

Bihar school kids to grow organic vegetables, fruits for their mid-day meals

After a successful pilot project, 20,000 schools will now be given Rs 5,000 each and asked to develop kitchen gardens



Students in 20,000 government-run schools in Bihar will soon grow organic vegetables and fruits for mid-day meals, announced the state government recently.

After a successful pilot project in 100 schools in Purnea district, the state informally expanded the project to 4,000 schools. Now the Centre has agreed to fund the model.

Each school will be given Rs 5,000 to purchase tools, seeds and saplings to grow 75 kinds of vegetables and

fruits. "It is already functional in these schools and will be expanded to 20,000 schools of the 72,000 primary and middle government-run schools in Bihar," said Jeevendra Jha, mid-day meal deputy director in the state.

More schools will be brought into the fold in the coming years, he added.

The government is betting on the project to provide extra nutrition to students through mid-day meals. Kitchen gardens, being referred to as *poshan vaticas* (nutrition gardens), will come up in these schools where vegetables will be grown organically.

"We have already started developing *poshan vaticas* (nutrition gardens) and all the produce, mainly organic vegetables, will be used in mid-day meals in schools," Vinod Kumar Singh, state mid-day meal director, told *Down To Earth*.

Increasing nutritional content in food, spreading awareness about organic farming and increasing greenery are the reasons behind engaging students, added Singh.

Around 44 per cent of children under five are underweight in Bihar, 15.2 per cent are severely underweight and 20.8 per cent wasted, according to National Family Health Survey-4.

Students grew large quantities of seasonal vegetables like ladiesfinger, pumpkins, *nenua* (sponge gourd), tomatoes, brinjals, green chillies and radish with high yield during the pilot project, said a district education officer associated with the pilot in Purnea.