

PROGRESSING FARMERS

Farmers are the backbone of India's economy. 50% of India's economy depends on farmers. Still, at present the condition of farmers is pathetic. Farmers do not get proper benefits of their hard work. It is the duty of all of us to strengthen the system that runs half of our nation's economy. Only the power and confidence of the farmer can keep this foundation strong.

Due to the hard work of the farmer, we get fruits, flowers, grains, vegetables, milk etc. which give us economic benefits. It is the contribution of farmers that today we are able to produce on such a large scale. It is the contribution of farmers that today our country is playing a major role in the production of wheat, rice, pulses, milk etc. h

Our economy has three parts - primary, secondary and tertiary. Whatever the farmers produce is converted into secondary products and delivered to the people. In this way farmers are the foundation of our economy. Farmers also regulate the fertility of the soil and our environment remains balanced. The contribution made by farmers in the agriculture sector controls global warming, environmental change, scanty rainfall etc. Farmers are the most obedient children of our nature. Having farmers is necessary for the conservation of nature. Only if the farmers of the country are capable, our country can develop. The government needs to bring some rules which can give the farmers their rights. Seeing the importance of farmers in the economy, we all need to encourage them, so that the nation can develop.

Fostering Inclusivity: Respectful language in political discourse

■ SHIVANSHU K. SRIVASTAVA

In a significant move towards promoting inclusivity and respect in political discourse, the Election Commission of India has issued guidelines for political parties ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, urging them to refrain from using derogatory language towards persons with disabilities (PwDs). This commendable initiative by the Election Commission marks a crucial step towards creating a more inclusive and respectful political environment, recognizing the importance of language in shaping public perception and attitudes.

The press note from the Election Commission acknowledges the unfortunate trend of derogatory or offensive language being employed in political discourse concerning PwDs. Such language, the note rightly points out, can be interpreted as an affront to the dignity of persons with disabilities. By explicitly addressing this issue and providing guidelines to political parties, the Election Commission is sending a strong message about the need for sensitivity and respect in political communication.

One of the key aspects highlighted by the Election Commission is the use of ableist language, including terms like "dumb," "retarded," "blind," "deaf," and "lame." These words, which have been historically used to marginalize and stigmatize individuals with disabilities, have no place in a modern, inclusive society. The Election Commission's call to avoid such derogatory language is a crucial step towards fostering an environment where PwDs are accorded the justice and respect they rightfully deserve.

In its press note, the Election Commission emphasizes the principles of accessibility and inclusivity in elections. This reflects a broader commitment to ensuring that every citizen, including those with disabilities, can actively participate in the democratic process. By issuing guidelines specifically addressing the use of derogatory language, the Commission is not only safeguarding the dignity of PwDs but also promoting a more inclusive political culture.

The significance of this initiative becomes even more apparent when considering that these guidelines are being introduced for the first time. It reflects a growing awareness within the Election Commission of the need to address not only the tangible barriers to political participation but also the intangible ones, such as negative stereotypes and discriminatory language.

Language plays a pivotal role in shaping public perception and attitudes towards different social groups. When political leaders and representatives use derogatory language, it not only reflects poorly on the individuals targeted but also perpetuates harmful stereotypes and contributes to a culture of exclusion. By taking a firm stance against such language, the Election Commission is signaling that it expects political discourse to rise above divisive and discriminatory tactics.

The guidelines issued by the Election Commission should be seen as a call to action for political parties to reassess their communication strategies. Political discourse should be a platform for informed debate, policy discussions, and the presentation of ideas, rather than a space for personal attacks or the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes. By adhering to these guidelines, political parties can contribute to a more constructive and respectful public discourse.

Moreover, the Election Commission's initiative aligns with broader global efforts to promote the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) emphasizes the principles of equality, non-discrimination, and full and effective participation and inclusion in society. The Election Commission's guidelines are in line with these principles, reinforcing India's commitment to upholding the rights and dignity of all its citizens.

While the guidelines represent a positive step forward, it is essential to ensure their effective implementation. The Election Commission must monitor political campaigns and take appropriate action if parties violate these guidelines. This could include issuing warnings, imposing fines, or even disqualifying candidates who persistently engage in the use of derogatory language towards PwDs. Strict enforcement will send a clear message that such behavior will not be tolerated in the Indian democratic process.

Additionally, political parties themselves must take responsibility for fostering a culture of respect and inclusivity within their ranks. Leaders should set the tone for their campaigns, emphasizing the importance of respectful language and steering away from personal attacks. Parties can also use this opportunity to educate their members about the significance of inclusive language and the impact it can have on public perception.

