

Pazhamudir Cholai Farm

Pazhamudir Cholai was started by Laxmi & Renuka in 2009.

The farm intended to mainly cultivate fruit orchards at the time of its inception. Due to multiple constraints such as lack of finances, seasonality of fruits, wild animal intrusion and water scarcity, as well as the early loss of most of their orchards to cyclone, it later diversified to include a dairy to support the farm financially. Part of the Auroville dairy group, the dairy tries to adhere to the basic dairy group standards.

The farm is certified organic under TNOCD

Labour

Aurovilians: 3

Regular Workers: 2

Salary: ₹17400/month + Pongal and Diwali bonus (Man); ₹350/day (Woman)

Seasonal Workers: 6 (Women - ₹350/day)

Land

Total Acres under management: 5

Acres Utilised: 3.8 (76%)

Although 3 acres is dedicated to orchards, the orchards have not been developed to the optimum and the production is low. Currently only 1 acre of the cultivated area (bananas and coconuts) is providing any yields.

The farmer mentions that they cultivate vegetables only due to the pressure to increase production although their preference is to concentrate on being a fruit orchard.

There is 0.5 acres dedicated area for the vegetable cultivation, in past years the production has been minimal partly due to destruction of crops by wild boars.

Fodder for the cows is cultivated seasonally.

The main irrigation line is laid across the entire farm although there is very little area that has microsprinkler/drip irrigation facility. Bananas are flood irrigated.

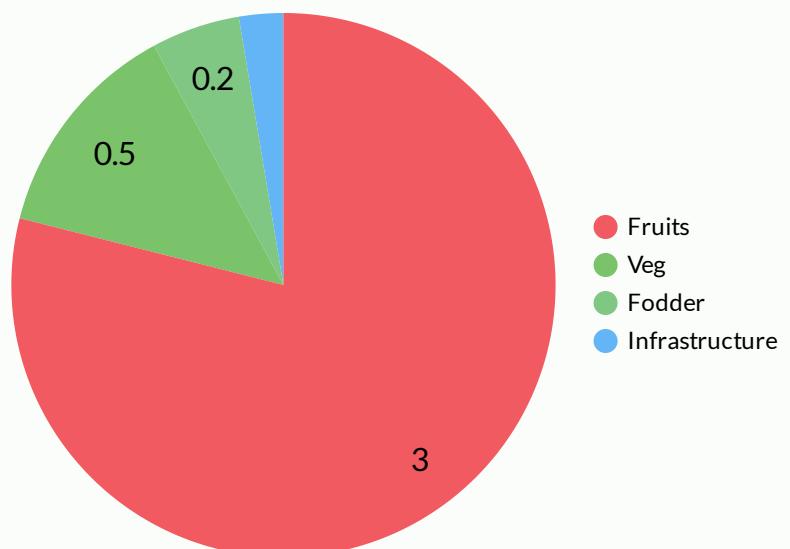


Chart 1: Breakup of Landuse

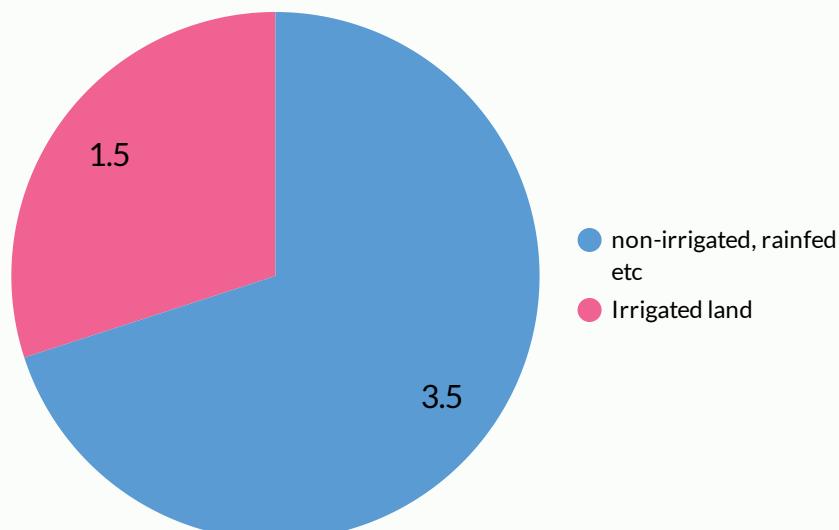


Chart 2: Breakup of Irrigated and Non-Irrigated land

Production (Foodlink Sales)

