

Karnataka forward - E-platform a game-changer of country's agriculture market

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By providing direct access to buyers on a virtual platform, UMP has solved the problem of exploitation by middlemen in one stroke

BENGALURU: Karnataka has pioneered several initiatives which have got national acclaim and have been followed by other states. In this new series starring today, TOI turns the spotlight on some of them and analyses what made them [click](#).

Krishne Gowda, a 27-year old farmer, has followed in the best family tradition, growing coconut palms on three acres in a remote village off Hassan and selling the copra (dry coconut) with the help of middlemen. The only thing that has changed is the way he sells his produce. He sells it online after browsing through prices quoted by traders, clicks the best price and gets paid online, all thanks to the Unified Marketing Platform (UMP), a model initiative of the Karnataka government. It's changing the lives of farmers like [Gowda](#) like no other venture. The network has reached 18 lakh farmers, and is expanding by the day, making it the country's most ambitious rural initiative.

"Middlemen have always been a bane for farmers in the agriculture markets as they short-changed the small and marginal farmers by quoting the lowest

prices. But with the successful launch of UMP, their role is increasingly getting eliminated as farmers get a far better price in the market," said [Manoj Rajan](#), managing director and CEO, Rashtriya e-Market Services, the brain behind the venture.

The UMP success can be gauged from the fact that wholesale dealers from Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Kerala, Haryana, West Bengal and Delhi have taken the unified trader licence to participate in Karnataka's online markets. Bulk institutional buyers like ADM, [Cargill](#), ITC, Reliance, Metro Cash & Carry, [Godrej](#) Agro, Pepsico India and major traders have also opted for online trading.

Currently, 142 markets across 28 districts have been brought under the UMP. Next year, 52 more markets will start transactions on UMP.

Rajan said the new system has contributed to a significant rise in prices of copra, groundnut, tur, turmeric, Bengal gram, arecanut, dry chilli and green gram. For instance, the average price of copra increased from Rs 5,000-5500 a quintal in 2013 to Rs 10,000-14,000 a quintal in 2016, thanks to UMP.

Farmer leader Mallesh added that the online system has created quality and price awareness among farmers but the biggest challenge for the government is to rope in more farmers into the system. Rajan said around 18 lakh farmers have registered till date. The government launched a drive to bring in more farmers under the system in 11,000 villages across the state.

Besides, he said, they have commenced assaying services in 10 markets to cover a minimum 15% of arrivals in the market. "We have taken an ambitious programme of installing automated cleaning and grading machinery in APMC markets where the farmer's produce will be cleaned and packed before sale. The project will take off in 65 markets next year," he added.