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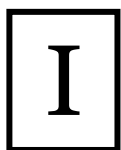
# The Accidental Raisin Farm in Arid Sangli

SHRESHTHA CHHABRA · 4 MINUTE READ



MADHAVI MOLLI, A FARMER, HOLDING THE RAISINS THAT SHE CULTIVATED. ALL PHOTOS BY UMRANI FARMS.

**By adopting regenerative practices, Umrani Farms is attempting to not only grow local varieties of grapes, but also transform the land that it grows on.**



In drought-prone Sangli in western Maharashtra, communities have witnessed constant deterioration when it comes to farming and agriculture. It is common for men in the region to leave for urban areas in search of better jobs, while the women stay behind, working on non-cultivable lands.



Sangli to live with her husband's family that cultivated grapes, the rocky soil and arid land seemed completely different from the lush landscape in Assam where she had grown up. Since then, Nina has been attempting to enrich the soil, and transform the land in the hope of a better future.

Although Fresh Express, the parent company of Umrani Farms, had been exporting grapes for nearly three decades, they stumbled into raisin cultivation quite by accident. When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, they were stuck with large quantities of grapes, left on vines. Nina and her husband Ranjit Patil, decided to follow a new path under these changed circumstances and began sun drying the naturally grown grapes, and opened the sale to domestic markets, leading to the inception of Umrani Farms. Since the beginning, they knew that regenerative agriculture and soil nutrition had to be the focus in order to cultivate on the land in Sangli.

Today, they actively promote local varieties like Sharad (black grapes) and Sonaka (green grapes). A simple comparative tasting with other options in the market will reveal that the raisins from Umrani Farms are plumper, and much more distinct and complex in flavour.





NINA PATIL AT THE 'MOTHER FARM' OF UMRANI FARMS WHERE BIOLOGICAL SPRAYS ARE BREWED BY WOMEN FARMERS, AND INPUTS ARE SUPPLIED TO INDIVIDUALLY-OWNED PLOTS. WITH A STRONG FOCUS ON NATURAL FARMING, NINA HAS BROUGHT HOPE TO HER REGION WITH HER TEAM OF SKILLED WOMEN FARMERS.



THE TEAM AT UMRANI FARMS CONSISTS ALMOST ENTIRELY OF WOMEN. HERE, THEY CAN BE SEEN CELEBRATING WOMEN'S DAY (IN 2022).





promoting cultivation of crops such as moringa and jowar on small pieces of land owned by them. Nina likes to use the phrase 'Wellness farming by women farmers' to describe her vision of increased autonomy for women in the region. She hopes to achieve this through self-generated farm incomes in addition to their employment at Umrani Farms, along with providing them financial literacy of market rates, non-government market schemes, and more. Over time, her efforts have also motivated men in the region to return to agriculture.



**THE REGION'S ROCKY SOIL METAMORPHOSED INTO FERTILE LAND FOR CULTIVATION AS A RESULT OF REGENERATIVE FARMING PRACTISED BY UMRANI FARMS.**

To bring back nutrition to the soil and maintain a healthy cycle, the vine shoots are regularly trimmed. This is also done to prevent vigorous growth, and maintain nutrient equity in all parts of the plant. Post the fruit-bearing stage, the grapes in Umrani Farms are allowed to stay on the vines for a few more months, to ripen





they derive the perfect sweetness and optimum texture.



THE GRAPES GROWN ON VINES ARE HARVESTED ONCE THEY ATTAIN (NATURALLY) A SUGAR LEVEL OF 22-24 G/DL IN THE REFRACTOMETER.



ONCE HARVESTED, THE GRAPES ARE WASHED, DIPPED IN AUSTRALIAN DIPPING OIL AND SUN-DRIED WITHIN 2-3 WEEKS, DEPENDING ON THE WEATHER. THE DIPPING OIL AIDS THE DRYING PROCESS BY ACCELERATING THE RATE OF WATER EVAPORATION. THE ENTIRE PROCESS IS NATURAL.





NEEM SEEDS BEING DRIED. GROWTH-PROMOTERS LIKE DRIED NEEM SEEDS AND MICROBIAL CONCOCTIONS ARE DISTRIBUTED AMONGST THE COMMUNITY TO ENCOURAGE NATURAL FARMING PRACTICES.







When we asked Nina about which form she most likes her raisins in, she said, laughing, “Although I should be politically correct and say that I consume soaked raisins every morning, I’ll just say that it’s all cakes and cookies and breads—I love them!” We also learn from her that their new raisin spread is very popular amongst teens. With the persistent hard work by the team at Umrani Farms, Nina has been able to witness the positive impact of natural farming practices in and around her region across the span of 8-10 years.

*To read more about Umrani Farms and their practices and efforts, check out our producer page [here](#). This is a paid partnership with Umrani Farms. We strive to keep the practices of a producer transparent and honest across all forms of partnerships.*

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