

Make agriculture Viable, Profitable & Sustainable: Vice President

Inaugurates National Consultation on Making Agriculture Sustainable & Profitable

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The Vice President of India, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu has called for making agriculture viable, profitable and sustainable to improve the lot of farmers and ensure home-grown food security.

Inaugurating a two-day National Consultation on Making Agriculture Sustainable and Profitable at Vaikuntha Mehta National Institute of Cooperative Management, Pune in Maharashtra today, the Vice President said concerted, coordinated and focused action is required to double the farmers income in the coming years. The Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Shri Devendra Fadnavis, former Union Minister for Agriculture, Shri Sharad Pawar, renowned Agricultural Scientist, Prof. M.S. Swaminathan, former Agriculture Minister of Andhra Pradesh, Shri Vadde Sobhanadreeswara Rao, Indian Agricultural Economist, Shri Ashok Gulati, several farm experts, farmers and other dignitaries were present on the occasion.

Saying that evolving a multipronged strategy to make agriculture viable, profitable and sustainable was the main purpose of this consultation, the Vice President stressed the need to identify gaps in policy formulation. Our policies should be more pro farmer and there should be a pronounced bias towards agriculture, he added.

The Vice President emphasized that 4 Is - Irrigation, Infrastructure, Investment and Insurance sectors - need to be strengthened for an integrated development of farm sector. He further said that it was important to make agriculture sustainable through a judicious use of scarce resources like water, electricity and by avoiding indiscriminate use of fertilizers and pesticides.

Observing that populist programs like loan waivers and free power would not provide lasting solutions, the Vice President said that farmers must be provided timely credit at affordable interest rates. Farmers have to be given the latest **know-how and trained in the do-how** to improve farm productivity, he added.

The Vice President said that along with increased production, we need efficient distribution of food

grains. Only then can we move our country forward to achieve the goal of zero hunger and adequate nutrition for all, he added.

The Vice President wanted e-NAM implementation to be further streamlined and expedited. Expressing his concern over the restrictions on export of agriculture produce, he advocated to strike a balance between the interests of farmers and consumer. He said that consumers are vocal and well organize, he added.

The Vice President said that Lab-to-Land transfer of technologies need to be enhanced. Referring to the need to promote diversification of crops, he said that farmers should be encouraged to cultivate high value crops like fruits, vegetables, condiments, pulses, spices and sugarcane.

The Vice President said that it is important to encourage farmers to take up allied activities like poultry, dairy, fisheries and aquacultures to not only enhance farmers income but also to provide a cushion against the adverse impact of failed crop.

Referring to the Prime Minister's call for doubling farmer's income by 2022, the Vice President said although many initiatives were taken to boost agricultural growth, there is a need to examine if policy changes are required. Let us do some prudent thinking, apply our minds and offer solutions to improve the lot of farmers, who are the backbone of our economy, he added.

Following is the text of Vice President's address:

“Agriculture today is at cross-roads and is facing many challenges. We need to evolve multipronged strategy to make agriculture viable, profitable and sustainable. That is the purpose of this consultation.

We have made significant progress over the years. From a food deficient country at the time of our independence, we have become self-sufficient in food grains. As FAO has noted, “From 50 million tons in 1950, India's food grain production rose more than five times, to over 257 million tons in 2014-15. India is the world's largest milk producer, producing over 130 million tons annually. The dairy sector is also one of the largest employers of rural people, especially women. With an annual production of over 10 million tons, India ranks second in global fish production and aquaculture, next only to China.”

The challenges today are mainly two.

The first is to make agriculture sustainable through a judicious use of scarce resources like water, electricity as well as protect the soil by avoiding indiscriminate use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

The second is to make agriculture more profitable so that existing farmers lead a better quality of life and more young people get attracted to this profession.

Water scarcity and **falling water tables** have been a key concern in recent years. Niti Aayog's recent analysis of water use and ranking of the states on a **composite water management index (CWMI)** highlights the need to adopt agricultural practices that make optimum use of water.

Although, successive Governments have accorded priority to agriculture right from independence, the sector continues to face problems. It is time for all us to get our act together. Parliament, political parties, press, policy makers and Planning Commission should focus on an integrated approach to agriculture.

After Independence, the Father of the Nation “Mahatma Gandhi” gave the slogan “**back to villages**”. However, we have not heeded his advice. That is why we are facing the present problems.

As all of you are aware, **the Prime minister has called for doubling farmers' income by 2022**. Although, both Centre and various State Governments are taking several initiatives to boost the agricultural growth, we have to critically examine if there are any policy changes or programmatic improvements that can make them more effective.

Let us do some prudent thinking, apply our minds and offer solutions to improve the lot of farmers, who are the backbone of our economy.

It is obvious that a concerted, coordinated focused action is required on a number of issues that impact the growth of agriculture sector and the quality of life of people who depend primarily on this sector.

We cannot be complacent about the food security situation as it exists today. The growing needs of our country's increasing population require our own home-grown food security strategy as suggested by eminent scientist and **Father of Green Revolution, Prof. M S Swaminathan**.

