

Proceedings of the meeting taken by Shri Siraj Hussain, IAS, Secretary to Govt. of India, Department of Agriculture and Cooperation to review the progress under major Flagship programmes of GoI on 08-08-2015 at Haryana Niwas, Sector 3, Chandigarh

A meeting was held in the Haryana Niwas, Chandigarh on 08-08-2015 at 12.00 noon under the Chairmanship of Sh. Siraj Hussain, IAS, Secretary to Govt. of India, Department of Agriculture and Cooperation to review the major programmes of Ministry of Agriculture. The following were present:

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MIDH
- i. Sh. Sanjeev Chopra, IAS, Joint Secretary (NHM), Government of India.
 - ii. Sh. Sanjay Lohiya, IAS, Joint Secretary (Crops), Government of India
 - iii. Sh. K.S. Pannu, IAS, Secretary (Irrigation), Government of Punjab
 - iv. Dr. Deepinder Singh, IAS, Secretary, Punjab Mandi Board
 - v. Dr. B.S. Sidhu, Commissioner Agriculture, Punjab
 - vi. Sh. Daljit Singh, IAS, Special Secretary Agriculture, Government of Punjab
 - vii. Dr. S.K. Jain, Regional Director, Central Ground Water Board, Chandigarh
 - viii. Dr. Mangal Singh Sandhu, Director Agriculture, Punjab
 - ix. Dr. Gurkanwal Singh, Director Horticulture, Punjab
 - x. Dr. Balwinder Singh, Director Research, PAU, Ludhiana
 - xi. Sh. R.K. Garg, Chief Engineer, Water resources and Planning, Government of Punjab
 - xii. Sh. S.S. Grewal, Managing Director, Punjab Water Resources Management and Development Corporation Limited, Chandigarh
 - xiii. Dr. Rakesh Sharda, Principal Investigator, PDFC, PAU, Ludhiana

2. The Chair welcomed the participants and initiated the discussions on Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY). He informed the implementation of the scheme will start from 2016-17 and the major thrust of this programme will be 'Har Khet Ko Pani' and 'More Crop Per Drop'. He desired that for implementation of this scheme, the District Irrigation Plans will have to be prepared.

3. The Secretary Irrigation, Punjab informed that three districts of the State viz. Hoshiarpur, Jalandhar and Moga have been selected under PMKSY. He

further informed that the State is facing a serious problem of declining water table as the groundwater is a major source of irrigation and due to its over-exploitation, 110 development blocks of the State have been identified as critical. The State has initiated a programme to diversify the cropping pattern away from paddy to less water consuming crops to arrest the decline in water table. Further, the State has also enacted and implemented The Punjab Preservation of Sub-soil Water Act to ensure a shift in the crop calendar for paddy to achieve conservation of irrigation water.

4. The Chair desired to know about the feasibility of increasing the area under kharif pulses and oilseeds as a part of Diversification Programme as it will help in import substitution. Director Research, PAU informed that the major pulse crop during kharif is moong-bean but because of rainy season it suffers from yellow mosaic virus attack which results in low productivity. He further informed that large scale trials for production of soybean are being held at farmers fields and in case of success some area can be diverted from paddy to soybean. Commissioner Agriculture further informed that due to rains at the time of maturity, there is more vegetative growth which also affects productivity. Further, due to non-uniform maturity, it is difficult to mechanize its harvesting. The farmers are reluctant to allocate more area to pulses because of labour problems and poor returns. More research on application of GM technology to pulse crops particularly moong-bean and pigeon pea can help in increasing the area under these crops.

5. Joint Secretary (Crops), GoI desired to know about the installation and performance of maize dryers installed under Crop Diversification Programme. Commissioner Agriculture informed that 4 dryers at a cost of Rs.32.00 crore and 5 dryers at cost of Rs.25.00 crore were approved under the programme. A sum of Rs.57.00 crore was released to Punjab Mandi Board for this purpose but to-date 7 dryers (2 of 64 TPD capacity and 5 of 24 TPD capacity) have been installed at a cost of Rs.52.85 crore. He further informed that these maize drying centres are working successfully. Earlier the farmers had to suffer losses by way of distress sale of their produce which usually

contained more moisture content than the permissible limit. Now, they are getting Rs.300 to 400/- per quintal more by selling their produce almost at MSP after drying it at these maize drying centres @Rs.60 per quintal. During the last two years, about 1.09 lac quintals of maize i.e. 0.44 lac quintals in 2014-15 and 0.65 lac quintals in 2015-16 has been dried at these centres to-date. Regarding the issue of excess expenditure by Punjab Mandi Board, he informed that the balance Rs.4.15 crore have been refunded by Punjab Mandi Board to the Department of Agriculture and the issue is likely to be sorted out shortly.

6. The Chair further informed that a special programme is being started during 2015-16 with an initial outlay of Rs.450 crore for arresting the decline of water table in about 1000 over-exploited blocks of the country. He desired to know about the interventions which could be made in these blocks during this year so that the out-comes could be measured.

