

Combine Agricultural Technology with Information Technology to improve Agricultural Sector: Vice President

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Inaugurates AP AgTech Summit 2017

The Vice President of India, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu has said that combine Agricultural Technology with Information Technology to improve Agricultural Sector in the country. He was addressing the gathering after inaugurating AP AgTech Summit 2017, in Vizag, Andhra Pradesh today. The Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, Shri N. Chandrababu Naidu, the Minister for Agriculture, Horticulture, Sericulture and Agri-Processing, Andhra Pradesh, Shri Somireddy Chandramohan Reddy, the Minister for Human Resources Development, Andhra Pradesh, Shri Ganta Srinivasa Rao, the Minister for Endowments, Andhra Pradesh, Shri Pydikondala Manikyala Rao and other dignitaries were present on the occasion.

The Vice President said that agriculture plays a vital role in India's economy. Agriculture, along with fisheries and forestry contributes around 17 per cent of the Gross Value Added (GVA) during 2016-17 at 2011-12 prices, he added.

The Vice President said that we have formidable challenges confronting us and we have set for ourselves a very ambitious target of doubling farmers' income by 2022. If we have to achieve this, the progress in various sources of growth has to be accelerated by 33 percent, he added.

The Vice President said that business as usual will not do and we have to innovate, work with farmers to infuse knowledge and technology. We must use technology to enhance productivity and see that the economic benefits of increased production reach all the farmers, he added.

The Vice President said that growing needs of our country's increasing population require us to evolve our own home grown food security strategy. He further said that increased production and efficient distribution of food grains can move our country forward to achieve the goal of zero hunger and adequate nutrition for all. The AP AgTech Summit 2017 is an excellent opportunity for global leaders, start-up founders and technology experts to discuss innovative ideas for agricultural transformation in Andhra Pradesh as well as in the rest of India, he added.

The Vice President said that technology can help improve farmers' lives in a number of ways - to know the health of the soil and help him choose from a variety of crops that can be grown on the land; forecasting the seasonal conditions in advance; intensification and diversification of farming in order to increase productivity and farmers' incomes; diversify towards other allied occupations as well like dairy and forestry; conservation of water, rain water harvesting, construction of check dams, drip and sprinkler irrigation; infrastructure like rural roads, dependable quality power, godowns, cold storage facilities, refrigerated vans and market yards; food processing; timely credit facilities at reasonable interest rates and farmer-friendly insurance policies and the market. We need to work collaboratively and strategically to make a difference in the lives of our farmers and tap into the nature's bounty, he added.

Following is the text of Vice President's address:

"I am happy to be with all of you at the inaugural session of AP AgTech Summit 2017.

Ours is a country with a vast agro-ecological diversity and where 64 percent of the total workforce in the rural areas is engaged in agriculture and contributes 39 percent of total rural net domestic product.

Agriculture plays a vital role in India's economy. Agriculture, along with fisheries and forestry contributes around 17 per cent of the Gross Value Added (GVA) during 2016-17 at 2011-12 prices.

The last seventy years after independence have been years of significant growth. The country's food grain production increased by 8.7 per cent and reached a record high of 273.83 million tonnes in 2016-17.

As the Food and Agriculture Organization acknowledged:

"India is the world's largest producer of milk, pulses and jute, and ranks as the second largest producer of rice, wheat, sugarcane, groundnut, vegetables, fruit and cotton. 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."

Yet, we have formidable challenges confronting us.

We have set for ourselves a very ambitious target of doubling farmers' income by 2022. According to one estimate, if we have to achieve this, the progress in various sources of growth has to be accelerated by 33 percent".

Clearly, business as usual will not do. We have to innovate. We have to work with farmers to infuse knowledge and technology. We must use technology to enhance productivity and see that the economic benefits of increased production reach all the farmers. Combine Agricultural Technology with Information Technology to improve Agricultural Sector. Workforce in agriculture sector is declining at the rate of approximately 2 percent every year. There is a general perception that agriculture is not a good economic proposition. This perception and trend must be reversed.

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 us to evolve our own home grown food security strategy. Increased production and efficient distribution of food grains can move our country forward to achieve the goal of zero hunger and adequate nutrition for all.

