehat made BAIF officials sign an agreement and even take an oath at the local temple that they would not swindle them or take over their land. “We later sank borewells there, which now help farmers grow wheat,” says Kakade. The village was transformed in just three years. ■