

SELINA QUADER - 2004



Proprietor of
Agroconcern

It all started with a casual hobby and genuine interest that, over time, turned into a successful and export-oriented agri-business.

Selina Quader was born in Jessore in 1947. Her father was a lawyer by profession but he took a keen interest in gardening that he shared with the rest of his family. Selina graduated from Jessore Women's College in 1967 and married an agri-scientist the following year. When her husband, Dr Shaikh Abdul Quader, returned from Germany in the early eighties, he was posted in Chuadanga.

Selina was excited by the large piece of land that was available within her home premises and promptly started growing a kitchen garden. Soon there was no looking back. She reinvested everything she earned from selling her vegetables into leasing more and more of nearby land and grew an increasing amount of produce.

Now, her total area of production is nearly 200 acres including her own land, leased land, and those of her contract growers in Chuadanga and Thakurgaon. Her direct employees number over 200 and her total turnover reached Tk 25 million in 2004 after demonstrating an impressive growth rate in the last five years. Her company, Agroconcern, works closely with clients and contract farmers on both production and marketing aspects.

Inspired by her success, Selina's neighbours in Chuadanga have also joined the bandwagon of vegetable production - now almost 6-8 truckloads are shipped every day from the vicinity for destinations

in Dhaka, Chattogram, and Sylhet.

With this spectacular performance in a previously arid geographical region, has come the benefits of economic development for all; villagers in the area now have access to electricity, concrete housing, and Selina's previous workers themselves have now moved onto their own lands.

Even though Selina's production basket includes a whole variety of items like cauliflower, cabbage, broccoli, capsicum, papaya, egg plant, rice, maize, watermelon, and sugarcane, her biggest success so far has been her potatoes. At first, she grew the

plagued by the middlemen who dominate the supply chain and eat up a chunk of the total margin. Lack of access to financing is also a factor that constrains her growth potential.

The bags she needs to export her produce are not available in the local market, they must be imported from China or India, and hence increase the lead time involved. Most importantly, she still has not been able to avail of the government's declared cash incentive because of procedural delays.

Despite these challenges, Selina is determined in her future ambitions. She plans to build further on her existing

Throughout her life, Selina has maintained a multitude of interests and activities. She has been an active athlete for most of her life and has won numerous prizes. Starting with student politics in her college days, she has continued to lead and implement various welfare projects. Today, she takes immense pride in the fact that her production quality is above average without the use of toxic chemicals and her seeds are highly sought after by farmers. After all, she has been able to exact a discernible difference in the lives of many of her community members.

seeds herself with the help of her husband to produce a variety that is high-yielding and disease-free. Large-scale production ensued in 1990 with the help of contract growers.

Prompted by high acceptance of these potatoes, she first exported four containers in 2000 to Singapore; since then, she has also exported to wholesalers in Sri Lanka and Malaysia. Furthermore, after three years of research, she has found a new variety of tomatoes that can be grown even during rainy seasons.

Selina plans to produce this highly-demanded strain in bulk next year. Consistent quality in all her products is ensured by importing seeds intermittently from European countries and by bringing in foreign technicians to monitor progress.

Selina's journey to this day definitely has not been obstacle-free. As is true for all other agricultural produce, she is

work of developing improved strains and introducing exotic seeds. She is exploring the export potential of her newly-developed tomatoes as well. At the same time, she feels that a joint-venture partner in the seed development industry for industrial vegetable production would help her go much further.

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