



Zero Budget Natural Farming

Description

Theme:-

- In the 2019's Union Budget, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced that the Indian government will promote 'Zero Budget Natural Farming', as a part of its efforts towards doubling the farmers' income by 2022.

What is Zero Budget Natural Farming:-

- 'Zero Budget Natural Farming' (ZBNF) or 'Subhash Palekar Natural Farming' (SPNF) is a set of natural farming methods. These methods are put together by Padma Shri Awardee 'Subhash Palekar', who is a farmer and also an agricultural scientist.
- This approach is based on 4 pillars.
 - **Jeevamruta** – A mixture of cow dung, cow urine, jaggery & pulse flour is sprayed on soil. It provides nutrients to the soil.
 - **Beejamruta** – A mixture of cow dung, cow urine, a powerful natural fungicide, a strong anti-bacterial liquid, lime and soil is coated to the seeds.
 - **Mulching** – Dead matters of any living organism (plants, animals, etc) are used to cover the soil. It helps in water retention of the soil.
 - **Waaphasa** – Healthy microclimate for air and water vapour is created in the soil to reduce water usage.
- It was called as Zero Budget because the small investment it requires is compensated by intercropping, which means growing two or more crops next to each other at the same time.

Pros of Zero Budget Natural Farming:-

- The third agricultural revolution, which is also called as 'Green revolution' resulted in heavy use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Chemical-based farming results in soil health deterioration, heavy water usage for crops and high input costs. Organic farming was started as a solution to this. But it requires large amounts of manure & vermicompost. So, organic farming is quite expensive

. But Zero-Budget Natural Farming approach will require very less input costs and restores soil health and produces high nutritious food.

- We are witnessing farmer suicides from the past few years in several parts of the country. This is mainly because of high input costs involved in farming. To raise capital, they are forced to take loans and if the crop fails due to various reasons, they are opting for suicides. Zero Budget Natural Farming will prevent farmers from getting trapped in a vicious cycle of debts.
- At present, most of the farmers in India are following chemical-based farming. But the food produced by excessive use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides can cause serious health problems when consumed. So, there is a need to address this, and Natural farming can be a solution for this.
- Even though organic farming produces healthy and nutritious food, it produces greenhouse gases and thereby contributes to climate change. So, the best alternative is ZBNF.
- With ZBNF, government do not have to spend crores of rupees on loan waiver schemes.

Challenges of Zero Budget Natural Farming:-

- ZBNF is a cow-based farming practice. So ZBNF will result in an increase in the number of cows. But cows produce Methane, Nitrous Oxide & Ammonia, which are greenhouse gases and hence contributes to climate change. Methane is more efficient at trapping radiation than carbon dioxide, which is another greenhouse gas. Comparatively, methane is 25 times more powerful than Carbon dioxide. Nitrous Oxide is 300 more powerful than Carbon dioxide. And hence it is not a totally safe option.
- The name – ‘Zero Budget Natural Farming’ is confusing. If anyone hears the name for the first time, he/she will think that this approach requires no investment. But it requires investment to spend on labour, cow maintenance and water. The costs are very low when compared with other forms of agriculture, but it is not completely zero. To avoid this confusion, ZBNF was renamed as Subhash Palekar Natural Farming (SPNF). But, it was announced as ZBNF in budget 2019.
- In the 1960s, the Green revolution increased food grain production with the aim of achieving food security and prevented famines. At present India's population is increasing. So we need an abundant food supply. This may not be possible if we completely switch to natural farming.

Conclusion:-

Even though several natural farming methods are in use from the past few years, they weren't known to many. And as a result, many farmers are still following chemical-based agricultural-based practices. As the importance of natural farming is reiterated in the budget, it gained wide popularity. This is a very good step. There is a need to conduct training programs all over India to help farmers in switching to natural farming methods. But depending entirely on one agricultural approach is quite risky. More efforts are needed by the government to research on other natural farming methods to find alternatives to cow-based agriculture.

Your Turn...

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