

# VICE PRESIDENT CALLS FOR MEASURES TO PREVENT AGRO BRAIN DRAIN AND ATTRACT YOUTH TO FARMING

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

The Vice President of India, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu today called for measures to prevent agro brain drain and attract educated youth to take up farming as a profession. He opined that the future of Indian agriculture lies in the hands of technology-driven farming practices, powered by well-informed and modern-minded farmers.

The Vice President made these remarks while virtually inaugurating the National Dialogue on “Indian Agriculture Towards 2030: Pathways for Enhancing Farmers’ Income, Nutritional Security and Sustainable Food Systems” organised by NITI Aayog, Ministry of Agriculture and Food & Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

Expressing concern over the increasing lack of interest in farming among the educated youth, Shri Naidu opined that changing socio-economic milieu, increasing agri-input costs and diminishing returns have turned agriculture into a less preferred profession among the youth. He called for establishing strong lab–farm links and farmer–industry interaction to turn the farmers into ‘agri-entrepreneurs’. Creation of ‘Business Incubation Centres’ would also be a step in the right direction for aspiring farmers in this field, the Vice President added.

Stating that agriculture input costs have gone up significantly, Shri Naidu urged the policymakers and other stakeholders to work towards reducing the input costs. Towards this end, he also suggested promoting organic farming in a big way. Stressing the need to move away from chemical farming, he said, “Organic farming is beneficial for all—the farmers, the consumers and the environment. He called for making organic agriculture a mass movement not only for a ‘wealthy nation’ but also a ‘healthy nation’.

Terming agriculture as the soul of India, the Vice President said that it is critical not only for our food security but the economy and the livelihood also. “Agriculture is the pillar of India’s ecology, culture and civilisation”, he said.

He lavished praise on farmers for record food grain production during the 2019-20 crop year despite unfavourable conditions imposed by the covid-19 pandemic.

Listing the four important sets of challenges faced by Indian Agriculture, the Vice President said the foremost among these is the challenge of food security and better nutrition for our growing population. “In fact, the time has come to switch the focus of our approach from food security to nutrition security”, he added.

The second challenge, Shri Naidu underlined, was the challenge of sustainability of the natural resources—land, water, forests and so on. He wanted increased focus on technologies that increase water use efficiency.

Terming climate change the third major area of concern, the Vice President said that agriculture needs to be made resilient in the face of the grave impact of climate change. This needs to be addressed with an increasing sense of urgency and awareness, he said.

Lastly, Shri Naidu said that the farmer and the farm-worker are at the heart of the agricultural

landscape and deserve total, undivided attention. “It is our moral responsibility to ensure that we give him a bright future that recognises the blood and sweat of our annadata which constitutes Indian agriculture”, he said.

The Vice President also expressed the need to incorporate all dimensions of sustainability—the economic, the social and the ecological into agricultural policy-making and planning. He batted for a wider and more holistic view of agriculture, wherein the sustainability of plants, fishes, forests and livestock and their natural interdependence with the well-being of people are given due attention.

Drawing attention to the increasing feminization of agriculture in India, Shri Naidu urged the policymakers to pay special attention to the welfare of women farmers.

Referring to the recent desert locusts attack, ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, and the bird flu, the Vice President said that there is urgent need for disaster-proofing food and farm systems, reviving the rural economy and greater emphasis on health and nutrition, particularly of vulnerable sections of society.

He was of the opinion that the farmers should be encouraged to take up allied activities like poultry, dairy, fisheries and horticulture to have income in case of a failed crop. He also called for fully tapping the potential of Indian food processing industry.

The Vice President wanted agricultural universities and Krishi Vignan Kendras to adopt a proactive approach in bringing the latest research and innovation to the farmers. The lab-to-land concept has to be effectively implemented, he emphasised.

Shri Naidu maintained that farmers have never let the country down even in adverse conditions such as floods, drought or pandemic and called for coordinated action in team India spirit by both the Centre and the States to make agriculture profitable. Recognising the fact that the farmers are unorganized and voiceless, he said that the 4 Ps--Parliament, political leaders, policymakers and press must pro-actively adopt a positive bias towards agriculture.

Noting that loan waivers and subsidies provide temporary relief to farmers and are not sustainable solutions, Shri Naidu said that both long-term and short-term measures are needed to ensure remunerative prices to farmers. He listed various measures such as e-marketing, cold storage facilities, uninterrupted power supply and timely credit crucial to make agriculture profitable and viable.