7. Secretary Irrigation, Punjab suggested that the marketing support for crops alternate to paddy can bring a marked shift in the decision of farmers to allocate area to various crops. For this purpose, a Market Stabilization Fund needs to be created to compensate the loss to the agencies carrying out market support operations which in case of profit should contribute back to the fund. The Chair remarked that the sowing of kharif crops in the current season is already over so it may not be possible to pin-point the outcomes.

8. Commissioner Agriculture, Punjab suggested that during this year it will be possible only to make technical interventions viz. laying of underground pipeline systems for conveyance of water, precision land leveling, raised bed planting etc. The maintenance of canal irrigation system can also contribute in reducing the burden of ground water. The outcome of these interventions can be measured in terms of reduction in rate of decline of water table. He further suggested that the area to be covered under the programme is quite large (110 out of 142 blocks), as such the resources shall be thinly spread over a large area and it will be difficult to quantify the outcomes. He suggested that instead overexploited

blocks, the programme should focus on 'Notified Blocks' i.e. the development blocks where stage of ground water development is more than 175%.

9. Regional Director, Central Ground water Board informed that the Central Ground Water Authority has notified about 167 blocks in the country as super critical on account of groundwater utilization being more than 175% and out of these, 44 fall in Punjab and that too in these selected districts i.e. Hoshiarpur, Jalandhar and Moga.

10. Commissioner Agriculture, Punjab requested that the new scheme should be restricted to the 44 'Notified Blocks' in the State. This will avoid a thin spread of the resources and working in these blocks will reduce the area of operation the scheme and may lead to quantifiable benefits. He further informed that some steps to utilize the treated sewerage water for irrigation have already been taken by the State. 9 STPs are working/have been planned in these districts and the treated water from these STPs will be used for providing supplementary irrigation.

11. Secretary irrigation informed that during the rainy days, the canal water is not much in demand and thus this water can be used for recharging the groundwater by using bore well recharge technology at the tail ends of the canal outlets. He also suggested that in Command Area Development and Water Management Programme guidelines, the laying of underground pipelines may also be included as a component under Micro Irrigation.

12. The Chair appreciated the suggestions and asked JS (NHM), GoI to look into these while framing the guidelines for release of funds under the new scheme. He suggested that ten blocks may be selected where the benefits of the different technologies can be demonstrated.

13. While reviewing the progress under RKVY, the JS (NHM), GoI informed that CAG has made some observations regarding utilization of funds under this scheme in its report. He desired that the replies to these observation should be submitted promptly to DAC. Director Agriculture and Director Horticulture, Punjab assured that the replies will be submitted by 31st August, 2015.

14. During the review of progress of issue of soil health cards, Director Agriculture, Punjab informed that 27311 soil health cards (SHCs) have been issued during the year and he has requested the Government of India, to reduce the target of issuing 278509 SHCs to 176000 SHCs due to lack of infrastructure and man power. The Chair remarked that since it is a Flagship programme launched by Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, the targets fixed for the State will have to be achieved. For this purpose, the State may outsource the work as provided in the guidelines of the programme. JS (NHM), GoI suggested that Director Agriculture should explore the possibilities of involving other public sector agencies such as IFFCO, KRBHCO in setting-up of Soil Testing Labs in their service centres so that the targets may be achieved.

15. JS (NHM), GoI desired to know the progress under MIDH. Director Horticulture, Punjab informed about the progress under various MIDH activities. Explaining the bottlenecks in growth of horticulture he emphasized on need to reduce the share of middleman in the consumer rupee, whereby both consumer and farmer are being exploited. Citing an example of kinnow marketing, he shared that kinnow price realized by the farmers is meager as compared to prevailing sale prices in the market. He suggested that a market intelligence wing for advance prediction of prices as per market demand be established. JS (NHM), GoI suggested that some aggregator may be appointed so that the farmers get the right price of the produce. The Secretary (A&C) suggested that the farmers of the State should be encouraged to use e-platform created by SFAC for marketing of horticultural produce. Secretary, Punjab Mandi Board informed that the issue of

amendment of APMC Act is under active consideration of the State Government. The Chair desired that both Director Horticulture and Secretary Mandi Board should work to encourage use of e-platform at Azadpur Mandi, New Delhi. He also asked PAU scientist to educate the farmers regarding judicious use of chemicals for plant protection so as to improve the quality of horticultural produce and its acceptability in the market.

16. Secretary Irrigation, Punjab highlighted the issue of declining standards of the agricultural education being imparted by private institutions. He also suggested that a National Policy may be formulated to ensure availability of good quality bio-fertilizers to the farmers. Commissioner Agriculture informed that the process of setting-up of a regulatory agency viz. State Council for Higher Agriculture Education has already been initiated.

The meeting ended with a vote of thanks to the Chair.