

A REVIEW

Issues and challenges in Indian agriculture

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ABSTRACT

Agriculture is considered to be the backbone of Indian Economy; it is considered to be one of the prime moving factors of economy and is responsible for generating huge dividends in the form of revenue. In spite of high growth rate of Indian economy, it is still not in good shape, there are many issues and challenges that are paid little attention. India is one of the chief suppliers of items like spices, pulses, saffron and milk, it contributes a major chunk to the GDP of nation, it impacts the lives of majority of Indians, however the figures are coming down. This paper tries to identify the major issues and challenges of Indian agriculture and what can be the possible solutions.

KEY WORDS : Indian agriculture, Challenges, Issues, Solutions

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Indian economy is partially dependent on agriculture. The population is involved in one kind of farm activity or other. These include horticulture, pisciculture, Floriculture or animal husbandry. One cannot deny the fact that after the infusion of Green Revolution, production of crops has tremendously increased. A huge slice of Indian population still lives below poverty line and is somehow facing malnutrition. Most of the regions which receive scant rainfall are yet to experience decent improvements in productivity and rural income. People who reside in remote and backward areas still suffer

from lack of access to basic services like finance, extension and inputs. This has resulted a distress among rural population. Farmers are confined to small holdings of land and this has led to the increase in small and economically non feasible holdings. This is responsible for producing more food from limited sources. There are lacunae that need to be fulfilled to minimize the burden on limited and stressed natural resources. The infrastructure too does not support in the increased yield. Although for the last few years, there has been a diversification of high value varieties of fruits and vegetables, yet the rising demand for food items has led to a phenomenon of food inflation. What adds to the existing stock of challenges for Indian farmers is increasing deregulation of trade. They are compelled to sacrifice on quality and prices of products before exporting to domestic and foreign markets.

Most of the times, farmers are sometimes made to produce according to the demand and quality standards,

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this has led to the increase in the expansion of farming agreements. It should be however kept in mind that growers should not be exploited. What can be done is the innovation in crop technologies.

Pal and Jha (2007) in their study revealed that the participation of private sector in R & D is on increase, the biggest investment is in chemicals and food processing.

According to the planning commission (2011) some of the private sector research and industry focus their attention on crops that have a good market value, as a result of this; most of the crops get lax attention.

Government of India (2011) reported that the speedy expansion of super markets and agricultural goods has led to the rising demand of food items and slower supply in most of the commodities.

METHODOLOGY

The data has been collected from various secondary sources like research papers, review papers, journals, articles, libraries and syndicated sources.

Major issues of Indian agriculture:

The problems faced by India agriculture are either natural or manmade; some of the problems that Indian agriculture faces are listed below:

Small and unorganised land holdings:

The biggest threat to the Indian agriculture is the unorganised sown area that is distributed into seemingly small and scattered pieces of land, this is difficult to manage. The problem does not seem to end here as small holdings continue to occupy land and make the whole system disturbed. This problem is more rampant in thickly populated areas like Kerala, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The reason for such a sorry state of affairs is inheritance laws where small piece of land is distributed among many sons. This is one of the major reasons of low agricultural productivity. The entire process becomes very time consuming in moving manure, fertilizers, seeds and cattle from one piece of land to another. Another reason is that of irrigation which an issue in small fields becomes. A huge portion of fertile land gets wasted in this process. This problem can be solved by integration of these small land holdings and creating farms that are bug instead of small patches of land. This problem can be solved by pooling the land together by farmers and

collectively working on them. They can share the profits later.

Problems related to seeds:

In order to attain good yield of crops, one of the basic requirement is that of quality seeds. Seeds are crucial for attaining good crop yield; it is unfortunate to note that most of the farmers do not have access to quality seeds which affects their produce. The seeds are priced high and marginal farmers do not afford at such hiked rates thus quality is compromised. To counter this problem, Government established NSC and SFCI to augment the selling of quality seeds to farmers. Also an initiative in the form of launching High Yielding Variety Programme (HYVP) in 1966 was introduced to increase the production of food grains in country. Improving seed variety can better the production and help achieving diversity in varieties that meet the needs of myriad climatic zones of India.

Problems related to manures and fertilizers:

Indian people have been growing crops on land for thousands of years and do not care much for its replenishment. This has led to the depletion and exhaustion of quality soils and often results in low productivity. Using quality manures and fertilizers can however solve this problem. Manures do the same role to soils that nutrition does to humans. Well nourished soils can deliver great results in terms of improved productivity and it can lead to about seventy per cent of growth in terms of production. Most of the Indian farmers use cow dung as manures, chemical fertilizers are costly and poor farmers find it difficult to afford that. In order to maintain the quality of the fertilizers, 52 fertilizer quality control laboratories have been set up in different parts of the country. In addition, there is one Central Fertilizer Quality Control and Training Institute at Faridabad with its three regional centres at Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai.