The AP AgTech Summit 2017 is an excellent opportunity for global leaders, start-up founders and technology experts to discuss innovative ideas for agricultural transformation in Andhra Pradesh as well as in the rest of India. I am glad that there is a competition among innovators to come up with solutions to small farmers' problems and afterwards, the state government intends to actually roll out viable solutions across the state. I am pleased that the focus is not only on generating new ideas but also on translating good ideas into programmes. In fact, this is the need of the hour. We must learn from the best minds around the world and adapt the knowledge and skills to transform our farmers' lives.

Technology can help improve farmers' lives in a number of ways. Let me mention five crucial areas that I think are very important.

Technology can enable a farmer to know the health of the soil and help him choose from

a variety of crops that can be grown on the land. This is already being done through the Soil Health Cards. We must go beyond this by effectively transferring information and knowledge to the farmers.

First, we have to bring in a major shift 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. The productivity of most of the crops in the country is below world average **mainly because of poor access to irrigation and improved technology**.

Forecasting the seasonal conditions in advance, testing the soil and water availability 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.

We must focus on **intensification and diversification** of farming in order to increase productivity and farmers' incomes. Productivity will go up through use of high yielding varieties of seeds and efficient use of land and water. Today, high yielding varieties cover only 69 percent of the total area under cereal crops. This coverage should be expanded. Equally important is that more crops must be grown on the same land.

The farmers' incomes can be improved if, through technology, we can advise them on not only the best cropping pattern but also suggest **diversification**. Farmers must be encouraged to diversify and take up high value crops like fruits, vegetables, fibre, condiments, pulses, spices and sugarcane.

There is also a tremendous potential to diversify towards other allied occupations as well like dairy and forestry. Similarly, we need to encourage farmers to take up agro-forestry and forestry, **Irrigation** is of course the most crucial factor in which technology can greatly help. Not only should we use technology to increase the availability of water, but we should also advise the farmers on the optimum utilization of available water. Conservation of water, rain water harvesting, construction of check dams, drip and sprinkler irrigation are areas in which technological inputs will be valuable. "It is seen that even districts at same level of irrigation show large difference in aggregate productivity". Every drop of this scarce resource must be made use of optimally. As Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay said, give work to every hand and water to every land to improve the agricultural sector.

Second, in addition to irrigation, we need to focus on **infrastructure** like rural roads, dependable quality power, godowns, cold storage facilities, refrigerated vans and market yards.

A major thrust must be given to **food processing**. **Technology plays a very important role in encouraging farmers to take up entrepreneurial ventures and agro-based industries**. The farmers have to be given to the latest know-how and trained in the do-how as well.

The third area in which technology can support the transformation we are envisaging is **Marketing**.

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 key. I am glad that a new initiative called E-NAM seeks to remedy this situation by adopting an e-trading platform for agricultural commodities.

The farmers will gain if we can enable them to tap into the **export** markets as well. Technologies can help in making this transition from mere sellers in the domestic market to exporters of surplus produce.

The **fourth** and the **fifth** important building blocks of a robust ecosystem are timely **credit** facilities at reasonable interest rates and farmer-friendly **insurance** policies. Both these can be made more transparent and farmer-friendly if the power of digital technologies can be harnessed. These encourage farmers to invest in better, income-generating crops and agricultural practices and increase their incomes. The insurance cover shields the farmers against unforeseen climatic and natural disasters. The kisan credit cards and the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) are steps in the right direction and need to be universalized.

I am glad that this event is taking place in the sunrise state and in Vishakhapatnam, the smart city in the making. Government should give top priority to Agriculture. Linking rivers is the best solution for improving agricultural sector in the country.

Andhra Pradesh is one of the major producers of a number of crops in India. One of the leading producers of food grains and oilseeds, the state is also the top producer of mango, chillies and turmeric. With Horticulture growing at 16.8% and Fishing and Aquaculture at 30.1% in 2016-17, there is a significant push to augment agricultural

incomes from the Hon'ble Chief Minister. The untapped potential for aquaculture and fisheries in Andhra Pradesh is immense because of its 974 Km of coastline.

The bye line you have adopted for this summit is also apt.

In the new India we are looking forward to, we definitely need progressive farmers who adopt smart farming practices.

We need to work collaboratively and strategically to make a difference in the lives of our farmers and tap into the nature's bounty.

I hope the scientists, technology experts and policy makers as well as the programme implementers will come up with a strategy that will bring in significant, sustainable change in the agriculture landscape of Andhra Pradesh and India.

Jai Hind!"

KSD/BK

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