

## AIR Spotlight - Measures for Agrarian Development and Doubling the Farmers' Income

AIR Spotlight is an insightful programme featured daily on the All India Radio Newsonair. In this program, many eminent panellists discuss issues of importance which can be quite helpful in [IAS exam](#) preparation. In this article, the topic of discussion is the measures taken by the government for agrarian development and doubling farmers' incomes.

### Participants:

1. Harbir Singh, Agriculture Expert.
2. Sanjeeb Mukherjee, Journalist.

### Context:

An ambitious target was announced on 28th February 2016 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who had said that by the time India celebrated its 75th Independence Day in 2021, farmers' income would have doubled. As we are approaching the deadline, a critical evaluation of the efforts is required to assess the progress so far.

### How did the announcement change the policy focus?

Earlier our entire policy focus revolved around the production part but now it has changed to farmer's income. We have become more than sufficient and self-reliant in various crops thanks to the focus on production but we have to see whether, in similar proportion, the farmer's income is going up or not. Therefore, the paradigm shift in terms of focus on farmer's income from production is needed from the policy think tanks.

### What should be the approach towards doubling farmer's income?

The quantum jump towards doubling farmer's income requires a change in approach from the one taken earlier in terms of increasing the production and procurements at higher prices through [MSPs](#). This approach has its limitations because beyond a point you cannot increase the income of the farmer by higher price keeping in mind not only the cost of production but domestic as well as international market situations. Therefore, a multipronged approach is required which may include:

1. Better irrigation infrastructure to convert a piece of land into two-crop land
2. A variety of crops
3. Better seeds
4. Agricultural management

5. Availability of nutrients
6. Timely dissemination of agricultural knowledge

These measures have been recommended also by the committee on doubling farmer's income (DFI) in its voluminous report.

**In the light of the recommendations of the committee on DFI and also statistics from MoSPI, should we focus more on the allied activities to achieve the target?**

This target is really hard to achieve by just focussing on conventional crops so a multisectoral approach focussing on allied activities such as dairy farming, fisheries, apiculture, etc. is absolutely required going forward. We are actually amongst the largest producers of milk in the world and the value is more than our entire crude oil production; the growth in this sector is also good. The grain production area has been saturated and plateaued and shifting to allied activities such as dairy and fisheries is needed as they have huge potential. Also, these sectors are getting more organised and fewer middlemen are involved with every passing day. The horticulture sector is another area that has already surpassed grain production and with the addition of newer varieties of fruits and vegetables along with societal prosperity, the demands for these commodities will increase in future, and therefore lead to a cascading effect on increasing the farmer's income.

**How far will the direct income support through PM Kisan of the centre or similar schemes of states play a role in this endeavour?**

Given that around 90% of our farmers are in the small and marginal category, such schemes do act as an income surety in times of need such as during sowing or nutrient purchase. However, the experts recommend a targeted approach for it to become a gamechanger. For example, farmers in Chhattisgarh get an input subsidy of Rs 10,000 per acre for cultivating some crops identified by the government other than paddy like kodo-kutki, sugarcane, maize, soybean, pulses, oilseeds, aromatic paddy, other fortified varieties of paddy or carry out tree plantations in place of paddy in the same land. So a combined strategy of some direct objectives and also some universal benefit transfer is required. Incentivising a targeted section of farmers to go for [crop diversification](#) such as oilseeds where our import dependency is huge and we have scope to improve, along with some universal benefit for marginal farmers who don't have the wherewithal as of now, is the way to go.

**Evaluating the agricultural growth till now, as we approach the 75th anniversary of our independence, what are the basic challenges in our agriculture?**

The most important challenge is how we can increase our farmer's income. For this the path that we should take should keep in mind:

1. Adoption of technology

2. Crop diversification
3. Increased productivity
4. Environmental degradation
5. Agricultural sustainability
6. Farmer's income

Agriculture is of strategic importance to us, it is still the largest job provider in the country. Food security is the real security for any country. So, we need to keep agriculture always in mind even though the economy is changing with the share of agriculture in the GDP coming down. Agriculture will always be our strategic area in terms of economy and society.

### **Climate change and Indian agriculture - The way forward**

Climate change is a big issue and our every activity must be mindful of this monster. Therefore, in terms of agriculture, where we have more hands and less scaling, the insurance support to vulnerable farmers, local value addition and income transfers, etc. are the areas where we should focus, especially in the rural areas going forward. It is hoped that despite several challenges that our agriculture sector is facing, it will become more resilient and growth-oriented in future, as we celebrate the 75th anniversary of our independence.

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