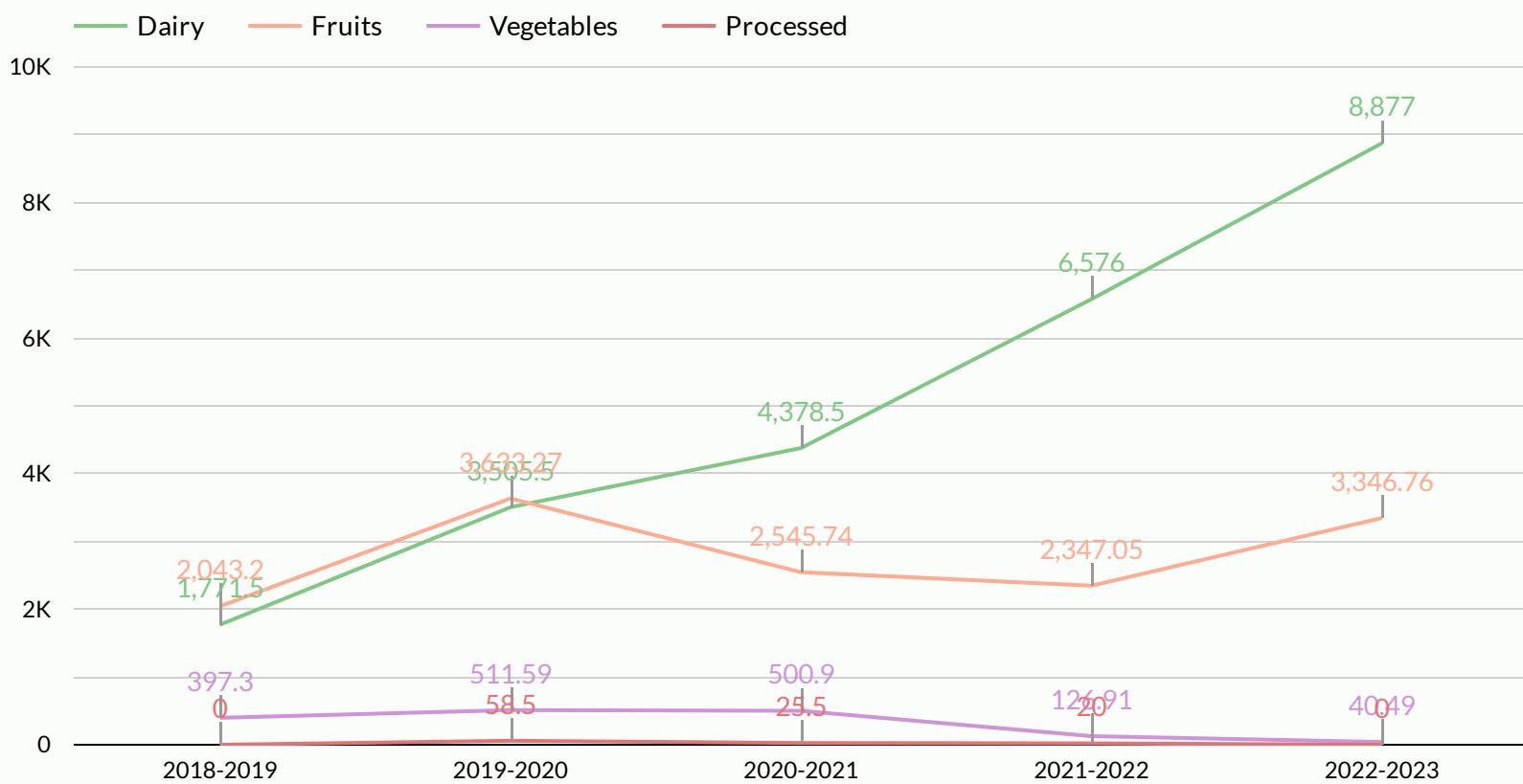


Chart 3: Sales in Kgs per category of food type across 5 years

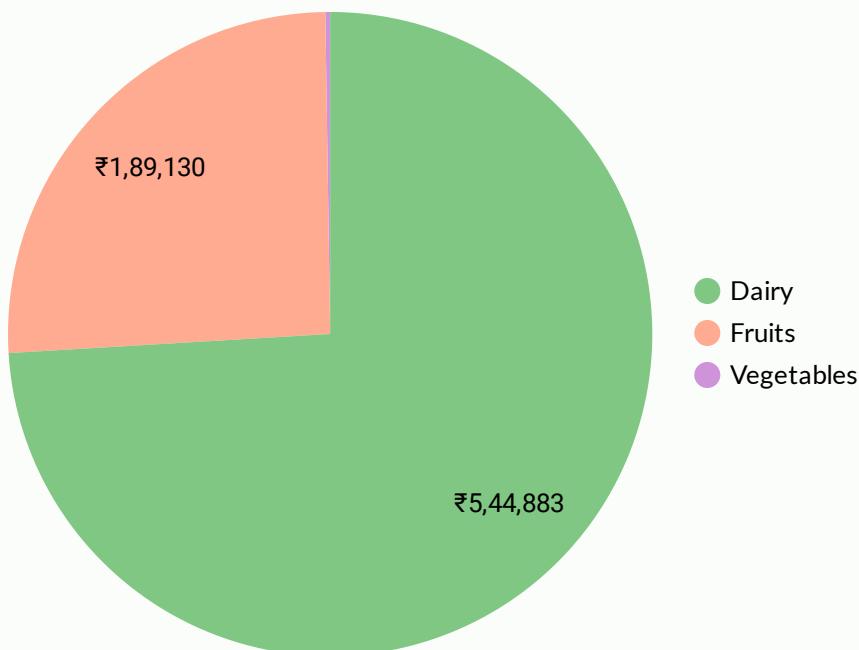


Chart 4: Breakup of Sales for FY 22-23

The data used in these charts show sales done through Foodlink.

We can see that the farm has prioritised developing its dairy. Milk production has gone up significantly while Fruit has stayed consistent. The farm has had trouble cultivating vegetables and the few vegetables that come from existing trees.

Top Produced Items

Item Name	Category	Quantity (kgs) ▾
Milk	Dairy	8,761.96
Coconut Dry Kg	Fruits	1,536.78
Banana Yellow	Fruits	1,308.25
Rose Apple & Water Apple	Fruits	103.61
Lime	Fruits	92.51
Papaya	Fruits	78.88
Pomelo	Fruits	57.4
Mango A	Fruits	52.53
Chikoo	Fruits	34
Kumquat	Fruits	26.69
Banana Cooking	Vegetables	20.17
Mango B	Fruits	17.83
Banana Red	Fruits	14.36
Banana Green	Vegetables	10.82
Drumstick KG	Vegetables	9.5
Ramphal	Fruits	7.16
Oranges	Fruits	6.46
Guava	Fruits	5.8
Jack Fruit Loose	Fruits	4.5

Roughly 3 acres is dedicated for the fruit orchard, only coconuts and banana (karpooravalli + 2-3 other varieties) account for the of the yields. These yields are from a relatively small portion of the land. The farmer mentions they lost most of the early plantations to Cyclone Thane in 2011.

There is a wide varieties of citrus and other tropical fruits planted on the farm however they are in relatively small numbers as is evident by the sales figures.

The banana plantation is irrigated manually using channel irrigation. The fruit trees are fertilised using cowdung and dairy effluents once a year.

Dairy Culture and Practice

The farmer mentions that the dairy supports the farm financially. The dairy herd which is bred on the farm, consist of 5 animals.

Cows are fed mix of wheat bran, pulses, rice bran, tapioca flour, peanut /sesame cake as grain feed, paddy straws as roughage. Fodder grass is grown seasonally in a 0.5 acres plot. During the season when wild grasses area available, the cows are allowed to graze while being tied on a long rope.

The calves are allowed to suckle on the mother cow before and after milking. Calves stay in the farm for 1-2 years. The female calves are kept on the farm while non productive animals are sold in case that there is no space to maintain them.