Firstly, the four I's namely **Irrigation, Infrastructure, investment and Insurance sectors** need to be strengthened for development of farm sector. Second, **Lab- to- Land** transfer of technologies need to be enhanced. Third, strengthening of **marketing systems** is the need of the hour.

Given the small size of land holdings, it is imperative that we should enhance our productivity and focus on “intensification”.

Increased productivity is possible if farmers have greater access to knowledge, technology and credit.

We have to **innovate**.

We have to work with farmers to infuse knowledge and technology. Knowledge sharing and encouraging adoption of new technologies is an integral and key part of this eco-system. However, the most important aspect is the effective transfer of the transformative technologies to the farmers. The farmers have to be given to the latest **know-how and trained in the do-how** as well to improve farm productivity.

We need to bring a major shift from in Indian agriculture, moving it from **a low-productivity stage to a high productive level** and at the same time ensure that it is sustainable and equitable.

At the same time, **diversification of crops** must be promoted. Farmers should be encouraged to cultivate high value crops like fruits, vegetables, condiments, pulses, spices and sugarcane.

Along with increased production, we need **efficient distribution** of food grains. Only then can we move our country forward to achieve the goal of zero hunger and adequate nutrition for all.

Along with diversification we need value addition.

Scientists must work with the government's extension machinery like Krishi Vignan Kendras to advise the farmers on the cropping patterns and **post-harvest** processes and **food processing** technologies. **The Government is rightly focusing on developing rural roads, supplying reliable power, establishing godowns, cold storage facilities, refrigerated vans and market yards.** The insurance schemes kisan credit cards and the Pradhan Mantri fasal bima yojana (PMFBY) are steps in the right direction and need to be further strengthened.

Timely financial **credit** facilities at reasonable interest rates and farmer-friendly insurance policies are vital to boost agricultural growth.

Forecasting the seasonal conditions in advance, **testing the soil** and ensuring water availability will go a long way in mitigating the problems of farmers.

Selling agricultural produce and getting a fair return is a big challenge for most farmers. The farmers still rely on local markets and have to resort, very often, to distress sale. Reliable, real time information is the key. **E- NAM implementation needs to be further streamlined and expedited.**

Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) act needs to be amended by introducing single-point levy of market fee across a state and a unified single trading license.

We must enable farmers to export the produce for getting better returns. In many of our policies, consumers are given more importance because of their large number, but farmers' concerns should not be ignored. How do we balance the two conflicting interests in practical terms? That is the major challenge!

Loan waivers are not a permanent solution. In long-term, it will affect the agriculture sector and hurt the farmers.

As huge population is dependent on agriculture for livelihood, increasing the income and the purchasing power of this group is extremely important.

Friends, the major challenge is to make agriculture economically viable. The solution lies in identifying the gaps in **policy formulation**. We should make our policies more pro-farmer. Second we should streamline **implementation processes** keeping the end consumer- the farmer- always in view.

Another important aspect is to encourage farmers to take up **allied activities** like poultry, dairy, fisheries and aquaculture which can not only enhance farmers' income but also cushion them against the adverse impact of failed crop season.

As I hail from an agriculturist's family and have personal experience of the distress faced by farmers, I am eager that we should find some practical solutions to their current problems.

We have a number of success stories of farmers who have doubled their incomes. These were show cased in the Prime Minister's interaction with farmers yesterday.

The question is: how do we draw lessons from these excellent experiments and reform our governance pattern and implement a "transformative" agenda effectively across the country.

I hope in this two-day national consultation, we get some meaningful and practical solutions to improve the farming sector. We also need to come out with suggestions to fine-tune the existing policies and programmes to enhance the income of farmers.

I am happy that seniors like Shri Sharad Pawar ji along with CM of Maharashtra Shri Devendra Fadnavis ji and Sobhanadreeswara Rao garu who are passionate about the welfare of farmers are with us today. I am glad that we have in our midst Dr M.S Swaminathan ji, the father of Indian Green revolution, renowned thinkers like Prof. Gulatiji and a number of eminent Vice Chancellors, agricultural scientists, economists, researchers and policy makers as well as farmers.

I think it is appropriate that we are meeting in this institute that fosters "cooperative" effort and an institution that has the motto drawn from our ancient heritage: "Saha veeryam karavaavahai" which celebrates the spirit of active collaborative learning and collective, concerted action.

That's what India needs today.

We need a comprehensive, 360 degree perspective on the issues at hand. This can come in when experts and stakeholders come together for this kind of a brainstorming meeting, when they can ask relevant questions and seek tangible solutions. We also need swift and sincere action.

I am therefore quite hopeful that with your active involvement, we shall be able to come up with a few concrete suggestions at the end of the two day meeting.

Incidentally, we are also celebrating the International Yoga day today. In this celebration, we are also celebrating India's holistic perspective and the ability to perceive life as an integrated whole combining the physical, mental and the spiritual aspects. Yoga teaches us to focus and concentrate. It enhances our efficiency and the sense of well being. It is an attitude that can help us achieve our objectives.

I hope all of you from various organizations like CII, FICCI as well from government and the academia will focus sharply on key issues we have set out for examination. This is, I think, a labour of love, an expression that demonstrates how deeply you care for the core issues in our society.

I look forward to the outcomes of your fruitful deliberations."

AT/BK/RK

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