In conclusion, the Election Commission's decision to issue guidelines against the use of derogatory language towards persons with disabilities is a laudable move towards creating a more inclusive and respectful political environment. This initiative underscores the importance of language in shaping public attitudes and reflects a commitment to fostering a democratic culture that upholds the dignity and rights of all citizens. As India prepares for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, it is imperative that political parties embrace these guidelines and contribute to building a more inclusive and respectful political discourse.

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Smart Solutions for Sustainable Food Security and Resilience

■ DR. PARVEEN KUMAR

It is said that everyday at least three times a day, we need a farmer. It is because a farmer is the one who ensures food for all of us even if it means going to bed hungry for him. The scorching heat or the chilling temperature hardly matters for him/her. It is he who ensures food as well as nutritional security for all of us. Farming constitutes one of the oldest practices that mankind knows about and which is still in practice today. It dates back to over 10,000 years. One simply cannot undermine the role of farmer's in our life and economy at large. To ensure that they get due credit and attention that they deserve, countries across the globe observe their 'National Farmers' Day' every year. The event is also popularly called as 'Old Farmers' Day' in the United States (US). There isn't an exact date when celebrating Farmers' Day became a trend, but the tradition is being followed since the early 1800s. In different parts of the globe, the National Farmer's Day is celebrated on different dates by different countries.

HISTORY OF NATIONAL FARMERS' DAY: A day at the national level dedicated to the farming community is infact recognition of them and a honour to them towards their services for the humanity and for the mother land. The National Farmers Day in India also known as 'Rashtriya Kisan Divas' is celebrated every year on 23 December on the birthday of the 5th Prime Minister of India, Choudhary Charan Singh. Choudhary Charan Singh was born on Dec. 23, 1902 and died on May 29, 1987. He was also a great farmer's leader who remained Prime minister of the country from July 28, 1979 to January 14, 1980. During his tenure as Prime minister of the country, he introduced many farmer friendly policies and enacted much legislation to improve the lives of the Indian farmers. Recognizing his contribution to the agriculture sector and his pro farmer welfare measures, the Kisan Divas in the country is celebrated on his birthday. The Kisan Divas has been celebrated since 2001 in the country. The Day depicts that if the agricultural sector and the farmers are empowered, only then the nation can grow. It is because agricultural sector is a vital contributor to our economy creating and providing livelihood opportunities to more than 50% of the population directly or indirectly. Majority of the rural population including the women folk are engaged in this sector. Every year the day is being celebrated with a different theme. The theme for this year is 'Delivering Smart Solutions for Sustainable Food Security and Resilience'. The theme focuses on the need to practice smart solutions in agriculture so that the damage done to the environment and biodiversity existing on this planet by the adoption of crude and unscientific agriculture practices can be halted or reversed.

Smart Solutions for Sustainable Agriculture: Different practices for sustainable agriculture that result in food security and resilience include: a. Zero/No tillage: The lesser known fact is that tillage also leads to soil erosion and formation of crusts which decrease soil fertility besides increasing time and labor for producing that crop. Under the new paradigm, the soil is not ploughed but disturbed to the least possible extent. Zero tillage involves opening a narrow strip about 2 to 3 cm wide or a hole in the ground for seed or seedling placement. Specialized machinery is now available for sowing of seeds in Zero/No till soils. At the time of seeding, fertilizers can also be applied simultaneously. It thus helps to minimize mechanical soil disturbance which is essential to maintaining minerals within the soil, preventing erosion, and preventing water loss from occurring

■ DR. BANARSI LAL

Every year 23rd of December is observed as the National Farmers Day or Rashtriya Kisan Divas in all the states/UTs of India to honour the birth anniversary of the fifth Prime Minister of India, Choudhary Charan Singh with full enthusiasm and joy. On this day the awareness among the citizens is created to understand the importance of farmers in the society for the overall social and economic development of the nation.23rd of December is celebrated as the birthday of Choudhary Charan Singh. He was born on 23 December; 1902 at Noorpur in Meerut district of Uttar Pradesh in a peasant family. He was the proponent of rural and agricultural development. On this day several debates, seminars, webinars, quiz competitions, discussions, workshops, exhibitions, essays, functions etc. are organized by various institutions especially on agriculture across the nation. Farmers and people of rural society held agricultural concerts and celebrations and pay reverence to their adored leader. Choudhary Charan Singh was primarily a peasant and always led an extremely simple life. Choudhary Charan Singh held the office as the fifth Prime Minister of India from 28th July 1979 to 14th January, 1980. He is well known for the budget he represented in 1979.That budget was amalgamated to accomplish the needs of the farmers and included everything that a farmer expects. During his tenure as the Prime Minister; he introduced many policies to improve the lives of the Indian farmers. He took initiatives for the welfare of the farmers and united the farmers' community against the landlords and money lenders across the nation. He always followed the famous slogan 'Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan' given by the 2nd Prime Minister of India, Sh. Lal Bahadur Shastri. He was an avid writer and wrote several books depicting his thoughts on the lives of the farmers. He always tried to find out the solutions of various problems of the farming community. Choudhary Charan Singh passed on 29th of May, 1987 but his contributions for the farmers are still known. Sh.Charan Singh's peasantry background helped him to understand the real problems of the farmers and he did his best to solve them. He was a son of soil and he contributed immensely to improve the lives of the farmers. Choudhary Charan Singh is credited to formulate and implement the Zamindari Abolition Act. He was the founder of Kisan Trust which was a non-political, non-profit making body on 23rd of December 1978.

