

Share knowledge & expertise with farmers to make agriculture sustainable & nutrition-rich: Vice President tells scientists

Vice President's Secretariat

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Let farmers know the nutritional value of different foods;

Indian agriculture must diversify our food production;

Addresses National Consultation on Leveraging Agriculture for Nutrition

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The Vice President of India, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu has said that government, civil society, scientists and researchers must share knowledge and expertise with farmers to make agriculture sustainable and nutrition-rich. Addressing the National Consultation on Leveraging Agriculture for Nutrition organised by MS Swaminathan Research Foundation, in Chennai today, he called on institutions like Indian Council of Agricultural Research and Krishi Vigyan Kendras to take the lead in educating our farmers. The Minister for Fisheries and Personnel and Administrative Reforms, Tamil Nadu, Shri D. Jayakumar, the Agricultural Scientist, Prof. M.S. Swaminathan and other dignitaries were present on the occasion.

The Vice President said that a considerable section of the population in our country suffers from malnutrition consisting of under nutrition, hidden hunger caused by micronutrient deficiencies and obesity. He further said that it is quite distressing that in spite of the efforts taken by successive governments at the Centre and in various States, the problem of malnutrition persists in India at unacceptable levels. There is a need to address this problem on war footing for the country's population to remain healthy and productive in future, he added.

The Vice President said that the Government of India has adopted The National Nutrition Strategy in September 2017 to address the problem. He further said that this policy recognises the imperative need to have a relook at our agriculture policy. We must make agriculture nutrition-sensitive and it is critical that we explicitly make this vital connection between agriculture and nutrition, he added.

The Vice President said that Indian agriculture must diversify our food production by moving away from mono cropping of major cereals to a system that integrates a variety of food items including small millets, pulses, fruits and vegetables. He further said that pulses cultivation will not only help in improving nutrient rich food production but also in restoring nutrient value to the soil. On the economic side, it will reduce our import burden as nearly six million tones of pulses are being imported, he added.

The Vice President said that millets like Jowar, Bajra, Ragi and little millets like Kutki, Kodo, Sawa, Kangni and Cheena are known to be nutrient-rich. Since cultivation of millets requires less water, efforts must be to promote their cultivation as part of crop rotation, he added.

Stressing on the need to create a market for nutritionally-rich crops, such as millets, the Vice President said that promoting or supplying them through the Public Distribution System can be a good option. He called on scientists and people researching on agriculture to create more awareness among the people, about the nutritional value of different foods so that they are able to make informed decisions. Regular monitoring of dietary consumption data of our population could help the government to initiate suitable modifications in policies from time to time, he added.

The Vice President lauded the efforts of Prof. M.S. Swaminathan for conceptualising and promoting the Farming System for Nutrition (FSN) to tackle household food and nutrition insecurity in rural India. He further said that the concept of FSN is a sustainable framework of farming and it involves crops, farm animals and fish. It calls for the integration of interventions in non-farm factors like hygiene and sanitation to improve nutrition and it addresses different human nutritional needs across gender and age groups through the life cycle, he added.

The Vice President said that in accordance with the suggestion given by Prof M S Swaminathan for a synergetic approach to integrate agriculture, nutrition and health, the National Nutrition Strategy, 2017 of Government of India, recognises the importance of a multi-dimensional approach to address malnutrition.

Following is the text of Vice President's address:

"It is a matter of concern that the number of hungry people in the world has risen for the first time in more than a decade, according to the Sustainable Development Goals Report, 2018 of the United Nations, released on June 20, 2018.

The report mentioned that the proportion of undernourished people worldwide increased from 10.6 per cent in 2015 to 11.0 per cent in 2016. This translates to 815 million people worldwide in 2016, up from 777 million in 2015. There are now approximately 38 million more undernourished people in the world than in 2015.

The increase in number of hungry people in the world is an enigma. The extent of malnutrition in India is incredibly high. However, it tends to be relegated to the background in policy debates. It is therefore, quite heartening that the father of India's green revolution, Dr Swaminathan ji has convened this consultation meeting with a view to connect agriculture with nutrition.

In 2017, 151 million children under age 5 suffered from stunting (low height for their age), 51 million suffered from wasting (low weight for height), and 38 million were overweight, according to SDG Report.

In India, a considerable section of the population suffers from malnutrition consisting of under nutrition, hidden hunger caused by micronutrient deficiencies and obesity. In 2015-16, according to National Family Health Survey-4: 38.4 per cent of India's children, below the age of five, are stunted, while 35.7 per cent are underweight. With more than one-third children suffering from the problems of stunting and underweight, we need to address this problem on a war footing for the country's population to remain healthy and productive in future.

The NFHS-4 also revealed that one-fifth of women in the reproductive age group are estimated to

be suffering from chronic energy deficiency, while another one-fifth are obese. More than 50 per cent of children and women suffer from anaemia.

