

NEW FERTILISER

MAKING THE MOST OF FISH WASTE

● **Deena Theresa**

When Maheshwari strolled on the Cherai beach several years ago, the stench of rotting fish waste struck her nostril, and she recognised the smell. "There is a certain scent of decayed fish waste, one which is all too familiar," she says.

Maheshwari grew up in the coastal regions of Vadanappally in Thrissur, where she watched her father deal with fish remains in the most efficient manner. "He would mix it with salt and use it to fertilise our coconut trees," she says. Needless to say, the trees bore fruit aplenty, thereby ingraining in Maheshwari's mind, the goodness of fish waste.

Around 23 tonnes of fish waste is generated from Vypeen to Munambam, as per Maheshwari. "It has been 28 years since my marriage, after which I shifted base to Munambam. I've seen seafood companies and fishermen deposit fish waste in the seas or dump it on land, polluting both. The sight of this took me back to my childhood and I was reminded of my father converting the same," she says.

After a week or two in 2011, the Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (CIFT) had developed a training course which comprised utilising fish to the maximum, generating



Maheshwari making Fertifish

value-added products sans waste. "They primarily taught us to make edibles but the thought of creating systematic fertiliser, which consists of ingredients more than salt, struck me," she says.

Using her bare hands, she collected fish waste from the Munambam harbour, and merged them with formic acid in drums. "To one kg of fish waste, one can add 35 ml of formic acid. After two weeks, silage is formed," she informed. Silage is a product liquified by the action of fish enzymes in the presence of an added acid. "The results are fabulous. I've used this fertiliser for my plants - bananas and vegetables. The

yield generated is enormous," she says. Maheshwari does not use machines, just her bare hands. Having a pulveriser would make things easy. Formic acid solely dissolves flesh, not the fish bones. But it is alright," she says. Not one to stop right there, she went ahead and marketed her fertiliser. Titled 'Fertifish', it is sold at her shop in Ernakulam called 'Jaiavasree'.

Maheshwari has tried obtaining a licence for her product to export it to other states but her efforts are in vain. "I'm unsure why it has not happened yet. Except for two elements, the rest are tested at the university. I've waited for ages

for a Government appeal.

There is so much that can be done with fish waste, and the nutrients are exceptionally great for plants," her voice trails off.

