Even as organic agriculture is gaining momentum in the country, a self-help group of tribal women in Wayanad district of Kerala is scripting a success story in production of 13 different varieties of bio agents to support organic farming.

Eight members of the Sabari Swasraya Sanghom of Nellarachal tribal hamlet were guided to biotechnology by the Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) under the Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) at Ambalavayal, a decade ago. They began their venture with production of trichoderma and pseudomonas, biocontrol agents to fight quick wilt disease in various crops, and are producing 13 varieties of bio agents now. “When the Kendra met them on a field visit, they were facing a hard time since their paddy fields had been submerged [in water] from the Karapuzha irrigation project,” said N.E. Safia, head of the KVK.

The Kendra gave them training for six months in fungal and bacterial culture and packing, she added.

Last year alone, the members produced nearly 183 tonnes of bio agents, including 16 tonnes of bio fertilizers such as azospirillum, azotobacter, rhizobium, bio potash and vesicular-arbuscular mycorrhiza; 80 tonnes of biocontrol agents like pseudomonas and trichoderma as well as 20 tonnes of bio pesticides, including beaviera, verticillium, pochonia, paeclomyces and metarhizium, said Sruthi Krishnan, research assistant, microbiology, KVK.

The KVK’s income was in excess of ₹1.67 crore from the sale of the products last year. Under an MoU with Kerala Agricultural University, group members will get 35% of the income, Ms. Sruthi said. Now, the unit is gearing up to produce pseudomonas and trichoderma.

“When we started off, the various scientific processes in the lab posed a challenge, but now we are acquainted with them,” K. Sharmila, president of the SHG, said.

Now, each group member gets an average monthly income of ₹8,500. A major share of the produce was procured by the Agriculture Department and the Spices Board for supply to farmers. “Our products have good demand in the market. Many times, we unable to meet the demand,” she added.