Jammu's own Agritech Revolution: From Automobile Expert to Mushroom Maestro

In a remarkable career pivot that echoes the spirit of entrepreneurship, Raman Gupta, once working in automobile industry, has taken a bold leap into the world of Agritech. Gupta, who hails from Jammu, stunned the business community when he announced his decision to leave his well-established Automobile Business and embrace the challenges of sustainable farming.

Inspired by the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he has set out on a mission to transform his 9-acre land into a thriving agritech startup, focusing on integrated farming practices. His venture, named 'Mushroom Farm' combines modern technology with traditional farming methods to ensure sustainability and maximize yield. The farm has implemented state-of-the-art mushroom cultivation techniques, it has 10 fully climate controlled mushroom growing rooms which utilize advanced technology to optimize growing conditions, resulting in a consistent and premium-quality yield. The farm has produced 150 tonnes of mushrooms this year and it is the first time this has happened in J&K. They aim to grow 300 tonnes of mushrooms next year. The

within the soil.

b. Crop rotation: Growing the same crops year after year of the practice of monocropping depletes the soil of different nutrients. Therefore crop rotation that involves growing different crops doesn't rob the soil of its nutrients; instead add to the nutrient composition of the soil. Practicing crop rotation with more than two species does not allow insect/pests and weeds to be set into a rotation with specific crops. When crops are rotated, these act as a natural insecticide and herbicide against specific organisms.

c. Taking care of the top soil: It is the top soil that supports entire vegetation on the planet earth. Its erosion or loss due to one or the other factors ultimately affects the soil fertility and its crop growth potential. Managing the top soil in order is also necessary to create a permanent organic soil cover that can allow for growth of organisms within the soil structure.

d. Raised beds with residue retention: This practice involves raising crops on raised beds. The irrigation is being provided through furrows. The beds made once can be used subsequently for other crops but a reshaping is necessary once in a year. It also results in reduction of weed population.

e. Water harvesting: Water is a very precious and scarce resource. Infact agriculture consumes the most of water. As rain water is the major source of water; it needs to be conserved with the help of farm ponds, roof top harvesting, water tanks and other water harvesting structures so that it is available whenever there is water scarcity. Water also needs to be used judiciously for irrigation by using drip, sprinkler technology that increase water use efficiency.

f. Green manuring: This involves growing of certain crops in the fields and then ploughing them back in the soil to enrich the soil with various nutrients. Green manuring helps increase biomass production in the fields, increase organic matter content, micro-organisms activity and also increase availability of both macro as well as micro-organisms to the crops

g. Laser land leveling (LLL): At the field level also there are variations in soil moisture, nutrient status and other parameters in the fields. The LLL gives us the inter field variations and then plan as per the field conditions. The technique of LLL has been reported to increase water application efficiency; crop yields, nutrient use efficiency and also reduces weed problems.

h. Organic manures: Organic manures like compost, vermi compost, Farm Yard Manure are a rich source of nutrients, soil micro organisms and are made up of farm; kitchen and animal waste which have been recycled. Such manures improve the soil health and also do not produce pollution of any kind.

i. Integrated techniques: The integrated techniques like Integrated Weed Management, Integrated Disease Management and Integrated Nutrient Management are also an important part of Sustainable agriculture. These techniques make the best possible use of chemical physical, biological and cultural methods to control diseases, weeds and nutrient uptake by the crops.

j. Agro-forestry system: An Agro-forestry system or an alternative farming system refers to the planting of perennial trees and/or shrubs with annual agronomic crops or pastures. These systems have been proposed as more environmentally benign, alternative systems for agricultural production in both temperate and tropical regions of the world. An Agro-forestry system comes with a number of environmental benefits that include carbon sequestering abilities, biodiversity conservation, soil health enrichment and air and

Farmers Day is celebrated to recognize his valuable services rendered to the farmers of the country. The famous 'Kisan Ghat' in New Delhi is dedicated to Choudhary Charan Singh due to his services for the farmers. Various agricultural institutions and farmers organize agricultural based programmes to pay homage to their beloved leader.

