Foreiners, locals flock to 3-day long festival to have a taste of Pondy's traditional foods

HUNDREDS of tourists including foreigners and locals had a taste of traditional foods at the three-day-long traditional food festival that came to a close here on Saturday.

The French Institute of Pondicherry, in collaboration with the Agriculture department, conducted the event named as 'Local Food System of Pondicherry: A discussion on food sovereignty and agro-ecology' from Friday to Sunday.

The first two days were marked by discussions with farmers and experts and trips to farms, where traditional food materials are cultivated using natural resource.

On Sunday, traditional food items were served at stalls in the street between the French Consulate and the French Institute of Pondicherry.

"The three-day festival focused on who is preserving agro-ecology and how farmers are inclusive in the agro-ecology. But the farmers are not included in the mainstream. After the green revolution, production went up in the country. But for that, surplus amount of water was used. Farmers wanted to go back to the traditional farming method. In urban areas, people are worried that polished rice is affecting the health and so they also want to go back to traditional food methods. The research institute is creating a bridge between farmers and people, who are consumers. It's difficult for urban people to change their food habits and for that, they need to find a path between the modern and traditional food items and farmers also have some problems like yield," said G. Venkatasubramanian, research engineer of the Social Science department in the French Institute of Pondicherry.

He said that while making Pondicherry a smart city, people should also think about smart food. Smart food is nothing but food made using traditional grains and rice. The motto of this food festival is to connect the smart city with smart food, he added.

"We are slowly moving towards organic farming and traditional crop farming is increasing day by day. This kind of festival helps us get introduced to consumers directly. People visited the stalls, got clarifications about the traditional rice items that we keep for sale and bought them with satisfaction. In the past, we had only a small number of consumers. Now we get more exposure through this festival and also new customers," said R. Venugopal, president of Namasthivai Iyarkai Uchavargal Sangam, based in Thupar in Pondicherry.

V. Sreeja of Pondicherry, had kept on display traditional food items like 'poruvilangal urundai', pickles, and handmade papads. She said that all were made by herself and the women group she belonged to. This kind of festival increases the market for their products and she felt happy that a large number of their products were sold.

David Jungst of Germany, told Express that he tasted some real traditional foods in India for the first time.