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Grass carps to clear ponds choked by weeds



KOCHI: At a time when excessive growth of aquatic weeds is choking waterbodies and posing a threat to the fresh water ecosystem, the Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) attached to the Central Marine Fisheries Institute (CMFRI) has launched a novel programme to tackle the weed menace by growing fishes in the ponds.

The KVK is in the process of mitigating the threat by using grass carp fish (*Ctenopharyngodon idella*), which feeds on the aquatic weeds.

The excessive growth of weeds makes most ponds useless. "Among the 140 species of aquatic weed in the water bodies, the varieties such as salvinia, hydrilla and pistia are the most detrimental to the fresh water resources", said CMFRI director A Gopalakrishnan.

Launching the programme by releasing grass carp fingerlings into Perunninakkulam Shiva temple pond in Tripunithura, he said that a single grass carp can feed up to three times its body weight," he said, adding that weedicides, chemical compounds to eliminate weeds, available in the market would cause damage to the fish stock and the ecosystem.

Experts said that advantage of using grass carps is that they cannot breed in the ponds and hence will turn a menace unlike the exotic fishes. A pond of one acre size filled with aquatic weeds requires only 20 grass carps. The fish seeds are also available in the market.

"The fingerlings should be at least 6-9 months old or about 200-250 gms in weight before they can be introduced in the pond. They just eat the weed and the waste in the pond. They are herbivorous and they are also edible. They can grow as much as 7 kgs," said KVK fish expert P A Vikas.

Last year, KVK as part of a pilot project had introduced fishes in another pond in Tripunithura and now the waterbody is being used by people for swimming. "We have decided to popularise the method which is cost-effective and safe for addressing the issue," he said.