

Promote non-Basmati rice varieties that are herbicide-tolerant, farmers urge PM

Our Bureau

Hyderabad

The Bharatiya Farmer Network, a national collective of farmers, has appealed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to promote the development and distribution of herbicide-tolerant (HT) non-Basmati rice varieties.

While acknowledging the work done by the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) in the development of HT Basmati rice, the network wants those benefits to be extended to a broader spectrum of rice cultivators. Non-Basmati rice constitutes a major portion of India's production, catering to the domestic and international markets.

WEEDS' CHALLENGE

In a letter addressed to the Prime Minister recently, the farmers said though the country had made good progress in rice cultivation, per-



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sistent challenges, particularly weed control, posed a significant threat to productivity and profitability.

The letter mentioned various challenges confronting rice farmers, including weed management, water scarcity, and labour shortages. It contended that herbicide-tolerant non-Basmati rice varieties could alleviate these issues by reducing the necessity for manual weeding, conserving water and diminishing cultivation costs.

"Weeds compete aggressively with rice plants for es-

sential resources such as water, sunlight and nutrients. If left unchecked, weeds often outcompete the crop, resulting in substantial losses for farmers," Ravichandran Vanchinathan, a leader of the Network, said in the letter.

He argued that HT non-Basmati rice varieties could revolutionise rice farming by effectively addressing the weed problem. By enabling the use of herbicides, these varieties would reduce the need for manual weeding, a labour-intensive and costly practice. With reduced tillage and flooding requirements, these varieties could contribute to water conservation and lower methane emissions, aligning with India's sustainable agriculture and climate action goals.

He said small-scale farmers need to get access to technological advancements through knowledge transfer initiatives and comprehensive training programmes.