

PRESCRIPTION TO MAKE INDIAN AGRICULTURE PRODUCTIVE, PREDICTIVE AND REMUNERATIVE – OPEN LETTER TO HON'BLE PM

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India being an agrarian country and agriculture being a State-Subject, there is a need for a calculated and balanced approach between the Union of India and the States as far Agriculture, in totality is concerned.

SUGGESTED STEPS:

1. At the level of NITI Aayog:

a) Centre is often blamed for skyrocketing prices of agri-commodities in the event of crop failures, even though agriculture happens to be a State-subject. A pragmatic approach could be the formulation of 'Annual Balanced Crop Plan' (ABCoP) assigning specific production targets to States, crop by crop, taking into consideration the total requirements of the Country. This should be deliberated, approved, and allocated to States by NITI Aayog with appropriate budgetary support, followed by monitoring.

b) In no case, crop production programs in each State should be based on convenience, taken up in a complacent manner. There must be comprehensive target-oriented production plans, meeting major agri-commodity requirements, locally. NITI Aayog must encourage State Agriculture Depts. to allocate irrigated areas to Pulses and Oilseeds, proportionate to mitigating deficiency levels, backed by incentives. The Central Govt. should come to the rescue of those States where climatic conditions do not favour growing a particular crop, profitably.

2. At the level of ICAR:

a) A serious introspection is needed to decide continuity, redefining objectives and aligning goals of over 101 Research Institutes; 80 All India Coordinated Research Projects (AICRPs) of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR -the apex body for agricultural research and education, established way back in 1929, and continues to exist with no major structural reorganization). Though the Dr. R A Mashelkar Committee submitted its recommendations about restructuring ICAR about a decade ago, this has been kept on hold. However, major recommendations may be still relevant. The irony is that, our Country has as many as 73 State

Agricultural Universities (SAUs) and half a dozen Central Agricultural Universities (CAUs), all with similar mandates, leading to serious duplication of research and a very thin spread of resources; resources that are critical to the advancement of high-tech R&D to boost return on investment (ROI) and international competitiveness.

b) To begin with, ICAR may combine the existing individual crop-based (CB) research facilities into crop-group based (CGB) National Institutes considering All Pulses, All Oilseeds, All Cereals, All Spices, All Fibre Crops, All Fruits & Vegetables, All Fisheries, including their respective Technology components, as well as All Animals/Veterinary Sciences, including Dairy Technology, and All Poultry and Avian Research Institutes, together.

c) Build a culture of co-existence and partnership with leading private seed industries by sharing knowledge, germplasm and facilities that are unique for development of smart hybrids (with emphasis of non-GMOs first) in major Field and Vegetable crops. Pay more attention on Water and Nutrient-Use-Efficiency Research to support and prop up rainfed agriculture.

d) There are acute shortages/misuse of Breeder and Foundation Seeds of recently released varieties resilient to climate changes with inbuilt resistance/ tolerance to biotic and abiotic stresses. During the release of such varieties, it should be made mandatory for the concerned Institute/SAU releasing such a variety/hybrid, to take up seed production in adequate quantities, using existing facilities created under the National Seed Programme (NSP) and roping-in their own Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVKs)/ Regional Stations. On production of Foundation Seed, the Dept. of Agriculture & Cooperation (DAC), Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) can allocate them to National Level Agencies (NLAs) for Certified Seed production and supply.

3. At the level of DAC, Ministry of Agriculture, Govt. of India:

a) Suspend all the routine schemes namely National Mission on Oilseeds and Oil Palm (NMOOP), Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH), National Food Security Mission (NFSM), etc. that are in place since the last few decades, and continuing to exist, just by changing names, but having no matching impact in the target areas. The funds could be utilized where it is needed most in supporting seed production of novel varieties and linking it with ABCoP at the State levels.

b) In the event of the merger of State Farms Corporation of India (SFCI) with National Seeds Corporation (NSC), there may not be 'Test Stock Seed Multiplication' of newly identified varieties any more under the DAC support. The budget for that purpose should be transferred to concern commodity Institutes of ICAR/SAUs so that enough seed is produced for Minikit/ Front Line Demonstrations under the centrally sponsored schemes. This will help in promoting new/novel crop varieties released in the last 5 years, and thereby enabling farmers to realize higher yields, even under the adversities of climate change.

c) The NSC, wholly owned by DAC, MoA must stop purchasing seeds from open markets through a tendering process, often based on L1; this is the single biggest contributor to the gradual destruction of Indian Agriculture. Similar practices must be stopped with other NLAs for seed production and supply.

d) Present Seed Certification System, as practiced and endorsed by the DAC, MoA, is the biggest menace in Indian Agriculture (in fact could qualify as a scam of the highest order), which was documented and submitted to Joint Secretary (Seed) and Secretary Agriculture, DAC, MoA by the author with facts and figures, State by State, for initiating corrective measures, a year back. Appropriate corrective measures must be initiated without any further delay.

e) Equip the Food Corporation of India (FCI) with modern warehouses, silos to store food grains and food legumes, thereby avoiding wastage and compromising quality, with other logistic support.

4. At the Joint Levels of Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Commerce:

a) Discourage private market players from unnecessarily importing important agri-commodities for individual/ institutional gains, particularly in Pulses and edible Oilseeds, by

raising the import duty. It is essentially required to ensure best prices for Indian produce and is in the best interest of the farmers. It will also serve as a confidence building measure by ensuring procurement and offering special incentives. Such steps may lead to achieve sustained self-sufficiency in Oilseeds and Pulses sector.

b) Money spent by DAC for promotion of organic agriculture will be a colossal waste unless the area converted to C-4 and certified by Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) are further utilized for production of organic food and exported, besides marketing locally.

5. At the level Ministry of Food Processing Industries, Govt. of India:

a) Harvest and post-harvest losses in major agricultural produce is estimated at Rs. 92,600 crores annually. Similarly, losses in fruits and vegetables are close to 40,8000 crores. Unavoidably, matching investment is desperately needed for post-harvest storage infrastructures.

b) Services in pre-conditioning, pre-cooling, ripening, packaging, labelling, etc. should be made available.

c) Developing cold chains and quick transportation systems to save perishable fruits and vegetables and constructing "accessible" cold storages in large numbers for different crops in strategic areas.

d) Involvement of Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) Institutes namely Central Food Technological Research Institute (CFTRI) and National Institute of Nutrition (NIN) in developing Nutri-Foods products using traditional nutri-cereals (kodo, quinoa, quality protein maize, etc.), and their appropriate commercial manufacturing processes for value-addition through inexpensive technology, primarily targeted towards the malnourished sections in the society. However, given the recent trends in Food & Nutrition, premium lines can also be developed for health conscious, middle to high income groups, which will make this venture profitable, while subsidizing the low-income groups. Being at the Service of Agriculture for 50 Years (1970-2020) I sincerely appeal for the much-needed reform as proposed.

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