It is quite distressing that in spite of the efforts taken by successive governments at the Centre and in various States, the problem of malnutrition persists in India at unacceptable levels.

Some of the major contributory factors of malnutrition are the **quantitative and qualitative deficits in food intake, environmental conditions and access to health**.

Here, I would like you to remind that our founding fathers while drafting the Constitution had kept all these things in mind and made a provision in Article 47 under Directive Principles of State Policy.

Article 47 of the Constitution states that, “the State shall regard raising the level of nutrition and standard of living of its people and improvement in public health among its primary duties”.

Any approach to address the problem of malnutrition will have to pay concurrent attention to food and non-food factors that influence nutritional status.

Three types of nutritional deficiencies are observed in India:

- Calorie deficiency due to inadequate consumption of food;
- Protein deficiency due to inadequate consumption of pulses, milk, egg etc;
- Micro-nutrient deficiency (or hidden hunger) due to inadequacy of iron, iodine, zinc, vitamin A, vitamin B12 etc.

I am glad that the Indian Government is extremely concerned with the status of malnutrition in the country and has adopted The National Nutrition Strategy in September 2017 to address the problem.

This policy recognises the imperative need to have a relook at our agriculture policy. We must make agriculture nutrition-sensitive. It is critical that we explicitly make this vital connection between agriculture and nutrition.

While we have by and large achieved food security, there is an increasing recognition today that food production has to be modified to achieve nutrition security.

Our success in food production combined with our policies on Public Distribution of Food grains resulted in alleviating the problem of hunger for the marginalised sections in our country.

Yet, as the statistics show our malnutrition status is grave and it is time for us to move towards achieving nutrition security for all.

Dear sisters and brothers,

It is high time that we diversify our food production by moving away from mono cropping of major cereals to a system that integrates a variety of food items including small millets, pulses, fruits and vegetables.

Pulses cultivation will not only help in improving nutrient rich food production but also in restoring nutrient value to the soil.

On the economic side, it will reduce our import burden as nearly six million tonnes of pulses are

being imported.

Millets like Jowar, Bajra, Ragi and little millets like Kutki, Kodo, Sawa, Kangni and Cheena are known to be nutrient-rich. Since cultivation of millets require less water, efforts must be to promote their cultivation as part of crop rotation.

I am glad that the Government of India had declared 2018 as “National Year of Millets” with a view to provide nutritional security and prevent malnutrition.

Dear sisters and brothers,

Apart from encouraging nutritionally-rich crops, there is a need to create a market for such items. Promoting or supplying them through the Public Distribution System can be a good option. We need to create awareness among the people about the importance of nutritional value of food products. I would like to call upon institutions like Indian Council of Agricultural Research and Krishi Vigyan Kendras to take the lead in educating our farmers. Simultaneously, we have to build greater consumer awareness about the nutritional value of different foods so that they are able to make informed decisions.

Government, civil society, scientists and researchers must share knowledge and expertise with farmers to make agriculture sustainable and nutrition-rich. Regular monitoring of dietary consumption data of our population could help the government to initiate suitable modifications in policies from time to time.

Prof. Swaminathan’s suggestion of leveraging agriculture to achieve this goal of nutrition security is an extremely important one. Particularly so in a country such as India where a considerable section are still dependent on agriculture and allied sector.

Prof. M.S. Swaminathan has conceptualised and guided his Research Foundation to promote the Farming System for Nutrition (FSN) as one of the approaches to tackle household food and nutrition insecurity in rural India.

The concept of FSN is a sustainable framework of farming. It involves crops, farm animals and fish. In addition, this approach calls for the integration of interventions in non-farm factors like hygiene and sanitation to improve nutrition.

It addresses different human nutritional needs across gender and age groups through the life cycle.

The FSN model is a location-specific, inclusive model based on the resource endowments and specific environment that shall address the nutritional needs of families.

Underlying the concept of FSN is a principle that household food production is important to the diets of farm families, particularly small holders.

At the macro level, the concept calls for diversity in food production, moving away from mono cropping of major cereals to a system that integrates a variety of food items including small millets, pulses, fruits and vegetables.

In accordance with the suggestion given by Prof. M.S. Swaminathan for a synergetic approach to integrate agriculture, nutrition and health, the National Nutrition Strategy, 2017 of Government of India, recognises the importance of a multi-dimensional approach to address malnutrition.

This strategy envisions a role for the Ministry of Agriculture.

This recognition of nutrition-sensitive agriculture in national policy would hopefully bring about significant impact on the nutrition status of children.

I have great pleasure in inaugurating the National Consultation on leveraging Agriculture for Nutrition wish all participants' success in the deliberations.

I hope the discussions will come up with substantive recommendations which will help in reducing the malnutrition levels in our country.

Thank you

Jai Hind!"

AKT/BK/RK

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