

NEW VISION FOR AGRICULTURE

Naresh Sirohi

The government has taken a decision to provide minimum support price for all non declared crops of Kharif which will be least one and a half times the production cost. Such declaration is not enough. It is also important to ensure that the crops should also be purchased on declared MSP so that benefits accrue to the farmers. For achieving this it is necessary that if the cost of agricultural products is below the MSP the government should come forward to purchase or initiate such work plans through which MSP can be provided to the farmers.

The government has taken a decision to provide minimum support price for all non declared crops of Kharif which will be least one and a half times the production cost. Such declaration is not enough. It is also important to ensure that the crops should also be purchased on declared MSP so that benefits accrue to the farmers. For achieving this it is necessary that if the cost of agricultural products is below the MSP the government should come forward to purchase or initiate such work plans through which MSP can be provided to the farmers.

The government has completed four years on May 26, 2018. The economic policies of the government have farmer- centric focus. The Prime Minister has been reiterating the commitment made by the government to give high priority to agriculture development, increase in income of farmers and infrastructure development of rural areas and accordingly the policies of the government are made and developed. Keeping in view the interest of farmers more budgetary allocation has been made in the agriculture sector. The increase in the budget of farmers is a ground-breaking step. In the current fiscal, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley has announced that minimum support price (MSP) will be given 1.5 times the cost of various agricultural commodities. By doing so, the government has attempted to fulfil the most important promise made to the farmers.

In the last four years, several farmer friendly schemes have been initiated which include Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (Prime Minister's Crop Insurance Scheme), Mrida Swasthya Card (Soil Health Card), Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (Prime Minister Agriculture Irrigation Scheme), Rashtriya Krishi Bazaar (National Agricultural Market), Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (Traditional Agriculture Development Scheme). However, despite meaningful government schemes and programs, there is no major change in the quality of life of the

farmers. This is mainly due to the requisite support not forthcoming from State Governments as expected and slow response of the official machinery. In fact, it is not easy to set right damage to the system in such a less time. The government is however putting in all out efforts to tighten the nuts and bolts of the system.

I want to share one of my experiences here regarding the flaws of the system. While planning, care should be taken to make the scheme according to the local requirement and participation of the local people is essential in its implementation. It is a challenge for the government to supply water to every farm. But at the local level attempts are being made to fight this challenge. One such example is Mangal Singh, a farmer from Bundelkhand who has invented a turbine. This machine named Mangal Turbine is fabricated in the village. It runs with the aid of flowing stream. Generally in the rural areas where the farmers irrigate fields using diesel or electric pumps, the irrigation by using Mangal turbine is done without consuming diesel or electricity. Drinking water can also be pumped using this turbine. With some modification, the turbine can be used as flour mill, sugar cane crusher, or after adding generator can also be used to make electricity. The use of Mangal turbine saves diesel and electricity besides checking pollution.

Many well-known technical experts and officials of the country have also appreciated this invention for its wide potential. However, due to the lack of adequate state support the patent holder of this turbine is still nowhere. Government should promptly come forward to support and encourage such farmers. Most of the government schemes, which can improve the condition of farmers, are not able to percolate to the ground as they don't get the required push from the official network. The farmer who is neck deep in debt today is forced to sell his

crop below the MSP declared by the government. Farming, which is acquiring the tag of loss-making business, has compelled the farmers' associations to demand for debt waiver and implementation of the recommendations of the National Commission for Farmers (Swaminathan Commission) across the country.