Finances

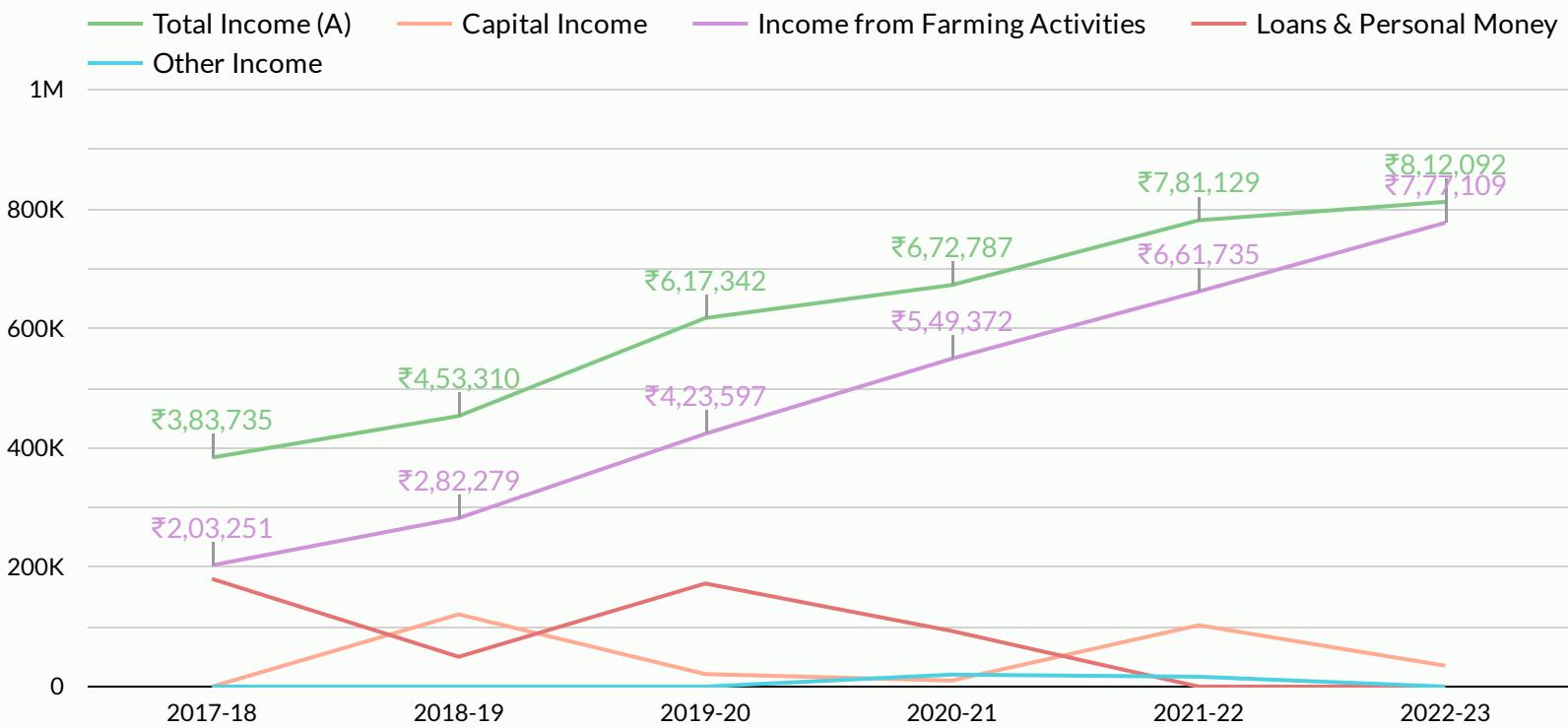


Chart 5: Break-up for farm income during 2017-23.

