

How a Young Couple from Delhi Left City Life behind to Become Full-Time Organic Farmers in Mysore

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[Agriculture](#), [Inspirational](#), [Organic Farming](#)

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Meet Vivek and Juli, a couple who started doing organic farming in Mysore in 1986 and have today built a unique example of sustainable living.

About 30 years ago, Juli and Vivek Cariappa, a young couple from Delhi, travelled to Birwal village of Heggadadevana Kote taluka in Mysore district of Karnataka. They bought a small piece of land there and started farming. Juli was 20 at the time and Vivek was 21. He had studied economics and she had a degree in sociology.

Both of them quit their jobs at a garment export company and decided to take the leap of faith – one that has now turned into a beautiful story of adventure, sustainability, green living, and lots of love.



“For me, it was about taking control of my life,” says Juli who was born in India and left for Rome at the age of seven when her father was transferred for a job. She returned to India when she was 17. “Farming was just something that made a lot of sense to me. I was always the kind of person who didn’t like the way things are always put into boxes rather than being integrated as a whole. I liked the idea of relating and bringing together different parts of life into one way of living. That was an important motivation for me. Additionally, as a child, I used to be quite sick. I had a lot of bronchial issues and used to take allopathic medicines. I was 14 when I decided that I had to heal my body and it was up to me. It was clear to me that I had to do this by being in contact with a piece of land and being able to make my own decisions.”

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Juli and Vivek were studying in Delhi University and they met each other on a college bus. “I grew up in Delhi and realised early what urban life really is...When we met, I didn’t have the thought that I wanted to farm, per se. But I was happy doing something else other than living the urban life – 9 to 5. And I was also interested in taking control of my destiny. When she came up with the idea of farming, more than anything else, I was happy just being with her. For me, other things came much later. Right then I was happy to go where she would be. One of the biggest assets we have is that we are more like friends than husband and wife. We went there as two city kids and grew together,” says Vivek.

They left Delhi in 1985 and went to a remote area located about 50 km south of Mysore.



At the time, there were only three busses plying on that route and there they were – two people with a dream, starting from scratch. There was no phone or electricity where they lived for about two years and even their closest neighbours were 3 km away.

The couple didn't know much about agriculture at the time and they had to learn on the field itself.



“First we had to unlearn everything we had learnt in school because that was completely irrelevant to what we wanted to do. We were just learning to survive in an environment that was completely different from the one we grew up in, to face ourselves and our shortcomings, and to grow enough food just for ourselves – that was a big task the first couple of years,” says Juli, adding that they were fortunate to receive a small loan from their parents to help sustain them since they didn’t have any savings.

Today, they have a farm named Krac-A-Dawna, spread over an area of 40 acres. On it they grow pretty much everything they need to live – grains, oilseeds, eggs, food, fibre, spices, compost, cotton, paddy, millets, sugarcane, vegetables, etc.



Except for a few “luxury items” like tea, they don’t need much from the outside world. They also cook food using biogas. Three decades on, it’s not just the two of them in the wilderness. Juli and Vivek have two sons, a daughter, and a daughter-in-law.

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Their children were home-schooled and they are also interested in farming and animal husbandry.



As for sustainability and self-reliance, the couple has been trying marketing in many ways over the years. They used to run a small shop and café in Mysore city, supplied to organic shops all over southern India, started the first farmers' market in Mysore, organised exhibitions, etc. "I think those experiences helped us develop the idea of what an ideal marketing situation would be for a farm like ours, where all our ethical considerations and the way we want to do business are retained," says Juli. They are currently in business with one of the branches of Orange County Resorts, and Just Clean Cotton.

Ask them what a normal day in their lives looks like, and they burst out laughing. “Every day is a new and special day. There is no normal day. That’s one of the biggest differences between urban living and working on a farm. There are so many factors you have no control over. So you learn to approach each day in an open way,” says Juli.

The family sits down for breakfast at 7am. Priorities for the day are discussed.



Other than the customary things that need attention – like milking the cows, irrigation, cooking, sweeping, cleaning etc. – the rest depends on how the day moves forward. “And it also depends on the weather. That’s the boss we have above our heads and we have to keep the boss in context as well,” adds Vivek.

The farm is nestled in beautiful surroundings and the family also hosts experimental tours for selected agriculture enthusiasts.



As for her advice to others who want to move towards a more healthy form of living like them, Juli says, “Approach the earth with humility and accept that you don’t know much but nature is there to teach you. If you open your mind, it’s endless what you can learn. And it is important for society to understand that the farmer is not illiterate, even if he/she does not know how to read and write. The people who grow your food have immense wisdom and knowledge, and you need to respect and honour that.” Over the years, she has studied and learned all about homeopathy – it is useful both at home and also for the animals. They have dogs, cats, sheep, cows, goats, and chickens.

As for Vivek, his advice to the present generation is just “to slow down, take it easy, and enjoy life because life is all about learning, a few successes and lots of failure.”

The couple has received the Krishi Pandit Award given by the Department of Agriculture to individuals for best farming practices.



“People often ask us: wasn’t it difficult? I say no. This is what we wanted to do and wanted to be. It was positive. It taught us. So live today. Live everyday to the fullest! Live dangerously. Learn more. Don’t be afraid of failure,” concludes Vivek.