

AIR SPOTLIGHT : India Strides in Agriculture and Farm sector

AIR Spotlight is an insightful program featured daily on the All India Radio Newsonair. In this program, many eminent panelists discuss issues of importance which can be quite helpful in [IAS exam](#) preparation. In this article, India's journey in the agriculture sector and its challenges are discussed in detail.

Participants:

1. Ramesh Chand, Member NITI Aayog.
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Context: The journey of agriculture in 75 years.

Journey so Far of Agriculture sector:

- The journey of Indian agriculture can be divided into three phases:
 - First phase(post-independence): In this phase agriculture area was the main focus concern.
 - Second phase(Mid 1960s): This was a crisis phase and India had to depend on imports. This phase led to the Green revolution.
 - Last Phase(1980-2020): In this phase despite the rising population, India was able to grow its per capita food production by two times.

Reasons for increased production:

- The post Independence reforms in the field of agriculture like: irrigation facilities, land reforms and rural infrastructure provided the foundation for agriculture growth.
- The major driving force was The Green Revolution, which was given huge support by enabling policies.
- It is also attributed to the hard work and enthusiasm of our farmers.

Arguments in favor of the skewed nature of agriculture growth:

The agricultural revolution was skewed towards wheat and rice. Reasons in support of such policy measures are:

- At that time when our food production was deficient, it was important to focus on the most important items like a staple. The cereal crops like rice and wheat are the staple food for the vast majority of the population of India.
- Moreover, attention was also paid to other sectors like poultry, dairy, etc.

Areas where the agriculture growth was strong:

- Staple crops like wheat and rice saw massive increase in productivity due to increased focus on research and development and favorable government policies.
- Huge progress was also reported in the fruits, vegetable, dairy, fisheries and poultry sectors.

Areas where the agriculture growth was weak:

- Edible oil: India largely depends on imports for edible oil. This situation was further aggravated when the per capita intake of edible oil increased at a very fast pace, almost reaching twice that of cereals.
- Pulses: This crop also saw a decline owing to the rising popularity and better returns of wheat and rice.

Measures Taken by Government:

- The Government in the past few years has increased its focus on pulses cultivation and the production has increased by 60% in a period of seven years.
- In the case of edible oil, area is a major constraint. The government has now taken measures to expand the area in the eastern and southern regions of the country.
- Moreover, the Government has also launched missions like: National Mission on Oil palm, as one acre of oil palm cultivation can produce as many as 10-15 acres of mustard/ groundnut cultivation.

Farmers Income:

- Earlier policies gave primacy to output and growth, in the hope that it will be translated to higher income for farmers. However, the desired result was not achieved.
- The government now made a paradigm shift to 'Doubling of Farmers' income', as we have achieved self-sufficiency in production.
- Factors that should be considered in increasing farmers' income are:
 1. Increase in productivity by adopting Green Revolution-like approach for eastern India.
 2. Diversification towards high-value crops like horticulture.
 3. Farmers should have better price realization improving competitiveness in the market.
 4. Enhance non-farming activities like dairying, livestock, etc which has the potential to improve the income by three to six times.

Current challenges and how to address them:

- Marketing Challenges: It must be ensured that agricultural produce gets a proper market. This can be done by:
 - Adopting a new formula for Minimum Support Price.

- Ensure private sector participation in the market. This may further improve the entire ecosystem of infrastructure and logistics.
- Adoption of Model contract farming laws.
- Ecological challenges: The water depletion and soil erosion challenges can be addressed by the adoption of improved technology. This would not only enhance production but will also ensure efficiency.

