Doubling of Farmers’ Income by 2022 - How can India achieve this?

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Theme:-
- In Union budget 2017-18, the target was set to double the farmers’ income by 2022.

Why do we need to double farmers income?
- India is still an agriculture economy. Agriculture employs 50% of the Indian workforce but contributes only 17-18% to the country’s GDP. Improvement in this sector would mean improvement in GDP.
- Due to low incomes, Indian farmers are in distress. India has witnessed 5 farmers protests (large scale) in the last 2 years, with 4 of them in the year 2018 alone and suicide rates have also increased, every 30 minutes, an Indian farmer commits suicide.
- Indebtedness among farmers is at an all-time high.

All the above problems are due to the fact that farmers haven constantly underpaid in India. For the past 45 years, the Centre’s minimum support price (MSP) of wheat has risen 19 times during this period, salaries in government jobs have increased 120-150 times. The 7th Pay Commission gives employees 108 kinds of allowances; MSP calculations include none.

What should be done?

The key motive should be to make the agricultural sector self-sufficient and wean it off government crutches.

- Implementation of Swaminathan commission: National Commission on Farmers under the chairmanship of Prof. M.S.Swaminathan submitted a report on farmers’ distress and their solutions in October 2006. Government has failed to act on its recommendations.
- Improved cold storage facilities: Storage facilities are mostly absent or inadequate for farmers in India, as a result, they have to sell their produce to avoid them from
rotting or attack from insects and pests. Due to this hurry, they end up selling their produce to middlemen at a price which was even less than their investment.

- Instead of providing the farmers with loan waivers, the government should provide them cash, so that it can be readily used, and if all goes well the farmer will be able to pay back the loan.

- **Educating farmers:** Farmers should be made aware of the modern agricultural practices, they should be taught which crop will be suitable for them to grow according to the climate of their area, using the internet and other digital apps etc. for weather prediction and factoring other variables too.

- **FPOs:** They are one of the best ways to improve the income of farmers. According to the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation, the FPO has emerged as the “most appropriate institutional form around which to mobilise farmers and build their capacity to collectively leverage their production and marketing strength.”

- **Technology-enabled solutions:** Recently, technology has also reached out to our distressed farmers. A host of apps have come into existence to free the farmers from their perils. Apps like Mandi Trades have brought entrepreneurs’ attention towards the agriculture sector.

- **Roping in the Corporates:** Agriculture has long been a field left untouched by the private sector. Perhaps, a model can be worked out where private sector entities can provide irrigation facilities at subsidised rates to farmers, taking charge of particular regions.

- Proper implementation of government insurance schemes.

- **Setting up organised market:** In the absence of organised market and other facilities, the farmers have to depend upon middlemen to dispose off their produce ASAP after their harvest as they have to pay their debts, rents and meet other commitments. Most of the small farmers are forced to sell their produce to the local moneylenders in the village itself at whatever price is offered to them. The government needs to come up with an organized market structure for the farmers to improve their conditions.

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