The three-day dialogue to envision a roadmap for Indian Agriculture towards 2030 will see participation from agricultural experts, farmers, scientists, academics and civil society members.

Appreciating the initiative, Shri Naidu hoped that the delegates will examine the problems and challenges faced by Indian agriculture and will make suitable recommendations on how to overcome them and move forward. “I am confident that the genius and hard work of our farmers and our scientists and policy-makers will ensure that we nurture both the body and the soul of our great civilization”, he said.

Shri Parshottambhai Rupala, Union Minister of State for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Dr. Rajiv Kumar, Vice Chair, NITI Aayog, Prof. Ramesh Chand, Member, NITI Aayog, Shri Sanjay Agarwal, Secretary, Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Mr. Jong-Jin Kim, FAO Assistant Director, General and Regional Representative of the Asia-Pacific region, Dr. Neelam Patel, Senior Adviser (Agriculture), NITI Aayog, agriculture experts, researchers and farmers participated in the virtual event.

## **Following is the full text of the speech -**

Sisters and brothers,

It gives me immense pleasure to take part in this unique national dialogue on Indian agriculture, organised under the aegis of the NITI Aayog, the Government of India's Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, as well as the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations, all of whom are at the helm of policy-making on agriculture.

Agriculture is the soul of India. I say this as someone who hails from a family of agriculturists. It is not only critical for food security, the economy and the livelihood of nearly half of our population, but is also a pillar of our ecology, culture and civilisation. Any transformation of agriculture in our country has to recognize and respect the critical role of agriculture which lies at the core of our great civilization.

I am happy to note that during 2019-20 crop year, food grain production reached a record 296.65 million tonnes while production of horticulture crops in India is estimated at a record 320.48 million metric tonnes. It needs to be borne in mind that this output is despite unfavourable conditions imposed by the covid-19 pandemic. Our farmers deserve all appreciation for achieving this feat.

The importance of agriculture and allied activities in our economy is also evident from the fact that India has the largest livestock population of around 535.78 million, which constitutes around 31% of the world population. We are first in milk production and further aim to raise it to 330 million tons by 2024.

Welfare of our farmers is at the core of all the agricultural policies and programs framed by this government. I congratulate the initiative you have taken to hold this dialogue. I am sure that this erudite gathering of agricultural experts, farmers, scientists, academics and civil society members will examine the problems and challenges that Indian agriculture faces and will make suitable recommendations on how to overcome them and move forward.

My compliments to all the participating authors, chairs and discussants, who will come together during the next three days to envision a roadmap for Indian Agriculture towards 2030.

I am happy to note that the process will be opened up to those beyond the confines of the virtual conference to all the stakeholders concerned.

I would like to touch upon four important sets of challenges that Indian Agriculture has to address for the future, as I see it.

Foremost among these is the challenge of food security and better nutrition for our growing population. In fact, the time has come to switch the focus of our approach from 'food security' to 'nutrition security'.

Secondly, we need to address the challenge of sustainability of our natural resources—land, water, forests and so on. This calls for a heightened focus on technologies that increase water use efficiency, and also promote organic farming in a big way. It is pertinent to point out that the organic food segment in India is expected to grow at 10% during 2015-25 and is estimated to reach Rs. 75,000 crore by 2025. It bears no repetition that organic farming is beneficial for all—the farmers, the consumers and the environment. This has been proven beyond any shadow of doubt.

The third area of focus is the challenge of resilience in the face of the grave impacts of climate change expected in the next few years and decades. This needs to be addressed with an increasing sense of urgency and awareness.

Lastly, the farmer and the farm-worker at the heart of the agricultural landscape deserve all total, undivided attention. It is our moral responsibility to ensure that we give him a bright future that recognises the blood and sweat of our annadata which constitutes Indian agriculture.

We have to consider all dimensions of sustainability—the economic, the social and the ecological—and incorporate these into agricultural policy-making and planning. We also have to take a wider and more holistic view of agriculture, wherein the sustainability of plants, fishes, forests and livestock and their natural interdependence with the well-being of people are given due attention.

