

Hike in Minimum Support Price for Kharif crops will go a long way in improving the incomes of the farmers: Vice President

Vice President's Secretariat

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Crop diversification, Livestock and Horticulture sectors can be best bets for enhancing farmers' income;

Addresses Scientists of Central Island Agricultural Research Institute

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The Vice President of India, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu has appreciated the Government's resolve to double the farmers' income and complimented the Government of India for the steep hike in MSP for Kharif crops. These measures will go a long way in improving the incomes of the farmers, he added. He was addressing the gathering at an interactive session organized by the Central Island Agricultural Research Institute (ICAR), in Port Blair today. The Lt. Governor, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Admiral D.K. Joshi, the Member of Parliament Shri Bishnu Pada Ray and other dignitaries from scientific and farming community were there.

The Vice President stressed on the need to streamline the procurement process and the PDS network so that the farmer derives the maximum benefit apart from providing MSP at 50 percent or more over the cost of production. Other income enhancing measures need to be taken to mitigate agrarian distress, especially of the small and marginal farmers, he added.

The Vice President asked the scientific community present at the gathering to have regular interaction with farmers through their scientific teams and Krishi Vigyan Kendras. A good synergy between the research institutes, farmers and the local administration is crucial for development of farm sector, he added.

Expressing concern over the unstable income of farmers owing to risks relating to production, markets and prices, the Vice President stressed on the need to improve farmer's income. Creating greater awareness among farmers on crop diversification, Livestock (dairy and poultry) and horticulture (Green House cultivation, Hitech horticulture) sectors can be best bets for enhancing farmers' income and employment opportunities, he added.

The Vice President asked farmers and those involved in agriculture to be aware of government schemes like Soil Health Card (SHC) Scheme, Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY), Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) and The electronic National Agriculture Market (e-NAM).

The Vice President said that the decreasing man power availability and their increasing costs are making the farming less profitable and sometimes non-profitable. Secondary agriculture like

processing and value addition of farm produce has immense potential to enhance the farmers' economy, he said.

He also suggested Creation of farmers groups such as Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) and Village Producer Organizations (VPOs) to scale up post-harvest operations and directly link them with markets would also help farmers to realize higher prices for their produce. It would also generate considerable off farm /non-farm employment opportunities for the rural youth, he added.

Following is the text of Vice President's address:

"Admiral D. K. Joshi Ji, Lt. Governor, Andaman & Nicobar Islands; Member of Parliament Shri Bishnu Pada Ray Ji; Shri Vikram Dev Dutt, Chief Secretary, A & N Administration; Director, ICAR-CIARI, Dr. A. Kundu; dignitaries from A & N Administration; scientific fraternity and my dear brothers and sisters of the farming community. I am happy to be here and welcome you all for being present in this auspicious gathering.

At the outset, let me express my appreciation at the Government's resolve to double the farmers' income and also I would like to compliment the Government of India for the steep hike in MSP for Kharif crops. The MSP for paddy has been increased by Rs.200 per quintal, while that of moong dal has been hiked by Rs. 1400 per quintal. Similarly, the MSP for ragi went up by Rs.997 per quintal and that of sunflower by Rs.1288. These measures will go a long way in improving the incomes of the farmers.

The increase in the case of Bajra, Tur, Urad and Cotton ranged from 97% for Bajra to 59% for Cotton. This, no doubt, will give a fillip to pulses production.

In addition to providing MSP at 50 percent or more over the cost of production, there is a need to streamline the procurement process and the PDS network so that the farmer derives the maximum benefit.

Apart from MSP, other income enhancing measures need to be taken to mitigate agrarian distress, especially of the small and marginal farmers.

Friends

I am happy to note that various institutions under the Indian Council of Agricultural Research have been providing technological support to the farming community through their scientific teams and Krishi Vigyan Kendras. I am pleased to note that there is a good synergy here between the research institutes and the local administration.

I am also happy to know that the ICAR – Central Island Agricultural Research Institute (CIARI), which was established in 1978 in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, is functioning in multidisciplinary fields and catering to the needs of all sectors of agriculture. In these Islands, farming, after tourism, is contributing immensely to the livelihoods mainly through plantation crops and duly supported by the fishing and animal husbandry sectors.

Although about 61 per cent of the population in the country is dependent on agriculture, its contributions to the total GDP (<15%) is decreasing year after year as we are transiting from a developing nation to a developed one. However, thanks to the herculean efforts of our farmers, the low GDP share has not undermined agriculture and allied sectors and the rural economy is playing a significant role in providing livelihoods, ensuring food security and also in giving an impetus to the growth of industries and service sectors in the country. The record production of food grains (275.7 million tonnes), horticultural crops (300 million tonnes), animal products (155 million tonnes)

milk) 29 billion eggs and fish (10.8 million tonnes) speaks about spectacular achievements of the country.

However, the unstable income of farmers owing to plethora of risks relating to production, markets and prices is a matter of great concern for all of us. This is evident from the fact that the average monthly income of an agricultural household is Rs. 6,426/- as against its average consumption expenditure of Rs. 6,223/- leaving little disposable income at their hands. Further, the inequitable distribution of landholdings (85% of small and marginal farmers operating on 45% of the area) makes them vulnerable to poverty. Hence, efforts to enhance the income in agriculture for these sections of farmers have become the top priority of policy makers. The resolve of the Government is to ensure income security to farmers' by doubling their income by 2022.

