



Healthy and chemical-free: Seelam displays his organic food range.

**SRESTA NATURAL BIOPRODUCTS**

# Organic Opportunist

- **YEAR OF FOUNDING:** March 2004
- **FOUNDER:** Raj Seelam, 43
- **AREA OF OPERATION:** Organic foods
- **FUNDING:** Rs 12 crore from personal sources and APIDCVC
- **REVENUE:** Expects to end 2008-09 with Rs 25 crore, and Rs 100 crore by 2010-11
- **SIZE OF TARGET MARKET:** \$38 billion globally, and Rs 1,000 crore in India
- **KEY COMPETITORS:** Fab India and Mumbai-based Conscious Foods, besides other smaller players



**F**OR 10 YEARS BETWEEN 1995 AND 2005, Rajashekhar Reddy Seelam, or Raj Seelam as he prefers to be called, ate no cabbage or cauliflower. No, he's not lachanophobic (afraid of vegetables, that is), it's just that he can't stomach the thought of eating what often comes with vegetables and fruits: pesticides. "These 90-to-150-day vegetables such as cabbage and cauliflower are put through 30 rounds of pesticide spray before they are picked," says Seelam. "With cooking, the microbes get killed but the pesticide residues remain," he says in horror.

For Seelam, the pendulum has swung the other extreme. Between 1988 and 2000, the IIM Ahmedabad alum sold pesticides and fertilisers to farmers at the Murugappa Group company EID Parry and later moved to selling seeds as the National Sales and Marketing Manager. Working closely with farmers gave him first-hand knowledge of the havoc pesticides wreak, but it also gave him a business idea, which today has taken the shape of Sresta Natural Bioproducts, a farm-to-fork

organic food business in Hyderabad. "This is something I had wanted to do for more than 10 years before I launched Sresta in 2004," says Seelam.

He has travelled a long way since. In the first year (between 2000 and 2004, Seelam spent time 'preparing' farms for organic cropping), he had 2,000 acres and 250 farms under organic farming, spread across five states and processing in all 200 tonnes of organic foods. Today, he has 12,000 acres under organic farming, works with close to 1,200 farmers spread across 10 states and is able to process 6,000 tonnes of organic products (ranging from grain and fruits to pickles, jams and bakery products).

Sresta's produce, worth Rs 6 crore last year, is sold not only in India (through his own four outlets called 24 Letter Mantra and other retailers) but also in markets such as the US and Europe, which fetch 60-70 per cent of Sresta's revenue. "By 2011, I want to increase processing to 25,000 tonnes," says Seelam.

If his plans pan out, then a whole lot of health-conscious Indians—not just Seelam—may get to eat pesticide-free food.

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