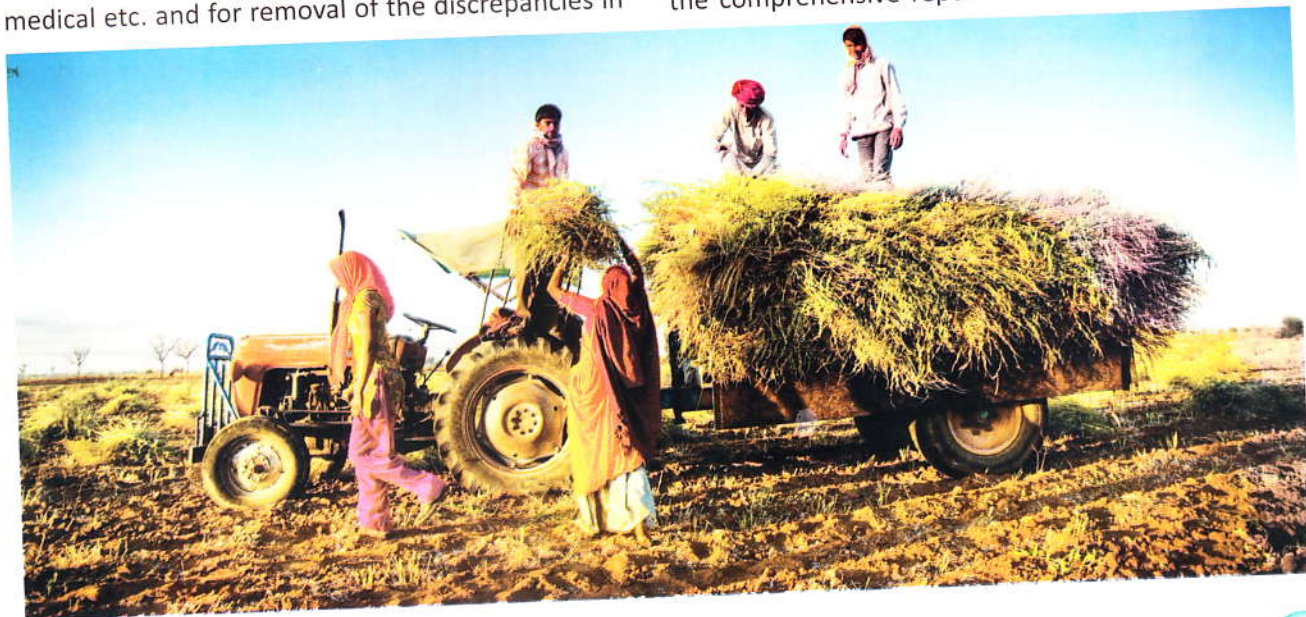
Before evaluating the work done by the government in the agricultural sector, let us have a look at the work done for farmers earlier. Only then will we be able to understand the initiatives taken by the government. In post independence years, the agricultural sector has gone through many transformations. The first period since Independence of India is from 1947 to 1968, in which the expansion of sowing area, increase in irrigation resources and the land reform laws have played a key role. The second period is from 1968 to 1980 which saw use of high yield dwarf varieties, fertilizers, pesticides and new techniques. It is called the period of the evolution of the Green Revolution. The third period is from 1981 to 1991, during which the policy of minimum support price for agricultural products and arrangement of ensured nationwide government procurement and storage and distribution took place. The fourth period is from 1991-1998, which is said to be the period of liberalization, industrialization and the establishment of the World Trade Organization. The fifth period was from 1999 to 2014.

National Commission for Farmers was constituted under the chairmanship of Prof. MS Swaminathan in November 2004 to promote traditional organic farming, development of rural infrastructure, such as road, electricity, education, medical etc. and for removal of the discrepancies in

the agriculture sector. The Commission handed over its fifth and final report to the Central Government on October 4, 2006.

After independence, there is unprecedented development in the agricultural sector. No one can deny this fact. In 1951, the food grain production was 51 million tonnes while today it has reached 277.49 million tonne mark. With foodgrains, there has been record production of fruits, vegetables, milk and fish. There are no two opinions that we have successfully achieved increased production and food security goals. However, despite this tremendous success, due to the agricultural methods adopted, many such problems arose which have brought crisis to agriculture sector and farmers. In addition to agricultural methods, agricultural conditions and policies have not fully supported the farmer. Due to the increase in population, the size of the farmer's holding has reduced. As compared to earlier times, the burden of population dependent on agricultural land has also been more than two and a half times.

As regards policies, the trend of relative prices has not been in favour of farmers. The price of agricultural products has been between 82% and 88% as compared to the price of other products. Due to this disadvantageous price system, farmers have to bear an average loss of 15 percent per annum in comparison to other sections of the economy. The direct result of this is that in almost every seven years the average income of a person engaged in agricultural work has gone down to half of the income of persons engaged in other occupations. Finding solutions of all discrepancies in the agricultural sector is awaited for long. This includes implementation of the comprehensive report of the National Farmers



Commission 1976 and the final report submitted by the National Farmers Commission (Swaminathan Commission) 2004 on October 4, 2006. This report focusing on the causes of the crises faced by the farmers and the suicides committed by them recommend formation of a national policy for them. But unfortunately, till the year 2014, no initiative has been taken to convert these recommendations in to tangible policies and pushing forward their implementation process.

This is the first time when the focus of the Government is on increasing the income of the farmers rather than the production. Consequently, meaningful efforts have been made to convert the recommendations for improving agricultural practices and agricultural conditions into concrete policies.

In fact, many important steps have been taken by the government for improving the condition of agriculture and farmers. Agriculture being the state subject, various schemes of the Centre have yielded different results in different states. In many states, the schemes have yielded positive results and the farmers have been benefited. But due to the indifference of many state governments, the results are not in line with expectations. It is worth noting that the Central Government makes important policy decisions related to agricultural produce, agricultural loans and business. Similarly, Central Government has a major role in obtaining funds for plant protection, biodiversity, food act, farmers' rights act, infrastructure in the villages and mandis and agricultural items. But due to the issue of agricultural being a State subject in the Indian Constitution, the responsibility of implementing all

the laws and schemes is of the State Governments.

