

BRING IN STRUCTURAL CHANGES TO MAKE AGRICULTURE RESILIENT, SUSTAINABLE AND PROFITABLE: VP

Relevant for: Indian Economy | Topic: Agriculture Issues and related constraints

Vice President's Secretariat

Bring in structural changes to make agriculture resilient, sustainable and profitable: VP

Have a positive bias towards agriculture sector: VP

Long-term solutions needed to make farming sustainable

Diversify crops; embrace technology to make agriculture viable

United efforts needed to achieve the ambitious goal of doubling farm income by 2022

Inaugurates Agri-Vision-2019

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The Vice President of India, Shri M Venkaiah Naidu has called for introduction of structural changes through policy interventions to bring in a positive bias towards agriculture and make it resilient, sustainable and profitable.

Inaugurating Agri-Vision 2019, a two-day conference on 'Envisioning Agro Solutions for Smart and Sustainable Agriculture' at Hyderabad, he stressed the need for a concerted action from all stakeholders to find comprehensive, long-term solutions to the multiple challenges faced by the agriculture sector. Short-term measures like loan waiver would provide temporary relief and would not be beneficial to the farmer in the long run.

Expressing his concern over the tendency of farmers to leave agriculture, the vice President said that lack of favourable terms of trade, the vagaries of monsoon, technology not reaching farmers in time and absence of proper marketing system were some of the reasons for agrarian problems.

Pointing out that declining productivity, diminishing and degrading natural resources, rapidly growing demand for food, stagnating farm incomes, fragmented land holdings and unprecedented climate change were some of the major challenges confronting Indian agriculture, he said traditional farming would not be beneficial and the farmer needs to diversify

into allied activities to ensure sustained income.

Observing that the growth of the agriculture sector was critically important for inclusive growth, Shri Naidu said that empowering the sector would not only reduce poverty but also helps in improving the livelihoods of lakhs of people connected to this vital sector. Agriculture sector accounts for 18 per cent of India's GDP and provides employment to 50 per cent of the workforce of the country, he added.

The Vice President emphasized the need to accord top priority to farmer-oriented marketing, providing adequate cold storage facilities and refrigerator vans, focusing on food processing through value addition, extending timely and affordable credit to farmers and ensuring that innovations and technologies reach the farmers.

Shri Naidu urged researchers and farm experts to come out with solutions to the multi-dimensional problems faced by the farming sector. He called for united efforts by governments, scientific community, Krishi Vigyana Kendras and farmers to realize the ambitious goal of doubling farmers' income by 2022.

The Vice President also suggested that students pursuing agri courses must spend at least six months with farmers to have a firsthand understanding of the problems faced by the latter.

Observing that the use of digital technologies was essential to tackle climate change and make farming environmentally relevant and sustainable, he said digital technologies could help in countering vagaries in farming and optimizing the resources. He said that it was necessary to adopt the latest technologies from seeds to post harvest management to marketing and to improve productivity on par with the other leading nations.

He also emphasized the need for India to have its own home-grown food security as the country cannot depend on imported food security.

AKT/RK

Following is the text of Vice President's address

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I am delighted to inaugurate Agri-Vision-2019, a two-day conference on 'Envisioning Agro Solutions for Smart and Sustainable Agriculture'.

As you all are aware, agriculture is the most important sector of Indian economy. Most Indians either directly or indirectly are dependent on agriculture.

Creating enabling environment for agriculture to thrive and empowering the sector will not only reduce poverty but also helps in improving the livelihoods of lakhs of people connected to this vital sector. This is critically important for inclusive growth.

Indian agriculture sector accounts for 18 per cent of India's GDP and provides employment to 50% of the workforce of the country. The Gross Value Added by agriculture, forestry and fishing is estimated at Rs 17.67 trillion (US\$ 274.23 billion) in FY18. During 2017-18 crop year, food grain production is estimated at record 284.83 million tonnes.

The introduction of high yielding varieties, additional irrigation facilities, increased input flow through fertilizers and pesticides, farm mechanization, enhanced credit facilities, buttressed by price support, and other rural infrastructure facilities ushered the green revolution over the past few decades.

It stimulated infrastructure and rural development, increased prosperity of villages, and improved the quality of life to an extent. There is lot of improvement in the agricultural production and productivity per se in India after the green revolution.

India today is not only self-sufficient in respect of demand for food, but is also a net exporter of agri-products occupying seventh position globally. It is one of the top producers of cereals (wheat & rice), pulses, fruits, vegetables, milk, meat and marine fish. However, we are still facing deficit of pulses and oilseeds. Although, the availability of fruits, vegetables, milk, meat and fish has increased, the most important aspect is to ensure access and affordability to a vast majority of Indians, including farmers.

