

# Rice growers in 11 UP dists give up stubble burning completely

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**Lucknow:** Around two dozen Kalanamak rice-growing farmers in 11 districts of Uttar Pradesh have completely given up on stubble burning to save the environment, as they have mastered the technique of how to use the stubborn stubble to grow mushrooms, after which the stubble decomposes naturally into compost and is not required to be burnt.

Two young entrepreneurs, Rohan Garg and Anant Kapoor, have trained 22 farmers to grow mushrooms on stubble collected from their farms in a 3-foot plastic bag in just 21-22 days. So far, the duo has processed 1,300 kg of rice stubble lying unattended on over 20 acres of land of these 22 farmers.

"We were worried about the poor air quality of Lucknow and other UP cities and always read that stubble burning was one of the main reasons behind it. My friend and I decided to look for some technique to handle this problem, so that we can breathe clean air. After reading hundreds of research papers, we found that in the UK, Australia and several other parts of the world, stubble is being used to grow oyster mushrooms," said Rohan.

"We brought stubble from a farm, and sanitized it using two chemical compounds, formalin and calcium carbonate, and planted mushroom spawn (living fungal culture, called mycelium, grown onto a substrate; it provides the backbone to any mushroom growing operation) and kept it in a dark room. After 21 days, we found mushrooms grew successfully. We had purchased chemicals and mushroom spawn both from online shopping website," he added.

Garg said, "Armed with



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the experience from a successful experiment, we visited Siswa Bazar in the Maharajganj district and convinced seven Kalanamak rice-growing farmers to try the technique, for which we provided them 3-foot plastic bags in which they collected stubble. They then added the two chemicals and kept it in a dark room and were happy to see that they had successfully done mushroom cultivation." To help farmers sell those mushrooms, we put them on our e-commerce website and later handed them the amount earned. Thereafter 15 more farmers showed interest, received training from us and cultivated mushrooms, he added.

"We call oyster mushrooms, a 'mushroom for clean air', which can be easily grown from September till April. For May to October, we are now researching the possibility of cultivating milky mushrooms on the stubble that can be grown in high temperatures," he said.

Garg said this model of rice straw monetization is a superior solution to stubble burning as there is no need for transporting rice straw, and it is processed in-situ. "Transporting rice straw is expensive. As mushrooms can be grown on farm, farmers can transport high-value mushrooms instead of the rice straw," he said.