Given the challenges faced by agriculture due to globalization, it is necessary to increase the role of the central government in agriculture sector. In view of all these issues, the National Commission for Farmers, in its final report, has recommended to keep agriculture in concurrent list. Considering the crises being faced by the farmers today, there is a need to review the entire process of preparing policies with regard to them.

Prime Minister is determined to actualize the concept of doubling the income of farmers by 2022. To achieve this important objective, a new direction has been given to all three divisions under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare looking after various schemes, programs and missions. The government has also constituted an inter-ministerial committee for doubling the income of the farmers. In this committee, besides representatives from business and industry, scientists, policy-makers, economists and progressive farmers have also been included. The Prime Minister has said that "I want to double the income of farmers by the year 2022, when India celebrates its 75th anniversary of independence. I have taken it as a challenge, but this is not only a challenge. This goal can be achieved through a good strategy, well planned program, adequate resources and good governance in implementation."

The government has taken a decision to provide minimum support price for all non declared crops of Kharif which will be least one and a half times the production cost. Such declaration is not enough. It is also important to ensure that the crops should also be purchased on declared MSP so that benefits accrue



to the farmers. For achieving this it is necessary that if the cost of agricultural products is below the MSP the government should come forward to purchase or initiate such work plans through which MSP can be provided to the farmers. Niti Aayog will set up such a mechanism in consultation with the central and state governments, so that the farmers get adequate price of their products.

Keeping in mind the C-2 formula of the farmers to fix MSP, a ministerial group has been constituted under the chairmanship of Home Minister Rajnath Singh, which will soon express its views on this subject. In fact, this decision will prove to be a milestone for agriculture sector and farmers. In order to protect the farmers from natural calamities and other losses, old scheme has been modified and given the new name Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (Prime Minister's Crop Insurance Scheme). Premium has been reduced in this scheme and the process of payment of claim has been made easier. Further, the budget of this scheme has been increased by 44.59 percent i.e. from Rs 9000.75 crores to 13014.15 crores in the year 2018-19.

In order to improve the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, the Comptroller and Auditor General, i.e. CAG's report, should be considered seriously. The CAG report, while focusing on the irregularities and shortcomings in the implementation of crop insurance schemes by the financial institutions, said that farmers lose the claims of insurance due to sheer negligence by the banks. The agencies entrusted with implementation of crop insurance schemes have rejected farmers' claims due to shortcomings in the proposals sent by the banks regarding insurance.

There are instances that banks did not deposit the claims of compensation to the beneficiary's account. That is why the CAG has suggested the government that the statement of account of all these private insurance companies should be made public as they are given huge amounts of funds from public money collected through taxes. Important works like crop cutting and TRS (Timely Recording Scheme) need to be transacted with more timeliness and seriousness in deciding compensation for crop insurance as this work is considered to be very important in terms of agriculture. The damage to the crops is detected by the results of the samples of crop cutting. They also help in assessing the actual condition of production and productivity of main crops.

Under the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana 'Water for every farm', there has been an increase in irrigation resources and the land under irrigation has also increased. Work is also progressing at fast pace in micro-irrigation. A special budget has also been allocated for this. So far about 10.48 crore Soil Health Cards have been distributed. However, how many farmers are using nutrients according to this Card, there is no data available in this regard. But 100 percent target of neem-coated urea has been achieved.

On one hand, this has benefitted the farmers who were perturbed due to the shortage of urea while on the other hand, the diversion to the urea industry has stopped and subsidy of government is saved. Through Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (Traditional Agriculture Development Scheme) native traditional techniques are being promoted. The production and productivity at all levels has been maintained and dependence on chemicals and fertilizers has been reduced. Work has also been started to digitize Land Records and in many states this work has progressed very well. In Telangana, after digitizing the record, work is in progress to link them with Aadhaar. There has also been a big transformation in the field of rural electrification. During the last four years, more than five and a half lakh kilometers of roads have been constructed in the villages of the country, which has resulted in better connectivity to the farmers' market. Obviously, easy access to the mandi and market will give the farmers more benefits for their crops.

In last four years, schemes related to agriculture and farmers can be called a good beginning by the government. During the implementation of the schemes, many practical problems will emerge and there will always be a scope for their improvement, which should also be carried out from time to time. At present, the condition of farmers is not satisfactory and there is a lot to be done for them. The government has the spirit to do earnestly for the farmers. The government has not only devised excellent and concrete policies and programmes in the interests of the farmers, but also made all out efforts to implement them meaningfully. The nation will witness the positive outcome in the days to come.

*(The author is an expert in issues related to Agriculture and Farmers' Affairs and Founder Adviser of Doordarshan Kisan Channel.
Email: nnareshsirohi@gmail.com)*