

## Govt's job push: Free lessons in soilless farming

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The training, currently undertaken by the Delhi transport department at a Hydroponics Horticulture Training Facility at Kushak Nallah cluster bus depot near Lodhi Road, is for a duration of eight weeks and the trainees are also given certificates

from the Agriculture Skill Council of India.

In an effort to promote self-employment among women from underprivileged communities and differently abled persons, the Delhi government has begun training them in hydroponics -- a soilless agriculture system -- to grow exotic vegetables like lettuce, bok choy, parsley, rocket leaves and fruits, among others, which are in high demand in places offering fine-dining in the Capital.

The training, currently undertaken by the Delhi transport department at a Hydroponics Horticulture Training Facility at Kushak Nallah cluster bus depot near Lodhi Road, is for a duration of eight weeks and the trainees are also given certificates from the Agriculture Skill Council of India. The first batch of 20 trainees got certificates from transport minister Kailash Gahlot on February 4.

For Daryaganj resident Kavita Kashyap (47), who lost her job as an office assistant during the pandemic, the training has offered a ray of hope. "I came to know about the hydroponics training through a common friend. I completed the training and have been selected as a trainer. I want to develop my own hydroponics setup in future and become an entrepreneur," Kavita told HT. Kavita's husband is daily wage labourer and the couple have two children.

Kajal (20), a first year B.Sc (zoology) student from IGNOU, said she underwent the training as she wanted to start her own business. "I come from a humble background and my father works in a private factory. Currently there are very few people in the market to fulfil the growing demands of exotic vegetables and organic products," said Kajal, who lives in Paharganj.

Of the 20 trained women, 12 have begun training students of classes 9 and 11 from 136 select Delhi government schools, under the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), from March 5. Officials said each batch will have 50 students (25 each from class 9 and 11) and the department has set a target to train around 6,800 students. "The main objective is to create self-reliance and entrepreneurial skills in students," said an education department official.

Government officials said the programme will unlock doors for the women. "It will help create more end-to-end employment solutions for women and persons with disabilities and create

more women entrepreneurs. The facility includes a training, production and harvesting centre, and trains women and differently abled persons in commercial utilisation of these crops as livelihood generators. DIMTS (Delhi Integrated Multi-Modal Transit System) has taken a commendable step through corporate social responsibility in empowering women,” said Ashish Kundra, principal secretary, transport department.

Gahlot, who visited the centre last month, called it a unique initiative by the Delhi government and stressed on “the need to adapt to smart farming methods in the wake of reducing land cover and depleting resources”.

Meera Chetan Bhatia, CEO of Sai Swayam Society, which is the executing agency for the hydroponics training project, said “We have already started harvesting all leafy vegetables such as iceberg lettuce, bok choy, parsley, rocket leaves, and this is expected to give a total harvest of 200kg,” said Bhatia.

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