Problems related to irrigation:

India holds the record of being second largest irrigated country after China. Irrigation is pivotal in a tropical country like India because people here cannot rely much on rains which is indispensable for sustained growth. There can be problems of over irrigation also and care must be taken to safeguard the harmful effects

of over or under irrigation.

Dependence on manual labour:

Most of the parts of country yet to see the light of mechanisation in agriculture. Dependence on humans for activities like ploughing, irrigating, weeding, harvesting or threshing is a barrier in achieving good results. It results in wastage of human labour as these jobs can be done with the help of machines in a better way. Mechanization of such operations is required to stop wasting labour force so as to make farming convenient and efficient. Mechanization improved significantly after independence and supply of uninterrupted power is needed to achieve his objective. This increase was the result of increasing use of tractor, power tiller and combine harvesters, irrigation pumps and other power operated machines. The share of mechanical and electrical power has increased from 40 per cent in 1971 to 84 per cent in 2003-04. Strenuous and continued efforts should be made to encourage the farmers to adopt technically advanced agricultural equipments in order to carry farm operations timely and precisely and to economise the agricultural production process in a better way.

Marketing of agricultural produce:

Marketing of agricultural produce is still a big issue for rural India. The absence of sound marketing facilities increases the dependence on local traders and agents for supplying the goods to designated markets and they charge huge prices. This causes the distressed sale of produce. To meet the needs of debt, poor farmers have to sell their produce at meagre price which exploits them. In an organised marketing setup, private lenders and middlemen won't be able to dominate the markets which otherwise take away more than 45 per cent of price. Thus regulation of markets becomes imperative in this scenario and Government should come out with such regulations that help in eradicating malpractices and ensure standardised weights and measures.

Lack of storage facilities:

This problem is mostly found in rural India where storage facilities are inadequate. Farmers sell their produce soon after the harvest at the prevailing prices. Storage facilities are very important to avoid losses and to benefit both the farmers and the consumers.

Problems related to transport:

The lack of efficient and cheaper means of transport is also one of the challenges faced by Indian agricultural setup. There are numerous villages at present that are not connected properly with highways or main roads. As a result of this, farmers cannot reach and explore the untapped markets that can fetch them good prices and reaching out to places without having adequate means becomes a challenging task.

Inadequate capital:

Running a successful agricultural setup requires capital, with the improvements in farm technology; role of capital is becoming more important. Most of the capital is locked up in assets like land and stocks which make people borrow from others. Farmers approach lenders, commission agents which provide interest at exorbitant rates and interest.

Supply chain bottlenecks:

Agricultural supply chain is one of the most important aspects of agriculture. But it is full of loopholes which makes it inefficient. Sometimes involvement of so many people in a supply chain makes it inefficient. Plus the farmers have to sell their produce at whatever price they are provided, the government can come into play by regulating the market and have structured grievance settlement setup.

New challenges to Indian agriculture:

Indian agriculture is still in doldrums, no matter a lot of effort and finances have gone into improving the conditions but a lot more needs to be done. One of the major challenges is that of climatic conditions. Farmers have to meet the growing demands of people in shorter span of time. They need to speeden up their production in shorter span of time. In rural India, people are illiterate, conservative and superstitious, they are hesitant to adapt to new practices and technologies that can improve their produce. Also India is a thickly and densely populated country; the pressure on land is too much which is responsible for further fragmentation of uneconomic holdings. What adds to the misery of Indian farmer is Land Tenure system which involves Zamindari system; here stakeholders exploit growers in form of rent, ownership and malpractices.

Discussion:

From the above challenges, one can conclude that Indian agricultural set up is riddled with problems at present; however each problem can be tackled with planning, strategising and prioritizing. Much attention should be paid towards making India self sufficient in terms of agriculture and steps should be taken to overcome all the problems mentioned above. It cannot be achieved in few months, but starting out is the key. Farmers can start out by growing crops that yield a higher produce and are easily available. Dependence on traditional crops can be lowered and seed banks can help farmers achieve this goal. Also, farmers should be supplied with timely and reliable market information supply chains should be improved, storage facilities should be looked after to improve the overall agriculture in India. Focus on improving the overall yield is important which can be achieved by improving infrastructure, use of improved technologies, improving soil fertility and preventing erosion.

Limitations of study:

The present study is based on the secondary sources of data and no statistical tool has been used. Also, it gives a theoretical approach of study which does not enhance the statistical value of study.

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