

India can switch 30% of agri acreage to natural farming by 2030: Ramesh Chand

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Written by **Prasanta Sahu, Sandip Das** | June 8, 2022



India's food production is growing by 3-3.25% annually in the last several years while population growth rate has gone below 1.5%. (Representational image)

India can double acreage of chemical-free farming to 15% immediately and 30% by 2030 without hurting national food security as any resultant loss in output and exports could be compensated by reduction in fertiliser subsidies, Niti Aayog member Ramesh Chand told FE.

He, however, ruled out implementation of direct benefit transfer (DBT) of cash in lieu of subsidised foodgrains under PDS system as it could threaten food security

of the country. Chand said that natural farming methods could be scaled up in 6% of the gross cropped areas in states such as Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and near the banks of Ganga in Uttar Pradesh where fertiliser usage is low and gradually expand such farming methods over the next decades without jeopardising India's food security concerns.

“Adoption of natural farming should not be done in knee-jerk fashion as was done in Sri Lanka (which banned fertiliser use). However, without compromising India's food security, by 2030 India can afford to have natural farming in 30% of the area,” Chand said.

India's food production is growing by 3-3.25% annually in the last several years while population growth rate has gone below 1.5%. “So, with domestic demand growing by 2-2.25%/annum, we have 1 percentage point of output growth which is not required for domestic consumption.”

In organic farming, there is 30-35% yield penalty or loss of production if agro-chemicals are not used. “India is now in a position to do this the trade-off gradually...we are exporting 6-7% of production and if we are willing to take a hit on that food output by setting aside 20% of acreage to organic farming, production will come down by 6-7%... we will not have any surplus to export (\$5-6 billion/annum),” Chand said.

The government has decided to absorb a substantial part of the rise in fertiliser prices, and subsidies are expected to touch Rs 2.15 trillion in 2022-23 against Rs 1.62 trillion in 2021-22 mainly because of the spike in global prices of phosphatic and potassic fertilisers and urea in last one year. In the next few years, he expects successful models of natural farming developing, which will bring down burgeoning fertiliser subsidies.

While acknowledging the role of chemicals and fertilisers in the Green Revolution Prime Narendra Modi at several occasions had warned against the dangers of pesticides and imported fertilisers which lead to increased costs of inputs and also cause damage to health.

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her Budget (2022-23) speech had said that chemical-free farming will be promoted throughout the country, starting with fields within a 5-km wide corridor along the Ganga River. On the challenges faced in rolling out DBT in food subsidies, Chand said the country has not reached a stage

where it can abandon buffer stock and procurement regime. “India’s policy of buffer stocking of foodgrains has been helpful in protecting the country against food crisis and price shock,” he said.

With wide variations in fertiliser usage across states and a large chunk of farmers engaged in tenancy farming, uniform payment of fertiliser subsidy directly to farmers bank accounts would be complex and unacceptable to many farmers, Chand said.

The government’s food subsidy expenses are expected to rise further from budgeted Rs 2.06 trillion for 2022-23.

Natural farming is being promoted by the agriculture ministry through Bharatiya Prakritik Krishi Paddhati’ (BPKP) which was introduced in 2020-21 as a sub scheme of Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana. A financial assistance of `12,200 per hectare is provided to farmers for adoption of BPKP and there are around 0.4 million hectare of area is under natural farming across states.

Source: <https://www.financialexpress.com/economy/india-can-switch-30-of-agri-acreage-to-natural-farming-by-2030-ramesh-chand/2552223/>