Dear friends,

We associate a farmer in our minds with a man ploughing his field or harvesting his crop. What this popular perception often glosses over is the increasing feminization of agriculture in India. As per Agriculture Census conducted every five years, the percentage of female operational holdings in the country increased from 12.78 percent during 2010-11 to 13.78 percent during 2015-16. A rise in migration of men from rural to urban areas has been a prime factor attributed to this change. Hence, our policymakers need to pay special attention to this increasing participation of women in agriculture and make suitable policies for their welfare.

Another problem facing Indian agriculture is the increasing lack of interest in farming among educated youth. Changing socio-economic milieu, increasing agri-input costs and diminishing returns have turned agriculture into a less preferred profession among the youth.

We need to turn our attention to see how this can be reversed.

I have no doubt that the future of Indian agriculture lies in the hands of technology-driven farming practices, powered by well-informed and modern-minded farmers. There are scores of highly successful farmers who have been an inspiration for their communities through their innovative use of modern agriculture techniques.

To turn the farmers into 'agri-entrepreneurs', efforts should be made to establish strong lab-farm links and farmer-industry interaction should be promoted. Creation of 'Business Incubation Centres' would also be a step in the right direction for aspiring farmers in this field.

These past months we have witnessed not only the coronavirus and its variants, but also desert locusts and now the bird flu. These problems have taught us that in the post-COVID world, there is urgent need, among other things, for disaster-proofing food and farm systems, reviving the rural economy and greater emphasis on health and nutrition, particularly of vulnerable sections of society. The agriculture sector is critically positioned to relook at the various policy options to address emerging needs and future challenges, while ensuring sustainability.

I am happy to note that you have prioritised these themes and challenges in the sessions to be held as part of the national dialogue.

None of these challenges can be dealt with alone. We have to work together for solutions. Yet there are no universally applicable solutions. They have to be locale and context-specific in such a large and diverse country as ours.

Farmers need to be encouraged to take up allied activities like poultry, dairy, fisheries, aquaculture, pisciculture, sericulture, apiculture and horticulture to have income in case of a failed crop. The Indian food processing industry has immense potential and needs to be fully tapped.

The agricultural universities and Krishi Vignan Kendras need to adopt a pro-active approach in bringing the latest research and innovation to the farmers. The lab-to-land concept has to be effectively implemented.

We should give due respect and recognition to our farmers, who have never let the country down—be it floods, drought or pandemic. They are bearing the brunt of nature's fury while ensuring our plates are full.

There is a need for coordinated action in team India sprit by both the Centre and the States to make agriculture profitable. As farmers are unorganized and voiceless, the 4 Ps--Parliament, political leaders, policymakers and press must pro-actively adopt a positive bias towards agriculture.

In fact, a radical shift in making agriculture profitable is the need of the hour.

Loan waivers and subsidies provide temporary relief to farmers and are not sustainable solutions. Both long-term and short-term measures are needed to ensure remunerative prices to farmers. Promoting e-marketing extensively, cold storage facilities and refrigeration vans should cater to farmers' needs in a big way. Providing uninterrupted power round-the-clock and extending timely credit at low-interest rates are crucial to make agriculture profitable and viable.

Implementing all these measures and encouraging agripreneurs will prevent agro brain drain and will hopefully attract youth to take up farming as a profession.

In the wake of the pandemic, the world is looking towards India. We need to seize the opportunity and give special impetus to agriculture to not only sustain self-sufficiency but also export to other countries and further strengthen India's economy.

Friends, as I conclude, I would like us to commit ourselves to the many agricultures in our country that show us many more sustainable possibilities to not only feed ourselves and all sentient beings, but also to nurture the planet.

My very best wishes to you all for having a very fruitful dialogue that can show us better and more effective and efficient ways for addressing the various challenges in the coming decades. I am confident that the genius and hard work of our farmers and our scientists and policy-makers will ensure that we nurture both the body and the soul of our great civilization.

Jai Hind!"

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MS/RK/DP

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Stating that agriculture input costs have gone up significantly, Shri Naidu urged the policymakers and other stakeholders to work towards reducing the input costs. Towards this end, he also suggested promoting organic farming in a big way. Stressing the need to move away from chemical farming, he said, “Organic farming is beneficial for all—the farmers, the consumers and the environment. He called for making organic agriculture a mass movement not only for a ‘wealthy nation’ but also a ‘healthy nation’.

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MS/RK/DP

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