

QUEEN OF SWEET GOURD

She was once known as Piyara Begum, but nowadays, she is affectionately known as “Kumrar Rani”, or “Queen of Sweet Gourd” of the Dhumketu village in Badarpur union of Lalmohan upazila in the southern coastal district of Bhola.

Ten months ago, Piyara enrolled in one of SPRING’s Farmer Nutrition School (FNS) sessions in the Lalmohan upazila.

During these FNS sessions, she learned about proper health, nutrition, care, and services during pregnancy. Piyara began visiting the local government health center regularly for antenatal care and iron tablets, which are essential in the prevention of anemia during pregnancy. She also learned about nutritious diverse foods she would need to keep her and her baby healthy, as well as the importance of handwashing to prevent the transmission of disease.

The SPRING FNS training sessions on how to cultivate diverse, seasonal vegetables in limited space, allowed her to maximize the small space in her home’s courtyard. Through homestead food production, Piyara supplements her family’s nutritional demands with the nutritious vegetables produced, such as red amaranth, sweet gourd, and okra.

While Piyara’s garden produces seven to eight types of vegetables in a growing season, the production of sweet gourd, kumra, went so well that people could only see kumra in her garden. She quickly became famous in the



The ‘Queen of Sweet Gourd’ Piyara inside her house with her youngest child and her robust production of sweet gourd.

village as ‘Kumrar-Rani’.

With her huge production, Piyara and her family not only consumed the delicious sweet gourd but also distributed it among relatives and neighbors. Still, she had hundreds of sweet gourd remaining in the garden, so she and her husband sold half at Tk. 2,000 (about \$25 USD) and preserved the rest for the family’s use in the future.

Piyara recently gave birth to a healthy baby. The baby was exclusively breastfed for six months. She believes the baby has grown well and remains healthy due to her exclusive breastfeeding. “Before the birth of my elder daughter, I did not know much about taking care of myself and the baby during and after pregnancy. At that time, I didn’t know much about feeding young children, especially when sick, and consuming diversified nutritious foods like vegetables, eggs and so on and so they were not taken during such a critical time. So my eldest child always suffers a lot from frequent illness. However, my youngest child Iqbal is getting a diversified diet with continued breastfeeding after completion of exclusive breastfeeding. He is now healthy and free from illnesses because of the actions I learned from the SPRING program.”

Practicing the simple skills and knowledge learned from SPRING, Piyara is now leading a healthy and happy family. Moreover, her vegetable garden is considered as the most successful garden within the village. Through the success of sweet gourd in her vegetable garden, the Queen of Sweet Gourd has conquered the hearts of the villagers.



Piyara Begum and her family in her garden with harvested vegetables for consumption.

This story is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the terms of the Cooperative Agreement AID-OAA-A-11-00031. The SPRING Project is managed by JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc. The contents are the responsibility of JSI, and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.