

Innovative practices must come into farm sector to make it sustainable & profitable: Vice President
Vice President's Secretariat

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Farmers must diversify and take up allied activities like poultry, dairy and fisheries;

Addresses Golden Jubilee Celebrations of Assam Agricultural University

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The Vice President of India, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu said that innovative practices must come into farm sector to make it sustainable and profitable. He was addressing the inauguration of year long Golden Jubilee Celebrations of Assam Agricultural University, in Jorhat, Assam today. The Governor of Assam, Shri Jagadish Mukhi, the Minister for Agriculture, Assam, Shri Atul Bora and other dignitaries were present on the occasion.

The Vice President said that achieving self sufficiency in the pulses and oilseed sector is challenge before the country. I am sure that with the dedication demonstrated by our agriculturists and the cutting edge research being conducted in our laboratories, we will achieve self sufficiency even in these two crops soon, he added.

The Vice President said that India needs to respond effectively to the changing needs of our farm sector for a sustained food security. He further said that contemporary realities like climate change, fatigued soil health, diminishing water resources and endangered bio-diversity are affecting the farm sector. Farming profession is becoming increasingly uneconomical and, therefore, unattractive, he added.

The Vice President said that fewer people than earlier are now opting for agriculture. We need highly skilled and motivated human resources, persons who will think out of box and institutions that will foster innovation, he added.

The Vice President called on scientists and governments to encourage farmers to diversify and take up allied activities like poultry, dairy and fisheries adding that increase only production may not encourage people to join farming. He further said that there a big unmet demand for dairy and meat products in the entire north eastern region and there is a need to turn this challenge into an opportunity. Farmers who toil on the farms should be empowered with knowledge, financial credit, warehousing and insurance facilities and we need to re-think and revitalize agricultural education and research, he added.

Following is the text of Vice President's address:

"It is indeed a great pleasure for me to be a part of the Golden Jubilee year celebration programme of Assam Agricultural University. It is a joyous moment that marks fifty years of

glorious journey of this institution.

I have been informed that this was the only agricultural university for the entire NE region till the year 1988 when the Central Agricultural University was established. Even with that university in place now, Assam Agricultural University still continues to welcome students not only from the region but also from the country and overseas.

It is heartening to know that students from 7 different countries are pursuing their higher studies in this university and that the students from this university are availing foreign fellowships enabling them to study in 6 European universities.

I am happy to note that this university has developed as many as 113 different crop varieties, 2 animal varieties and 1 poultry breed in the last 50 years.

I am delighted at the rapid progress being made by this university making it one of the top 100 institutions of India.

What is most remarkable is the fact that the University has opened its doors to the farming community and is working hand in hand with the farmers supporting them in their efforts to augment productivity and profitability. I complement and congratulate each one of you for your contribution to the growth of agriculture sector over the last five decades.

However, we in this country, have a long and arduous journey ahead to be undertaken in collaboration with all stakeholders. There are numerous challenges we need to collectively address in our country. You must build on your past achievements and address these new challenges and tap into newer opportunities. We, as a country, have come a long way from being food deficient country six decades back to a country that has achieved substantial home grown food security. One of our challenges now is to achieve self sufficiency in the pulses and oilseed sector. I am sure that with the dedication demonstrated by our agriculturists and the cutting edge research being conducted in our laboratories, we will achieve self sufficiency even in these two crops soon.

All of us are aware that for our sustained food security, we need to respond effectively to the changing needs of our farm sector. These needs are emerging out of contemporary realities like climate change, fatigued soil health, diminishing water resources and endangered bio-diversity. Most significantly, the farming profession is becoming increasingly uneconomical and, therefore, unattractive. Fewer people than earlier are now opting for agriculture. In order to meet these challenges effectively, we need highly skilled and motivated human resources, persons who will think out of box and institutions that will foster innovation.

Over the last decade and half, the agriculture sector in Assam is marching ahead slowly but steadily.

Presently, I believe it is growing at around 5 percent. Rice production increased from 3.8 million tonnes in 2001-02 to 5.2 million tonnes in 2016-17. This is still far below its potential of 12 million tonnes. Similarly, pulses production increased from 0.85 lakh tonnes to 1.08 lakh tonnes and Oilseed from 1.56 lakh tonnes to 2.15 lakh tonnes during the same year. While the state is self sufficient in rice, special efforts are needed for increasing production of oilseeds and pulses. I understand that wheat is not a popular crop with farmers of this state. The production is only 0.34 lakh tonnes though there is a demand for around 6 lakh tonnes. Apparently, a great scope exists in the wheat sector. The university, state government and the farmers have to work collaboratively to realize the potential.

Sisters and Brothers,

We need to not only increase production but also encourage farmers to diversify and take up allied activities like poultry, dairy and fisheries.

There is apparently a big unmet demand for dairy and meat products in your State as well as the entire north eastern region. I am told that there is about 60 percent milk deficiency, 80 percent egg deficiency and around 70 percent meat deficiency in Assam itself.

We need to turn this challenge into an opportunity.

I am happy that the government led by your Chief Minister, Sri Sarbananda Sonowalji, has planned to focus on animal husbandry and revitalize it. This is, in my view, the need of the hour. Farmers should be encouraged to diversify and take up allied activities to cushion them against uncertain and uneven returns from farming.

Along with supplementation of farm income, farmers should be given the encouragement and technical know-how to grow horticultural crops like fruits, vegetables, spices and plantation crops like areca nut, and floriculture. I recognize that some significant progress has already been made in this direction in your State.

Your land is the 'Sonar Assam', the golden Assam, a land of fertile lands, adequate rainfall and rich bio-diversity.

These rich natural resources must be used optimally and sustainably to generate wealth.

The farmers who toil on the farms should be empowered with knowledge, financial credit, warehousing and insurance facilities. They need to be provided the 'know-how' and 'do-how' to improve the farm productivity. That's what the universities are expected to provide. We need to ensure that they do so even more efficiently in the years to come. We need to re-think and revitalize agricultural education and research.

Sisters and Brothers,

Knowledge makes all the difference. The educational institutions must generate new ideas, extend the frontiers of scientific knowledge and search for practical solutions to challenging problems.

You must equip farmers with these knowledge, insights and products. You must 'dialogue' with farmers, 'discover' new products and practices and 'disseminate' new insights and knowledge. This process of dialoguing, discovering and disseminating is a continuous pathway to excellence and greater professional heights.

There have been many advances in farming practices like precision farming, vertical farming, hydroponic/ aeroponic farming and robotic farming. We must see if these innovations can be tried out in your state and in the regional context. We must also simultaneously examine and re-discover promising practices that the farmers are already adopting on their farms.

Sisters and Brothers,

India has a great heritage of agricultural science and has been the originator of path breaking discoveries over the last millennium. We have a responsibility to continue this scientific tradition. Young agricultural scientists will have to be encouraged to research and innovate. The universities must nurture young talent and mentor the students. Adequate opportunities for learning from the

field and the ability to communicate research findings to the farming community must be an integral part of the curriculum.

Our mother earth is a treasure house, a truly remarkable source of our sustenance. We must have the knowledge and wisdom to use this treasure for our livelihood and well being. We must protect and preserve, rejuvenate and renew our natural resources. Agricultural universities like yours have an important role to play in making farming attractive, innovative and sustainable.

You have been doing wonderful work in the last 50 years. I wish you many more successful years ahead in the service of the farming community and humanity at large.

May your efforts be crowned with greater successes as you stretch your arms towards perfection and excellence.

Jai Hind!"

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