

PROF. M.S. SWAMINATHAN IS A VISHWAGURU IN AGRICULTURE: VICE PRESIDENT

Relevant for: Indian Economy | Topic: Agriculture Issues and related constraints

Vice President's Secretariat

Prof. M.S. Swaminathan is a Vishwaguru in Agriculture: Vice President

Accord the most favoured status to agriculture and give priority in resource allocation;

Develop climate resilient crops that can withstand extreme weather conditions;

Agricultural renaissance needed to address hidden hunger and nutritional deficiencies;

Presents the 1st World Agriculture Prize to eminent scientist Prof. M.S. Swaminathan

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The Vice President of India, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu has called the eminent Agricultural Scientist, Prof. M.S. Swaminathan is a Vishwa Guru in Agriculture, a teacher and a scholar who continues to leave his inspirational, ideational thought prints on the world. He was addressing the gathering after presenting the first World Agriculture Prize to Prof. M.S. Swaminathan, instituted by the Indian Council of Food and Agriculture, here today.

The Vice President said that Prof. Swaminathan ushered in green revolution and laid a firm foundation for India's food security. His vision and lucidity of expression have captivated more than a whole generation of agricultural scientists, he said.

The Vice President called up on the policy makers to accord highest priority to agriculture as it provides employment to more than 50% of the population. He urged them to have positive bias towards agriculture and rural areas while allocating resources.

We need to accord the most favoured status for agriculture to give impetus to the farmers and provide infrastructure, irrigation, investment, insurance and credit, the Vice President said.

Stressing the need to re-think the development paradigm and see how we can make agriculture more economically viable and attractive, Shri Naidu called for regular and effective coordination between scientists, policy makers and farmers to make it sustainable.

Concerned over the decrease in number of people engaged in agriculture, the Vice President called for concerted, coordinated action to address a number of issues that impact the growth of agriculture sector and the quality of life of people who depend primarily on this sector.

Talking on the ill effects of climate Change, Shri Naidu said that it is impacting every aspect of life including agriculture and said asked scientists and policy makers to evolve strategies to cope with the changing climate, depleting resource base and increasing food demand.

“This calls for policy changes in agriculture sector. We should focus on developing climate resilient crops. We need to develop crops that can withstand extreme weather conditions,” he said.

The Vice President said that hidden hunger and nutritional deficiencies are major challenges before the world. He said that nothing short of an agricultural renaissance and an evergreen revolution with nutrition as the main component can make us realize this ambitious goal.

The World Agriculture Prize has been instituted by Indian Council of Food and Agriculture to recognise the contribution of eminent people who served the mankind through agriculture and allied services.

The Minister for Commerce and Industry, Shri Suresh Prabhu, the Governor of Kerala, Justice P. Sathasivam, the Minister for Agriculture, Haryana, Shri Om Prakash Dhankar and representatives of Indian Council of Agriculture and Research & Indian Council of Food and Agriculture and more than 200 farmers were present on this occasion.

Following is the text of Vice President's address:

"I am extremely happy to participate in this event organized by Indian Council of Food and Agriculture to award the first World Agriculture Prize to Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, one of world's most distinguished agricultural scientists.

I am glad that the World Agriculture Prize has been instituted to recognize outstanding achievements in the field of agriculture and related sectors.

It is indeed a great honour for me to present this award to the most well known agricultural scientist of modern India who ushered in green revolution and laid a firm foundation for India's food security. It is indeed our good fortune that Dr. Swaminathan, cast in the mould of ancient seers of India, continues to guide the country and the world towards an evergreen revolution and a world without hunger.

His vision and his voice have inspired many scientists, policy planners and students to quest for excellence.

His clarity of thought and lucidity of expression have captivated more than a whole generation of agricultural scientists.

He is truly in many ways, a Vishwaguru, a teacher and a scholar who continues to leave his inspirational, ideational thought prints on the world.

I compliment the jury for selecting him for the first World Agriculture Prize.

Awards and Prizes are not new to Dr. Swaminathan. He has won countless prizes and a number of awards. The institutions that confer awards consider it a privilege he bestows on

them that he accepts these awards. Since he is an embodiment of knowledge and humility, these honours sit lightly on him.

As you all are aware, Shri Swaminathan has pioneered the introduction of high-yielding varieties of wheat and rice seedlings in the fields of poor farmers, which led to steep increase in the food production in the country and paved the way to feed millions of people.

His continuous efforts to introduce innovative lab-to-land agricultural practices have given us rich dividends. He played a key role in drawing the attention of the policymakers and agriculture scientists to protection and conservation of plant genetic resources that are crucial to maintain biodiversity.

I fondly remember his statement at a conference in Washington where he had stated that the future belongs to the countries with grains, not guns. Shri Swaminathan has worked tirelessly to ensure that quality and affordable food is available to the poor and marginalized sections of the society.

Dear delegates,

In honouring Dr. Swaminathan, you are focusing on an important theme that is of great relevance to the world today.

