

Agriculture Minister Sh. Sharad Pawar's Speech on the occasion of 79th Annual General Meeting of ICAR held on Jan 23, 2008 at New Delhi

Shri M.V. Rajashekharanji, Union Minister of State for Planning, distinguished Ministers from states, Members of the ICAR Society and Governing Body, Special Invitees; DG, ICAR; Secretary, ICAR; Media persons, Ladies and Gentlemen!

On behalf of the ICAR Society and on my personal behalf, it is my pleasure to extend a warm welcome to all members and distinguished participants, to the 79th Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research Society. We are happy to have with us members who have made it convenient to participate in this meeting and are representing remote areas, especially from the northeastern states. The AGM of the Society provides a common interactive platform to all the members to share their views and experiences on agricultural developments and constraints to development.

It is an opportunity for us to take stock of our performance, to learn from our shortcomings and to look ahead.

Agriculture sector achieved record production levels during the year 2006- 07 in foodgrains, cotton, and sugarcane. The new technologies developed by the institutions of the ICAR system and their adoption by the farmers contributed significantly to the impressive performance at the national level. However, the challenges before us are many and multifaceted with environmental, social and economical and political ramifications. We assure the august house that the problems that need technological interventions will be dealt with by us with all sincerity.

About 60% of our population still remains dependent on agriculture, which contributes nearly 18 per cent to the total Gross Domestic Product (GDP), accounts for 10.7 percent of the national exports and around 1 percent of the total global agricultural trade. The per capita income in the farm sector is 1/6th of that in the non farm sector. We are in the first year of the 11th Plan, which focuses on faster inclusive growth with 4.1% annual growth from agriculture, as against 2.3 percent average growth achieved during the 10th Plan. Enhancing farmers' income is a vital issue. There are projections to suggest that a 4% growth in agriculture will not be sustainable from the demand side unless consumption by the economically weaker section grows. This means that, although rapid agricultural growth is the key to more inclusive growth, this in itself requires that other initiatives be in place to ensure that the poor are able to improve their purchasing capacity, nutrition and contribute to the growth of agricultural demand.

The National Policy For Farmers - 2007 highlights that efforts are needed to increase investment in irrigation, watershed development, land reclamation, etc. In addition, there has to be a greater focus on the accelerated development of the rural non-farm sector and development of clusters around towns/market centres. A growing farm sector, better rural infrastructure and connectivity, skill development, adequate power supply and easy availability of credit would help in the creation of more employment opportunities in the rural non-farm sector and, in turn, enhance the income of farm households.

The National Development Council resolved that agricultural development strategies must be reoriented to meet the needs of farmers and called upon the Central and State governments to evolve a strategy to rejuvenate agriculture and launched a Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana in August 2007 with a financial outlay of around Rs 25,000 crores. The scheme broadly aims to incentivise the states so as to increase public investment in Agriculture and allied sectors with flexibility and autonomy to states in the process of planning and execution. The main components for the RKVY could cover integrated development of major food crops such as wheat, paddy, coarse cereals, minor millets, pulses, and oilseeds. Under the scheme assistance can be provided for making available certified/HYV seeds to farmers; production of breeder seed; purchase of breeder seed from institutions such as ICAR, public sector seed corporations, production of foundation seed; production of certified seed; seed treatment; Farmers Field Schools at demonstration sites; training of farmers etc. The scheme would also focus on mechanization; soil health; rainfed farming; integrated development of watershed areas, wastelands, river valleys ; Integrated Pest Management; enhancement of horticultural production and popularization of micro irrigation systems. The scheme will have active participation of ICAR to ensure its success.

