

## Current Challenges Facing Farmers and Farming

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Agriculture is a life-giving enterprise. Unfortunately, in recent years it is becoming a life taking profession as a result of the occurrence of farmers' suicides. This unfortunate transition is caused by the low economic viability of farming. This is the reason why the National Commission on Farmers (NCF) recommended steps to improve the productivity and profitability of farming on the one hand and assured and remunerative marketing opportunities on the other. Although the recommendations of NCF are nearly ten years old not much action has been taken until recently to implement them. To enhance the economic viability of farming, we should pay concurrent attention to pricing, procurement and public distribution. The Food Security Act should also be strengthened by adding the dimension of nutrition security, since population is widespread.

Among the challenges, the most urgent one relates to pricing and marketing. The Minimum Support Price (MSP) should be C2 plus 50 percent as recommended by NCF. Apart from the market, monsoon behaviour is another serious challenge to farmers. Increasingly, extreme weather events like drought and flood are increasing. The present insurance policies are not adequate to insulate farmers from losses during adverse weather condition. Managing climate change needs both technology and public policy.

Monsoon management has become urgent and we have to build gene banks, seed banks and grain banks at the level of every Panchayat. As far as the market is concerned, the central and state governments will have to play a part in ensuring remunerative and assured marketing opportunities. Assessment of MSP should be followed by steps for procurement. Farmers' are demanding more attention to pricing, procurement and public distribution. Women farmers also require more support and attention since they play a very important role in all aspects of farming, particularly post-harvest management.

In 1973 delivering the Sardar Patel Memorial Lectures of the All India Radio, I had suggested that we should develop a Good Weather Code to benefit from normal monsoon. At the same time, we should also have on hand a Drought Code and a Flood Code to ensure that either deficiency or excess of irrigation water does not cause too much loss of crops. A Good Weather Code which should be prepared at the district and panchayat level to indicate both the farming systems that should be promoted and the input supply which can be ensured. Monsoon management is the key to benefit from monsoon prediction.

Ongoing agitations by farmers are mainly to draw public and political attention to their problems. Farming is more a means to livelihood in our country and is not just a business operation. Therefore, the human dimensions of farming should not be overloaded, and steps should be taken to ensure that farmers continue to take interest in farming.

A major challenge in achieving the goals of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) is the integration of economic viability with social and environmental sustainability. This is where new ecotechnologies become important. I stressed this point in my lecture on "Agriculture the Spaceship Earth", in 1973. I advocated Gandhian agriculture where productivity can be enhanced without harm to the environment. I wish to quote the following from my 1973 Sardar Patel Lectures:

"Based on the most advanced principles of biological science, we can probably develop a Gandhian Agriculture, because this would be an agriculture where Gandhian concepts become manifested in the form of an advanced rural economy, benefiting all sections of the community. Also, this will be an agriculture which enriches and not harms the environment"

Gandhian agriculture is based on the principle of non-violence to nature. What we need today urgently is the spread of Gandhian agriculture which is the pathway to sustainable food and nutrition security.

#### **Mainstreaming Nutrition Security**

Nutrition security will require the integration of agriculture, nutrition and health. What we need is mainstreaming of nutritional criteria in farming system. I had referred this as Farming Systems for Nutrition (FSN). Such FSN should pay attention to the three dimensions of hunger viz., under nutrition, protein hunger and hidden hunger caused by the deficiency of micronutrients. In addition, we have to pay attention to clean drinking water and sanitation. All this can be done if there are sufficient efforts in the field of nutrition education and social mobilisation.

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