

Farm sector pitches for better market access

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Pre-Budget meeting with Finance Minister sees calls for measures to boost investment



Farmers' organisations on Tuesday urged the Finance Ministry to enhance market access besides taking steps to accelerate investment in the farm sector.

Representatives of these organisations, office bearers of farmers co-operatives and companies engaged in the farm sector, and experts met Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for a pre-Budget consultation. The meeting was also attended by stakeholders from the agro-processing industry.

Suggestions galore

The main areas of discussion included agricultural marketing reforms, organic and natural farming,

agricultural commodities markets and future trading, storage infrastructure for agricultural produce, animal husbandry, agro-processing industry, and ideas for reducing food subsidy.

The significant suggestions received from the stakeholders included building the brands of Indian agricultural products abroad, giving the processing industry benefits/importance equivalent to agriculture, accelerating the depreciation benefit to the agro-processing industry, revamping of Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, encouraging the development of farm ecosystem services and market intelligence systems, further tweaking e-NAM (National Agriculture Market), developing agro-medicinal forestry, and fiscal incentives for farmers with primacy to soil health.

Views were also exchanged on crop diversification vis-à-vis agro-climatic suitability, revisiting the Food Security Act, incentives for promoting organic farming, extending subsidy to producers of green manure, bio-fertilisers and bio-pesticides, and steps to promote large-scale production of compost by utilisation of urban solid waste. Representatives also felt the need for the expansion of multi-dimensional research in agriculture for the development of new technologies, and further suggested promoting start-ups in institutes of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and agriculture universities.

Cigarette trade

In a separate representation, the Federation of All India Farmer Associations (FAIFA), a non-profit representing the cause of farmers and farm workers of commercial crops across Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Gujarat, etc, appealed to the Minister to save their livelihoods, which has been affected by rising illicit cigarette trade in India.

Due to higher taxation, smuggled, illicit and contraband cigarettes, along with 'one-sided' WHO regulations, the production of FCV (Flue-Cured Virginia) tobacco has come down from 325 million kg in 2013-14 to 210 million kg in 2019-20, resulting in a loss of more than ₹5,000 crore to the FCV tobacco farming community, FAIFA said.

The Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture (ASHA-Kisan Swaraj) urged the Centre to go beyond tinkering with a few schemes and allocations to announce some measures to address the crisis faced by farmers. It advocated higher allocation under the PM-Annadata Aay Sanrakshan Abhiyan.

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