

## From Plate To Plough: A vision coloured green

The finance minister announced Operation Greens, on the lines of Operation Flood, with a seed capital of Rs 500 crore in his speech on February 1. Three days later, the Prime Minister backed the scheme at a parivartan rally in Bengaluru. He said farmers are his TOP priority — T is for tomatoes, O for onions, and P for potatoes.

Operation Flood changed the face of milk production in India, making the country the largest producer of milk in the world — in 2016-2017, the country produced 164 million metric tonnes (MMT). But it's important to note that Operation Flood was driven largely by smallholders and the AMUL model has ensured that 75-80 per cent of the price paid by milk consumers goes to the farmers. Operation Greens wants to replicate that success story in fruit and vegetables, starting with tomatoes, onions and potatoes.

The main objective of this project, according to the finance ministry, is to reduce price volatility in these commodities, thereby helping farmers augment incomes on a sustainable basis. It also aims to provide these vegetables to consumers at affordable prices. The litmus test of this scheme would be in containing the booms and busts in prices. It will need to avert situations where farmers have been forced to dump potatoes and tomatoes on roads. Also, checking the prices from going through the roof has compelled the government to ban exports. It has resorted to de-stocking and conducted income tax raids on traders — the raids on onion traders in September last year is a case in point.

India is the second largest producer of vegetables in the world with about 180 MMT. But China produces four times more vegetables than India. The accompanying graph shows a structural break in India's vegetable production around 2003-2004. Although not as revolutionary as the Green Revolution in wheat, or the White Revolution in milk, yields of potatoes, onions and tomatoes — which constitute almost half of the country's vegetable production — have shown a healthy growth. For example, between 2003-2004 and 2017-2018, potato production increased from 28 MMT to 49 MMT while onion yields went up from 6.3 MMT to 21 MMT and tomato production increased from 8.1 MMT to 22 MMT.