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## Beyond Farming: Lessons from an Eco-Village Internship

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Regenerative agriculture has emerged as one of the most promising approaches to address the growing challenges of soil degradation, biodiversity loss, and unsustainable farming practices. Unlike conventional agriculture which focuses primarily on maximising short-term yields, regenerative farming seeks to restore soil health, enhance ecological diversity, and build long-term community resilience. Eco villages — intentional communities that integrate ecological sustainability with everyday living — have become important sites of innovation and practice in this field. Nannilam Eco Village, a 125-acre regenerative farming community situated in the Kalvarayan Hills of Salem District, Tamil Nadu, is one such initiative. Built on the guiding philosophy of Nilam, Valam, and Nalam — soil, wealth, and health — Nannilam operates simultaneously as a farm, a living laboratory, a community, and an educational centre. My 10-day eco-village internship at Nannilam gave me the opportunity to understand how regenerative farming practices, community-based agro-business models, and systematic data management can come together to create a productive and ecologically responsible farming system.

**Keywords:** Regenerative Agriculture, Eco Village, Agroecology, Seed Bank, Microgreens, Mushroom Cultivation, Own an Acre, Lean Farming, Permaculture

### Internship Experience and Field Activities

A 10-day field internship at Nannilam Eco Village from 19th to 28th March 2026 provided structured participation across multiple areas of the farm's regenerative production system. The initial phase of the internship was dedicated to understanding the overall farm ecosystem — its layout, land use pattern, and operational design — followed by active involvement in bed formation, a fundamental practice in organised vegetable cultivation. Manual raised bed preparation, carried out without mechanised equipment, demonstrated how soil structure and integrity can be preserved while improving drainage, aeration, and root zone development for crops. Crop data collection was undertaken systematically across the vegetable garden, which is organised into 13 individually managed production blocks. Each block was documented in terms of crop varieties, growth duration, and bed count — building a comprehensive record of the farm's production diversity and seasonal planning approach. The collected field data was subsequently entered and organised into structured digital records, alongside monthly farmer activity logs for February and March. This exercise underscored the critical importance of systematic data management in modern farm operations — supporting crop rotation planning, resource allocation, and the long-term transfer of farming knowledge. In the latter phase, seed weight measurement and labelling were carried out as part of the farm's indigenous seed bank management programme. Each variety was carefully weighed, recorded, and labelled for structured storage and future use. Microgreen sowing and daily maintenance formed a continuous activity throughout the internship period, providing practical understanding of short-cycle crop management, germination monitoring, and moisture regulation (Figure 1). The final days were utilised to consolidate field observations

and develop a structured planting plan — a practical contribution incorporating the key learnings and insights gathered across the internship period.



Figure 1: Activities done during the Internship

### Farming Practices and Practical Understanding

Nannilam Eco Village integrates a range of high-value, low-input farming practices that collectively demonstrate the productive potential of regenerative agriculture. Bed formation, carried out manually without heavy machinery, forms the structural foundation of the vegetable production system — preserving soil integrity while improving drainage, aeration, and root development across 13 individually managed crop blocks. Systematic crop data collection and farmer activity documentation across these blocks reinforced that organised record-keeping is as essential to farm productivity as the cultivation itself. Microgreen cultivation, practiced daily throughout the internship, proved to be one of the most resource-efficient crop systems — requiring minimal land and input while delivering nutritionally dense produce within 7 to 14 days of sowing. Mushroom cultivation, integrated into the farm through the Farmversity programme, demonstrated how agricultural residues can be transformed into high-protein food within a 30-to-45-day production cycle — creating a circular value chain within the farm with near-zero waste. The seed bank programme further illustrated how preserving indigenous seed varieties is not merely a conservation effort but a strategic investment in long-term agricultural resilience. Together, these practices reflect a farming philosophy where productivity, ecology, and efficiency are not competing priorities but naturally aligned outcomes of thoughtful system design.

### Key Observations and Insights

Field observations at Nannilam revealed that regenerative farming, when practiced with intention, creates a self-sustaining system where every element supports another. The Own an Acre model stood out as a practical and replicable agro-business innovation — connecting investors directly to the productivity and health of the land while keeping the farm ecologically managed and economically viable. The Lean Farming approach demonstrated that reducing waste and maximising land value are not opposing priorities but natural outcomes of good system design. The seed bank maintained at Nannilam highlighted the urgent need for community-level conservation of indigenous varieties, which carry centuries of adaptation to local soil and climate conditions. Overall, the most significant insight from this experience is that data, documentation, and community participation are as essential to modern sustainable farming as the soil and seeds themselves.

## Conclusion

This internship at Nannilam Eco Village offered a clear and grounded understanding of how regenerative farming works in practice. The key learning is that sustainable agriculture is not a single method but an integrated system — where soil health, crop diversity, seed conservation, data management, and community participation all work together. Practices like microgreen cultivation, mushroom farming, and seed banking are practical, low-cost, and highly replicable — making them relevant not just for eco villages but for any farming community seeking to diversify income and restore ecological balance. The Own an Acre model and Lean Farming approach demonstrated that economic viability and environmental responsibility are not opposing goals — when systems are designed with intention, both are achievable together. The message this article seeks to leave with the farming community is straightforward — the future of agriculture lies not in more inputs but in better systems. Nannilam is proof that a more sustainable, productive, and community-driven way of farming is not a distant ideal. It is already happening, one acre at a time.

## References

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