When Dr. Swaminathan was asked as to what the motivation was for the green revolution, he said, "the motivation was a hunger free India – an India which will not go with the begging bowl, an India which will not go on with a ship to mouth existence."

This award, therefore, is a recognition of his dedicated work in making India self-reliant in food production.

Today's program is an occasion to reflect on the current challenges in sustaining agriculture production and move towards an "evergreen revolution", as Dr. Swaminathan says, in which productivity is improved without ecological harm.

The agriculture sector needs a big push in India and in other parts of the world. It is obvious that a concerted, coordinated action is needed 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.

In India, agriculture has traditionally played a vital role in economic development and continues to do so even till this day. Agriculture, along with fisheries and forestry, is one of the largest contributors to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

The current challenge is to make it more profitable and ecologically sustainable. Being the second largest country in the world in terms of agricultural output, India is poised to take the lead in reforming the sector.

Farming or Agriculture contributes about 16% of total GDP and employs nearly 50% of the total workforce in India.

Given the nutritional deficiency in the population there is an increasing recognition today that food production has to be modified to achieve nutrition security. We should reshape the agri-food system to focus on nutrition as well.

Of late, agriculture has not been a vocation of choice, especially for the youth. The number of

people engaged in agriculture as a percentage of total employment has been steadily going down all over the world. From 43% in 1991, it is now a mere 26% in 2017. In India also, while nearly 64% of the total workforce was engaged in agriculture in 1991, it was down to 44% in 2017.

We need to re-think the development paradigm and see how we can make agriculture more economically viable and attractive. I would like to quote Dr. Swaminathan who had said, in 2001, "Agricultural progress will determine India's economic and political future. We can shape this future in a desirable direction through synergy among technology, public policy and farmers' cooperative action. Unless farming becomes both intellectually stimulating through the pathway of I.T. based precision farming, and economically rewarding through value-addition to primary produce, it will be difficult to attract or retain youth in farming".

Irrigation, infrastructure, investment and Insurance sectors need to be strengthened to support farmers. We must achieve agricultural intensification and diversification. 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.

It is important to establish coordination among agricultural research institutions, scientists and Krishi Vigyan Kendras to train and educate farmers. Techniques of precision farming, Zero budget farming must be made available to farmers.

Steps must be taken to effectively implement the 'National Agriculture Export Policy' formulated in line with the vision to double the farmers' income and increase the share of agricultural exports from the present level of about USD 30 billion to over USD 60 billion by 2022.

Here I would like to highlight the need to diversify our food production by moving away from mono cropping of major cereals to a system that integrates a variety of crops 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.

Dear friends,

We need a multi-pronged approach to address the complex interrelated issues in current agriculture scenario.

As I consider this the most crucial sector of India economy, I have initiated a National consultation on crucial issues.

We have successfully completed National consultation on making agriculture sustainable and profitable. A number of good ideas have emerged. It is clear that the government will have to take the lead, as it is doing now, to take concerted action along with other partners and stakeholders to build a facilitative eco-system to revitalize this sector. Creating adequate warehousing, cold storage and food processing facilities, enhancing access to timely affordable credit, dependable power and water resources, good quality seeds and farm equipment can make a world of a difference.

However, a major leap forward is possible only with diffusion of knowledge and skills, through technology – mediated agricultural practices. This is going to be the game changer in the next

few years. More so in the context of climate change and environmental degradation.

Dear friends, Climate change is real and is impacting every aspect of our life. Its impact on bio diversity is visible. Changes in rainfall patterns, melting glaciers, heating up of soil and rising sea levels are having a profound impact on farming as well.

We need to evolve strategies to cope with the changing climate, depleting resource base and increasing food demand.

This calls for policy changes in agriculture sector. We should focus on developing climate resilient crops. We need to develop crops that can withstand extreme weather conditions.

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, there are quite a few challenges that need urgent attention and action. It is time for all us to get our act together. The Parliament, all political parties, media and scientists should focus on an integrated approach to agriculture sector and look at productivity as well as the returns on investment. .

I believe, you have a dedicated session today to discuss the aspects and impacts of climate change and food security. I hope this august gathering will come out with new ideas to create a new momentum towards sustainable and profitable agriculture.

Of course, concomitantly, one has to look at other factors that impact agriculture like unchecked population growth and unsustainable consumption of scarce natural resources.

The world community has committed to 17 sustainable development goals to be achieved by 2030. Goal 2 is to "End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.

Nothing short of an agricultural renaissance and an evergreen revolution with nutrition as the main component can make us realize this ambitious goal.

Nourishing the 815 million people who are hungry today and many millions of children who are stunted due to malnutrition are real challenges before all of us.

I am sure visionary activists like Dr. Swaminathan will provide the illumination of possible pathways we can achieve the zero-hunger goal.

I wish you all have a productive session in which you share ideas that could transform our world and the world of our farmers for the better.

Jai Hind!"

AKT/BK/MS/RK

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