

## **SP2. Community-based production and organic certification of aromatic & medicinal crops in India**

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*India has been one of the leading producers of essential oils for Industrial applications. The journey first began from Lemongrass Oil in 19<sup>th</sup> Century to Menthol and Mint-based derivatives in recent years. As the consumer is demanding more traceability, community-based projects in the country are reaching out for organic certification and fair trade carving a niche for them. The article covers the journey of these marginalized communities and the ways in which they are keeping up with the changing consumer preferences and regulatory requirements.*

Essential-oil production from perennial aromatic crops became a challenge after the green revolution which laid emphasis on food production. Once India's food production targets were met in 2002, the government launched the National Horticulture Mission. This mission aimed at increasing the production of horticulture products. Since fruit trees had a gestation time of 4-5 years, the aromatics crops became the preferred choice. Intercropping aromatic crops in fruit orchards thus gained popularity. On similar lines, 'Wadi Project' gained momentum in the 90's. India's tribal population is concentrated in the Central region comprising the States of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Orissa. These states, being sparsely populated and economically backward, provided an ambient environment for the development of essential oils.

More recently these communities have been going organic by getting their clusters certified. As India had National standards for Organic Production and equivalence agreements with EU their produce found seamless access to the global markets. In 2013 when the import authorization system threatened to jeopardize exports of certified organic products from India, it was their combined strength which found back and restored the trade. Alongside essential oils, this region has been an important source of medicinal herbs for the Ayurvedic Industry and joint forest management programs have been in place for the collection of wild herbs for over 20 years. These 'van-samiti' (Translates Van=Forest, Samiti= Committee) which consists of members of the rural community and forest authorities serve as just the right kind of network for sustainable collection of medicinal herbs in the wild. At present, over 50 community-based projects spread across 3000 hectares are engaged in essential-oil production. The strength of these projects lies in the use of spent biomass to fuel distillation units. These projects are backed by Government programs and implemented by non-governmental organizations along with marketing tie-up with the Industry.

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