Dear sisters and brothers, the Indian food industry is poised to make rapid strides by increasing its contribution to world food trade, particularly in the food processing industry.

In view of the huge potential, the food processing sector plays a critical role in improving agrarian economy, raising farm incomes, reducing wastages, ensuring value addition, promoting crop diversification and generating employment opportunities as well as export earnings. This sector is among the few that serves as a vital link between the agriculture and industrial segments of the economy.

The Indian food and grocery market is the world's sixth largest, with retail contributing 70 per cent of the sales. The Indian food processing industry accounts for 32 per cent of the country's total food market, one of the largest industries in India. It contributes around 8.80 and 8.39 per cent of Gross Value Added (GVA) in Manufacturing and Agriculture respectively, 13 per cent of India's exports and six per cent of total industrial investment.

Organic farming in India is also rapidly growing. India holds a unique position among 172 countries practicing organic agriculture. India is home to 30 per cent of the total organic producers in the world, but accounts for just 2.59 per cent (1.5 million hectares) of the total organic cultivation area of 57.8 million hectares.

India has clearly emerged as a leading horticultural country of the world with a total annual fruits and vegetable production of 306.82 million tonnes during 2017-18.

The area under horticulture has grown substantively over the last decade to about 25.1 million hectare which includes a wide variety of crops, vegetables, root and tuber crops, mushroom, floriculture, medicinal and aromatic plants, nuts, plantation crops including coconut and oil palm which are grown in different agro-climatic conditions. India is the second largest fruit producer in the world.

Livestock is an integral component of India's agricultural farming since time immemorial and the. The livestock sector in India in recent times has been growing faster than crop sector. The contribution of livestock output to the total output of the agriculture sector has significantly increased from 15 per cent in 1981-82 to 29 per cent in 2015-16. This not only provided a cushion to agriculture growth but also has set a pace for itself to emerge as an engine of agricultural growth.

India is also the world's second largest milk producer and is emerging as a major exporter now.

It is contributing around 26 per cent to total agriculture GDP.

However, the major challenges confronting Indian agriculture are declining total productivity, diminishing and degrading natural resources, rapidly growing demand for food, stagnating farm incomes, fragmented land holdings and unprecedented climate change. All these challenges need to be tackled on a war footing to make agriculture resilient, sustainable and profitable. We need to bring in structural changes in agriculture through policy interventions from the Union Government and State Governments.

Another big challenge is that 85 per cent farmers are small and marginal with land holding of less than 2 hectares. Linking these small farmers with market is another major challenge in our system. To enhance the farmers' income, it is necessary to link them with marketers, traders and exporters.

One of the major challenges for food security in the 21st century is not only improving productivity but also yield stability through the development of crops which are disease-resistant, pest-resistant and adaptable to climate change. Hence it is necessary to adopt the latest technologies on all fronts from seeds to post harvest management to marketing, which will improve our productivity on par with the other leading nations and thereby help in enhancing of farmers' Income.

Given the importance of agriculture sector, Government of India took several steps for its sustainable development.

Steps have been taken to improve soil fertility on a sustainable basis through the soil health card scheme, provide improved access to irrigation and enhanced water efficiency through Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY), support organic farming through Paramparagat KrishiVikasYojana (PKVY) and support creation of a unified national agriculture market to boost the income of farmers. Further, to mitigate risk in agriculture sector, "Pradhan Mantri Fasal BimaYojana (PMFBY) has been launched for implementation from Kharif 2016.

The Hon'ble Prime Minister has set a target before the country to double farmers' income by 2022. To achieve this target, the government has been focusing on irrigation with schemes like "Per Drop More Crop", provision of quality seeds and nutrients based on soil health, setting up warehouses and cold chains to prevent post-harvest crop losses, promoting value addition through food processing, creating a National Farm Market, removing distortions and e-platform across 585 Stations.

Increasing investments in agricultural R&D and rolling out efficient institutional reforms are vital to tackle the emerging challenges in agriculture, including food and nutrition security both at national and regional levels. I have been always emphasizing upon the need for India to have its own home-grown food security as the country cannot depend on imported food security.

Digital Technology applications in agriculture have emerged as an important area. The use of Information Technology, Space Technology, Geo-Informatics, Internet of Things (IoT), Block Chain Technology, Artificial Intelligence and Big Data Analytics and their first-mile connectivity to farmers is vital for enhancing farm incomes. Digital technologies can also help in countering vagaries in farming and optimising the resources.

Jai Hind! "

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