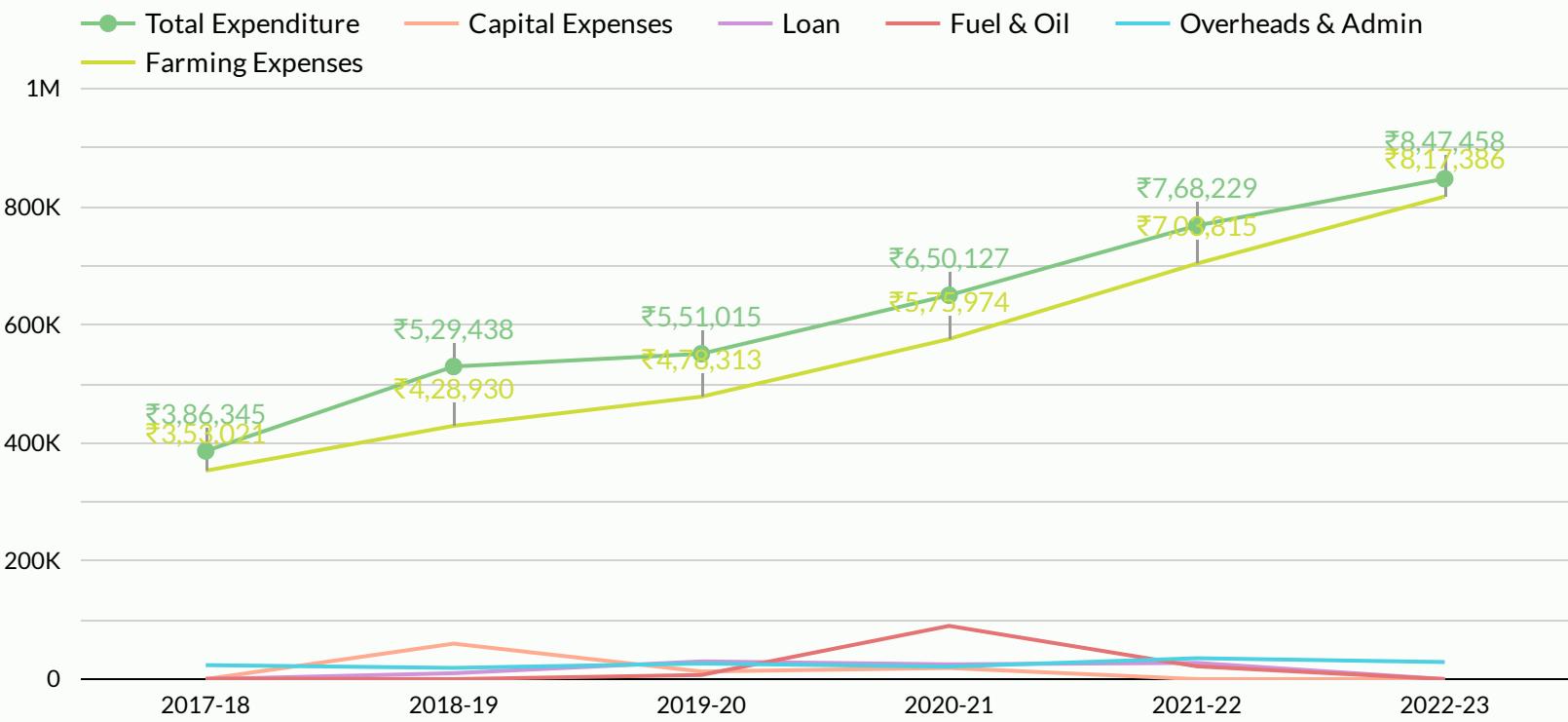


Chart 6: Expenses across years 2017 - 23

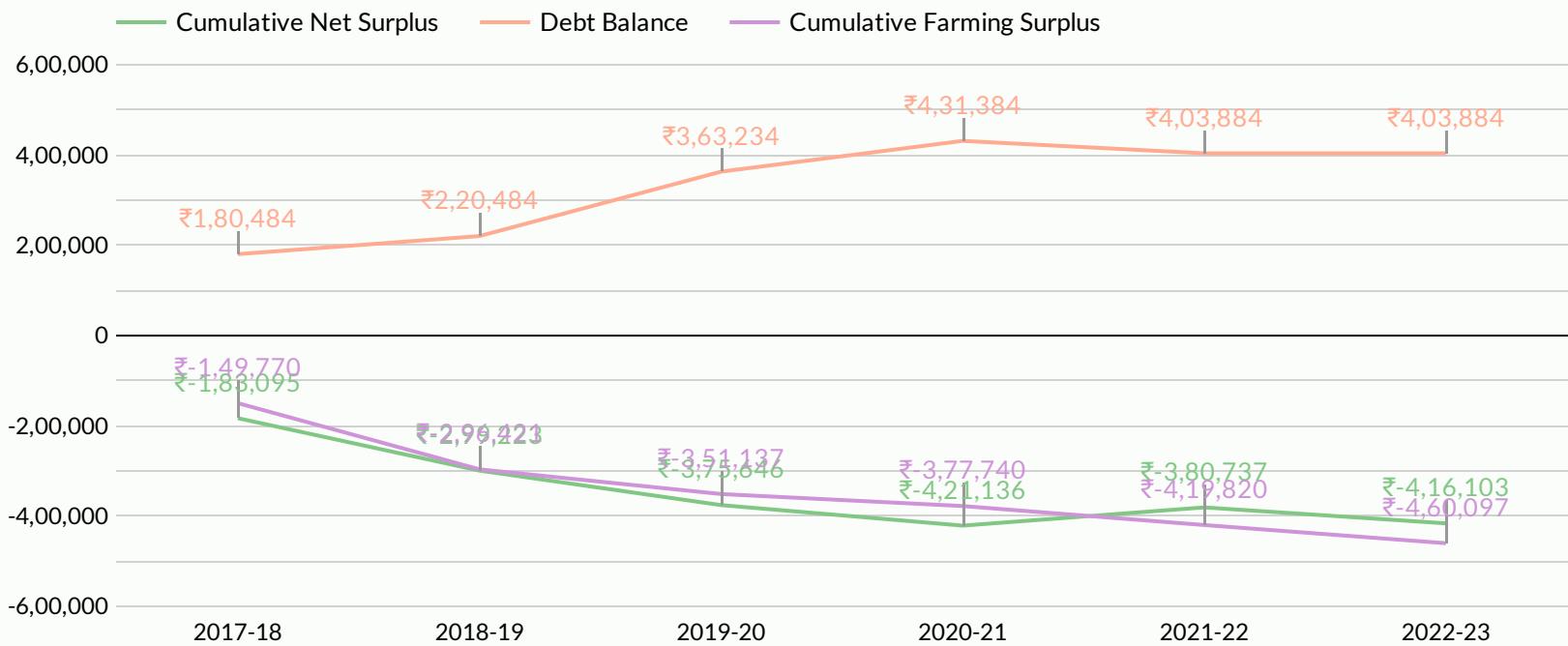


Chart 8: Cumulative Net Surplus, Cumulative Farming surplus and Debt Balance

Although there has been a steady rise in the income generated, it comes along with a heavy rise in expenditure. Farming activities are consistently in a loss and the farm is maintained largely through personal funds of the farmers invested in the farm. The "debt" of around ₹4 Lakhs comes from these personal funds.

Net surplus is the "total income" - "total expense" of a farm for a year. This does not include any debt. The chart shows this number cumulatively starting from 2017-18.

Farming Surplus is "farming Income" - "farming expenditure". This is the surplus a farm is able to generate from its activities alone. Chart is cumulative starting from 2017-18.

Debt Balance is the remaining debt that the farm owes. This "debt" can be in the form of external loans or personal investments by the farmer. Chart is cumulative starting from 2017-18.

Challenges and Needs

Managers mention that the major challenges they face are drought and flooding and damage from wildlife. They also claim major loss during cyclone Thane in 2011 from which they have not been able to recover. The major threat from wildlife are the wild boars that make their way in by digging under the fence.

The managers identified that needs as farm labour, volunteers (if they have capsules for accommodation), fencing to keep away boars, and collective tools like a tractor.

Conclusion

Cholai farm has not been able to recover from the losses after the 2011 Cyclone Thane due to lack of investments and working hands on the farm. The farm has identified basic needs like fencing, irrigation infrastructure, design strategies to deal with drought and flooding which at the moment limit their activity and production. At the moment, the farm is financially staying afloat due to the personal funds of the farmer.

The farm dairy is the main income source for the farm and supports the entire farming activity while they are also working on the existing fruit trees hoping to get better returns from these crops. The farm could consider crops that can give production in a shorter time span like papaya and banana. Both these fruits have an enormous demand in Auroville and since many farmers are already growing them, there is enough experience to cultivate them keeping in mind drought and flooding. The farm would also benefit from a newer overall vision.