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AGRI BYTES

E- Weekly Newsletter

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1. Shri Radha Mohan Singh calls for more Investment and Affordable Credit for Family Farming

Minister for Agriculture Singh has called for more investment in family farms to channel affordable credit and sustainability especially to combat impact of climate change. In his message, on the eve of World Food Day, Singh has said that family farming is inextricably linked to ensuring national and global food security and is the pre-dominant form of agriculture in both developed and developing countries.

Underlining the importance of family farmers in the growth of agriculture, Singh said family farmers despite less access to productive resources efficiently manage their agriculture and record high productivity. Family farmers have not only preserved traditional food products but have also contributed to produce a balanced diet and safeguard the world's agro-biodiversity and sustainable use of natural resources. India has consistently supported small farm holders which have played a very dominant role in steady growth of agriculture, he added. The Minister has said almost 200 million hectares of gross cropped area is cultivated by small farm holders to help the country in achieving macro food security. In order to realise the full potential of family farmers in eradicating hunger and malnutrition and ensuring food security, Government of India has put in place an extensive research system involving national and state level institutions beside agriculture universities. Extension workers and cooperative societies help in educating farmers and providing inputs such as credit, seed, fertiliser etc. to family farmers. The Agriculture Minister has said that on the World food Day, all of us should resolve to strengthen family farmers keeping in view their contribution to Indian Agriculture and to ensure food security.

Every year 16th October is observed as World Food Day to mark the founding of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations (UN). The intention of observing this Day is to raise public awareness about the plight of the hungry and malnourished people all over the world and initiate comprehensive action to tackle and mitigate the menace of malnutrition and hunger. The theme selected for this year's World Food Day is Family Farming: "Feeding the World, Caring for the Earth".

2. Kerala government to encourage high-tech farming

Kerala government plans to encourage high-tech farming to increase agriculture production in the state, Chief Minister Oommen Chandy said. Speaking at the state level agriculture development Committee meeting, Chandy said when states like Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra have excelled in high-tech farming, Kerala was far behind in this kind of agriculture methods. Though this kind of agriculture method received Central subsidy and loan facilities which required only very little investment and land, people were not coming forward into this field, he pointed out. However, now more youths were coming to take up farming work and in view of this, government has decided to encourage this type of farming method, he said. Stressing the importance of organic farming, he said the state would come out with a policy in this regard.



Both paddy and coconut, the main agriculture in the state still faces crisis, he said, adding, with the introduction of "Neera drink", the crisis in the coconut farming sector has been reduced to a certain extent. On the crisis in paddy sector, he said state government was procuring paddy at Rs 19 per kg for which the Central subsidy was Rs 13.50 and state share Rs 5.50. The state's total liability on this would come to around Rs 200 crore, he said. However, farmers were of the opinion that this price was also low, the Chief Minister said, adding that in order to get more price to farmers pressure will be exerted at the Centre. With regard to vegetable sector, he said it was a matter of shame that Kerala has not yet attained self sufficiency in vegetable farming. On the crisis in rubber sector, he said rubber price in the international market was Rs 12 less than that in Kerala and issues connected with rubber would be brought up at the Centre, he said.

3. Punjab agriculture department helping farmers with welfare schemes

Traditional marketing system of fruits and vegetables is unfavorable for farmers as major share of consumer rupee is pocketed by the traders, an official of the Punjab Agriculture Department has said recently. Farmers get low price for their produce whereas the consumers had to pay higher price for poor quality products available in the markets, said a spokesman of the Punjab Agriculture Department. Punjab State Marketing Board had already started 'farmers's market' with a view to give boost to the small farmers around cities so as to provide direct access to the consumers, by eliminating the middlemen, he added. It is also known as the 'Apni Mandi' because it belongs to both the farmers and the consumers who can mutually help each other. The spokesman said offices of different departments of Punjab government relating to Agriculture at Sub Divisional Headquarters were not concentrated at one place and farmers have to shuttle from one corner of the town to another.

The Board has initiated a scheme for construction of Vikas Bhawans at all Sub-Divisional Headquarters. The work on 18 such Vikas Bhawans has already been completed at a cost of Rs 411.86 lakh. The Departments of Agriculture, Horticulture, Soil Conservation, Animal Husbandry, Food and Civil Supplies, Fisheries, Food Corporation of India, MARKFED and PUNSUP are planned to have their administrative offices located in each of these complexes.

4. Chandigarh lad wins National award for project on agriculture

City lad Sayansh Jindal added another feather to Chandigarh's cap by emerging first in the Northern Region category of the National Level Exhibition and Project Competition (NLEPC) under INSPIRE award scheme for his research project related to agriculture. The event was launched by department of science and technology. "I investigated the effect of magnets on the growth of plants. Saplings of the same type were planted in various pots with or without magnets near the roots. All conditions like soil, type of plants and sunlight were the same for all the pots. The growth of the plants was measured in terms of height for four weeks after which the data was analysed. The analysis of the study revealed that plants with magnets grew better than the plants without it," said Jindal.

"This method can go a long way in increasing crop production and providing food security," he added.

5. Agri varsity urged to adopt 100 villages for integrated farming

Poonam Malakondaiah, Principal Secretary, Agriculture, Telangana government, has suggested developing 100 model villages in Telangana to promote integrated farming to help small and marginalised farmers. Addressing the World Food Day celebrations at Prof. Jaya Shankar Agricultural University recently she said that integrated farming would help farmers to take up dairy farming, fisheries, sericulture and other allied activities along with regular farming to boost their earnings. She suggested the varsity should adopt 100 villages to promote this to help small and marginal farmers. She reminded that the same experiment was successful in production of vegetables taken up under 'Mana Vooru Mana Kooragayalu' programme by the marketing and horticulture departments. Ms. Malakondaiah also suggested to the university to offer specialised certificate courses for young farmers so that they can improve productivity and also benefit from changing farming patterns. Their success would also spread positivity in the community and lead to adoption of better practices. She asked the students to get involved in community service and said developing community radios was one of the methods of getting involved in the service. Praveen Rao, Registrar, was also present.

6. MoFPI planning new food processing policy to reduce perishable wastage

Keeping in mind the higher rate of inflation and the increasing wastage of perishables, the ministry of food processing industries (MoFPI) is planning a new food processing policy for the country. Food processing industries minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal, minister, said that the new policy was aimed at integrating the ministry's schemes better. The policy, called the National Food Processing Policy, is, however, in its incubation period currently, and the minister has stated that she is in the process of acquiring information on the subject, adding that it would take some time before it takes shape. When quizzed about the need for the policy, Badal said that there has to be some kind of policy to curb the wastage of the food, reduce inflation and create the required infrastructure. To sustain the policy, the focus should be on the latter. The minister said, "You can't have policy without back-up," and added that it would integrate such schemes as cold chains, mega food parks and food grids under one roof.

As far as inflation is concerned, the ministry is focussing on the most-consumed items. The targets are the top three commodities, including onions and tomatoes. It is aimed at identifying the producing regions to find out the requisite infrastructure, take corrective action, and check whether it has made any difference to the situation or not. "We want to do it in a targeted manner. The linkage needs to be done from farm to storage to fork," she added. Other schemes being formulated by the ministry include the cluster development scheme for processing and higher assistance for fruit and vegetables, and the Cold Chain Grid wherein the cold chains would be linked with logistics. Badal also emphasised the need to have a food map for the country.