The National Development Council (NDC) in its 53rd meeting adopted a resolution to launch a Food Security Mission comprising rice, wheat and pulses to increase the production of rice by 10 million tons, wheat by 8 million tons and pulses by 2 million tons by the end of the Eleventh Plan (2011-12). Accordingly, a Centrally Sponsored Scheme, 'National Food Security Mission', with total budget of Rs 4882 crores has been launched from 2007-08 to operationalize the above mentioned resolution. In this scheme ICAR institutes, SAUs and Krishi Vigyan Kendras are called upon to provide technological inputs in district level planning, implementation and monitoring. Wheat production, which grew after the Green Revolution, has been in the range of 68-75 million tonnes in recent years, with an average yield of 2662 kg per hectare. The production of pulses is stagnant in the range of 11-14 million tonnes while that of oilseeds has touched 25 million tonnes, which are well below the domestic demand. A situation of mismatch between demand and supply is emerging in wheat also, as we have seen in recent years. With no significant varietal breakthroughs in the case of pulses and oilseeds, the country has to meet its demand through imports. The cost of pulses imports was Rs. 3851 crores, that of Edible Oils Rs. 9416 crore in 2006-07, and of wheat imports approximately Rs. 7500/- crores during the last two years. While the average weighted price was \$ 205 last year, this year wheat was available only at an average price of \$ 375 per tonne.

Climate change leading to adverse changes in temperature, precipitation and rise in sea level is an emerging issue. Most experts agree that the impact of global warming is a cause of serious concern. Consequent to these changes, droughts and floods are likely to be more frequent. Proactive measures to reduce the vulnerability to climate change will be needed. The ICAR has already initiated several research projects in the related areas to develop strategies and generate technologies to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change. Most of the projects are multi-disciplinary and multiinstitutional. The ICAR scientists made significant contribution to the IPCC Report that received Nobel Prize for Peace during 2007. Some stakeholders, from different sections of the society, have begun to question the efficacy and relevance of agricultural research. When comparisons are made regarding the pace of innovations in universities abroad and the number of patents held by our Agriculture

Universities/research institutions, the performance is not at all satisfactory. We cannot remain complacent and remedial steps are called for and must plan and put in place highly skilled and competent human resources. In this endeavour, our institutions of higher agricultural learning, primarily the SAUs need to be proactive.

The ICAR should remain active to revise the course curriculum of agricultural education to make it more relevant. Recently the Fourth Deans' Report on Education reforms has suggested introduction of several new courses including some of practical value to develop entrepreneurial skills in the agricultural graduates. Since the concerned ministers and senior officials from the states are already here, I would urge them to ensure a speedy implementation of the reform process. The delay or laxity could prove counter productive to our combined efforts of an all-round agricultural development. Through adoption of integrated nutrient management practices as developed by the Council, nutritional imbalances will have to be addressed to, to trigger further agricultural growth. Similarly, emphasis is required to be laid on use of integrated management practices as evolved for a number of crops and cropping systems to minimize loss in production. Use of quality seeds holds key to enhance productivity and profitability. All-out efforts must be made to make right kind of seed available at right time to reap the benefit. Sale of spurious seeds and pesticides will have to be arrested through effective quality law enforcement. Emphasis needs to be laid on processing, diversified product development and value addition so as to create job opportunity and deriving worth of the agricultural produce.

Both Centre and the States need to invest much more on education, extension and technology generation for achieving technology led growth in agriculture. Every possible effort must be made to fill up vacant positions in both ICAR Institutions and State Agricultural Universities so that time bound priority programme do not suffer for want of critical staff. We need to reorient our research and development efforts so that farmworthy technologies are utilized in the shortest possible time. Critical gaps wherever available, should be bridged through added resource mobilization and effective allocation during the XI Plan so that emerging problems are addressed in time. There is a need to focus more on commercial applications of technology, by forging better partnerships with industry and committed entrepreneurs.

It is now crystal clear that what we need now is a harmonized technology generation and delivery mechanism. Given the urgency to improve the agricultural profitability and productivity while protecting environmental sustainability, we will need some out of box approaches and solutions for which commensurate investment will have to be made. I am hopeful that with the active participation and support of the Members of the ICAR Society, in today's Annual General Meeting a number of pragmatic suggestions will emerge that will help in shaping the future programmes of the Council.

Jai Hind !

Source: <http://www.icar.org.in/AM-Speech.pdf>