

Bihar can be a leader in India's sunflower push

Mohit Sharma
Karma L Bhutia

India's sunflower industry shows significant potential for growth. And regionally, Bihar has emerged as a favourable State for sunflower production. With an average yield of 1,402 kg per hectare, Bihar far exceeds the national average of 900 kg per hectare.

The State's agro-climatic conditions, characterised by well-distributed rainfall and moderate temperatures, provide the perfect environment for sunflower cultivation. Research indicates that sunflower farming in such regions can yield higher productivity with relatively lower input costs.

With its cultivable land of above 6.5 lakh hectares, all of which are suitable for sunflower cultivation, Bihar could be crucial in achieving the National Mission on Edible Oils – Oilseeds (NMEO-Oilseeds) goal for 2024-25 to 2030-31 which has been rolled out recently with a budget outlay of ₹10,103 crore.

CONSTRAINTS

Despite the potential in Bihar, the

Indian sunflower industry faces several hurdles. One of the main challenges is the lack of adequate processing infrastructure.

Another challenge is the financial aspect. The Minimum Support Price (MSP) for sunflower has risen by 47 per cent over the last four years, which is a positive step. However, prices of sunflower seeds remain volatile, and many farmers face difficulty in securing the necessary inputs, such as quality seeds and fertilizers, to optimize their yields.

Moreover, while there has been a rise in farmer producer organizations (FPOs) over the years to meet the ambitious target of 10,000 FPOs, very few FPOs focus specifically on large scale sunflower farming.

Bihar, with its favourable agro-climatic conditions, should be recognized as the 'Sunflower State.' Regardless of the season or photo-period, sunflower are naturally photo-insensitive crops that can bloom and yield seeds. Therefore, the cultivation of sunflower throughout the State during any available season, such as the rice fallow season, relay cropping with wheat, intercropping with maize, etc., as per the guidelines of



SUNFLOWER. A game changer

NMEO-Oilseeds could be a game changer in States like Bihar.

Additionally, the crop may be grown during any available cropping window and only takes 90-100 days from seed to harvest. Likewise, investment in the state's sunflower farming infrastructure ranging from seed production to post-harvest management while covering the entire value chain could significantly boost production. Creating dedicated clusters of sunflower farms in such regions and backing those with processing facilities could help achieve economies of scale ensuring overall community development. Export infrastructure still needs a push in the State however, inviting more business

players can ease this further.

Further, to address the domestic supply gap, Bihar needs to invest heavily in sunflower oilseed processing facilities. Setting up processing units closer to production hubs will not only create jobs but also improve the supply chain efficiency. Investment in large-scale oil extraction facilities will ensure that Bihar can support the nation to meet its rising demand for sunflower oil without relying heavily on imports.

In order to enhance sunflower farming and processing, there must be a strong partnership between the government, private players, and farmer producer organizations (FPOs). While the government can provide the necessary subsidies, support for research, for the development of cold storage and processing units private players can bring in the necessary investment and technology. FPOs/start-ups can act as the bridge between farmers and the market, ensuring fair prices and better access to resources.

The writers are with Dr. Rajendra Prasad Central Agricultural University, Pusa, Bihar. Views are personal.