

FEEDING THE FARMS

Relevant for: Indian Economy | Topic: Major Crops, Cropping Patterns and various Agricultural Revolutions

© 2019 The Indian Express Ltd.
All Rights Reserved

The Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) in New Delhi — which is synonymous with the Green Revolution and has given the country blockbuster varieties such as Kalyansona and HD-2967 wheat, Pusa-1121 basmati paddy, Pusa Bold mustard and Pusa Sawani okra — has been without a full-time head for over three years now. More than 60 out of the 100-plus institutes under the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), including the National Dairy Research Institute in Karnal and the Central Institute of Cotton Research at Nagpur, are functioning with “acting directors”. Even at the ICAR headquarters, the current deputy director-generals of the crop science, animal science and natural resource management divisions are holding “additional charge”. On top of these, the Agricultural Scientists Recruitment Board itself has just one member, who is also its acting chairman.

The above administrative apathy is unfortunate. The ICAR institutions, unlike most government departments, can be credited with work that has had tangible impact on the ground. Ninety per cent or more of India’s basmati rice exports worth \$4.5 billion annually comprise improved varieties bred by IARI. The latter’s HD-2967 and HD-3086 varieties cover nearly half of the country’s 30 million-odd hectares area under wheat. Uttar Pradesh’s average cane yields going up by a third in the last five years, and the state overtaking Maharashtra in sugar production, has happened only because of the high-recovery early-maturing Co-0238 variety developed by the ICAR-Sugarcane Breeding Institute at Coimbatore. Agricultural research is one area — just as rural roads, education, community health and sanitation — where the returns from public investment are far higher than subsidies on fertiliser, electricity, water or farm credit. India will have to sustain and produce more food in the coming years, with less crop area, water and farm labour availability and rising threats from climate change, erratic rainfall and salinity. Meeting these complex challenges and also the goal of doubling farm incomes is not possible without investing more in research, including via public-private partnerships.

It is high time the ICAR itself is restructured by closing down or merging some institutes, giving more money and operational autonomy to the better-performing ones like IARI, and freeing both the apex organisation and its affiliates from the clutches of Krishi Bhawan. The ICAR must, like the Indian Space Research Organisation and Department of Atomic Energy, be brought directly under the Prime Minister’s Office. Agricultural research should be viewed as a strategic sector, and too important to be left to the whims of visionless ministers and generalist bureaucrats.

Download the Indian Express apps for iPhone, iPad or Android

© 2019 The Indian Express Ltd. All Rights Reserved

END

Downloaded from crackIAS.com

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com