To achieve this target, several new initiatives have been launched right from providing basic inputs like seeds to making available the produce to consumer through marketing. The major schemes initiated for this purpose include Crop Diversification Programme, Soil Health Card Scheme, Input Management, Per Drop More Crop in Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY), Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) and electronic National Agricultural Market (e-NAM).

There is a need to create greater awareness among farmers on crop diversification as it has been the major driving force for enhancing the farm incomes. Livestock (dairy and poultry) and horticulture (green house cultivation, hitech horticulture) sectors are the best bets for diversification and enhancing farmers' income and employment opportunities.

Soil health is a matter of concern for all owing to imbalanced use of fertilizers and emergence of widespread micronutrients deficiencies leading to low factor productivity of applied nutrient. In this context, the GoI initiated and launched Soil Health Card (SHC) Scheme in 2014 to generate 14 crore cards in four years. This scheme is aimed at improving soil fertility on a sustainable basis and is expected to generate good yields. I am told that about 12000 soil health cards in Andaman & Nicobar Islands were issued.

To increase the net irrigated area from 34.5 per cent to its potential and to tide over rainfall dependent production vagaries, Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY) is being implemented in mission mode with the help of Command Area Development to complete 99 major and medium irrigation projects covering 76.0 lakh hectares area in a phased manner by December 2019. I am told that District irrigation plans (DIP) were prepared by CIARI for Andaman & Nicobar Islands and submitted to the administration for implementation.

Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) which is a yield index based crop insurance scheme was launched in 2016, and 23 States during kharif 2016 and 25 States / Union Territories during rabi 2016-17 have implemented the PMFBY covering 30 per cent gross cropped area.

I am told that there is a problem, in Andaman & Nicobar Islands in implementing the scheme as no insurance firm is coming forward to handle the small volume of business. I am sure, the Government is looking into this.

The electronic National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) that was launched by the Government in April, 2016 aims at integrating the dispersed APMCs through an electronic platform and enable price discovery in a competitive manner, to the advantage of the farmers. These islands need to take due initiatives and thus reap the benefits from this approach.

Recognizing the critical role of women in agriculture, the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare has declared 15th October of every year as Women Farmer's Day besides earmarking at least 30 per cent of the budget for women beneficiaries in all ongoing schemes/ programmes and

development activities.

The decreasing man power availability (58.2% of total work force in 2001 and 25.7% by 2050) and their increasing costs are making the farming less profitable and sometimes non-profitable. To tide over this crisis of manpower, farmers are adapting farm mechanization at a faster rate by either individual purchase of machinery or through custom hiring basis. This initiation was found rewarding as there is 20 per cent reduction in cost of cultivation and 30 per cent increase in productivity. Reduced drudgery and post-harvest losses are other gains from mechanization. Though the small size of farms and uneven terrain of the Andaman & Nicobar Islands deter large scale farm mechanization through tractors and combine harvesters, small implements and machineries like power tillers, pedal operated thresher, coconut climber, brush cutter and sprayers have immense practical utility. I am sure, the UT Agricultural departments / CIARI are giving them due promotion.

Secondary agriculture like processing and value addition of farm produce have immense potential to enhance the farmers' economy. However, these gains are often garnered by industrialists. Creation of farmers groups such as Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) and Village Producer Organizations (VPOs) to scale up post-harvest operations and directly link them with markets would also help farmers to realize higher prices for their produce. It would also generate considerable off farm / non-farm employment opportunities for the rural youth.

I am told that not much exploitation was done in this sector in the islands and there is huge scope for coconut and spices processing and value addition.

The agriculture sector in India is experiencing structural changes which are opening up new challenges and opportunities. The Government has initiated reforms in the field of agricultural marketing, given a big push to the use of technology in agriculture, and also adopted Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) mode for timely delivery of extension services, credit and other inputs to small and marginal farmers. The core priority of the government is to provide opportunities for farmers to diversify their income generating opportunities and also to reduce the various risks by facilitating the development of agricultural sub-sectors like livestock and fisheries.

The transformation of agriculture and allied sector is crucial. For this to happen, appropriate policy interventions related to prices, trade, adoption of Climate Smart Agriculture, increased focus on small, marginal and women farmers are needed. Although the share of agriculture and allied sectors to the GDP is on the decline, agriculture sector will continue to remain an engine of economic growth and for inclusive economic development by reducing inequalities and provide food security to the nation at large.

For evolving suitable production technology for organic farming, Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, GOI has launched a National Project on Promotion of Organic Farming and to augment the research needs, a Network Project on Organic Farming under Indian Institute of Farming Systems Research, Modipuram, Meerut with 13 collaborating centres across the country was started. Also a separate institute ICAR-National Organic Farming Research Institute (NOFRI) was established at Jadong, Gangtok, Sikkim (2016). Since 2015-16, 'Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY)' is implemented in a cluster mode, wherein it is proposed to increase certified area by 2 lakh ha under organic farming (10000 clusters) within a period of 3 years.

Under Tribal Sub-plan which is now called as Scheduled Tribe Component, the CIARI and Andaman & Nicobar Administration have done commendable job for the Tribal farmers in the field of capacity building, demonstrations of technology, creation of assets, upgradation of knowledge, skill and employment generation.

I believe that the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Govt. of India, Andaman & Nicobar Administration and the Central Island Agricultural Institute will surely fulfill the vision of the Government for doubling the income of the farmers of these islands.

My best wishes to all of you for your future endeavors.

JAI HIND!"

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