India is known as the country of villages. It is predominantly an agricultural country and agriculture is the backbone of India's economic development. More than 80 per cent of the rural population of India contributes about 18 per cent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Agriculture sector is unquestionably the largest livelihood provider and is considered as the largest private enterprise in India. India is the land of villages and agriculture is the main source of income for the farmers. About 70 per cent of the Indian population still thrives on the income generated through cultivation. Farmers are the spine of India. This sector provides the commodities and raw material required in non-agriculture and industrial sector. Agricultural sector is undergoing a structural change with respect to its farm size, cropping pattern and share in the national Gross Value Added (GVA).Now we have achieved high crops production but still there is agrarian crisis. In order to increase the income of the farmers there is dire need to adopt the income centric approach in preference to production. There is need to facilitate the farmers so that they can operate their farm enterprises on the basis of profitable returns. Promotion of agriculture as a true self-enterprise will have to define by the sustainability of resources. Sustainability refers to appropriate use of natural resources, environmentally friendly technologies and protection of biodiversity with a view to ensure the food and nutritional security of the increasing population. There is need to provide the equal opportunities for all categories of the farmers to grow and earn family incomes more than they are presently earning.

Presently around 86 per cent of the total numbers of holdings in the country are under small and marginal farmers categories. The average size of holding in the country is around 1.15 ha. Agriculture comprises various sub-sectors such as field crops, horticulture, animal husbandry, sericulture, fisheries etc. and it is important to understand the composition of these sub-sectors and the growth potential of each of these. The Internal Rates of Returns are not uniform from all the sectors. It has also been

water quality improvement.

k. Integrated Farming Systems: Such a system encompasses diversification. The integrated farming system involves different components like cereals crops, vegetables, livestock, horticulture mushroom cultivation, goatry, apiary and other allied enterprise. An integrated farming system (IFS) approach is thus advocated for increasing the income of the farmers. An IFS approach also ensures that the local resources and family labour is used effectively.

i. System of Crop Intensifications: In recent years, the system of crop intensification (SCI) has emerged in a number of Asian and African countries, raising the productivity of the land, water, seed, labor, and capital resources that farmers invest can for growing a wide range of crops. SCI methods are particularly relevant for resource-limited, nutritionally vulnerable households because SCI like System of Rice Intensification relies minimally on purchased inputs. SCI is an agricultural production strategy that seeks to increase and optimize the benefits that can be derived from making better use of available resources: soil, water; seeds, nutrients, solar radiation, and air.

j. Organic farming system: This type of system is largely devoid of the use of chemicals. In the simplest terms, organic farming is based on maintaining a living soil with a diverse population of micro and macro soil organisms. Organic matter is maintained in the soil through the addition of compost, animal manure, and green manures and the avoidance of excess tillage and nitrogen applications.

k. Natural Farming System: Natural farming is a closed system, one that demands no human-supplied inputs and natural farming is related to fertility farming, organic farming, sustainable agriculture, agro-ecology, agro-forestry, eco-agriculture and permaculture, but should be distinguished from biodynamic agriculture. The system works along with the natural biodiversity of each farmed area, encouraging the complexity of living organisms both plant and animal that shape each particular ecosystem to thrive along with food plants. Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF) is a Natural farming method being in use in India.

l. Digital Farming: Digital Farming is ICT and data ecosystems to support the development and delivery of timely, targeted information and services to make farming profitable and sustainable while delivering safe nutritious and affordable food for all. 'Today agriculture is witnessing what is called 'digitalisation'. Just as our smart phones have become necessary for us, in the future the farming community is all likely to see through digital glasses and at the same time young farmers are likely to don the digital glasses or consult devices that will help them to analyze their work and accordingly take decisions for their betterment. For farmers it has come as a fascinating experience. Digitalisation of agriculture has also emerged as another revolution, more so for the large numbers of the world's smallholder farmers. Various digital farming technologies include Internet of Things (IoT), Precision Farming, Agricultural Drones and Robots and smart greenhouses.

There is an urgent need to propagate and practice technologies which do not compromise with our natural assets and our huge biodiversity. Sustainable agriculture practices bring with them smart solutions for most of the environmental problems we are facing today.

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observed that the livestock, fishing and aquaculture have more growth potential as compared to crops sector. Within the crops sub-sectors, horticulture sector has been registering more growth rates over the last decade. The share of horticultural output as a percentage of agriculture now constitutes 30 per cent. It is obvious that horticulture, livestock and fisheries have great potential and need special emphasis. Also the efforts are needed to increase the yields of field crops. Road, markets, irrigation, godowns, cold storage infrastructures, knowledge creation through technical development and so on are necessary for the agricultural growth in the country. For instance, improving of road infrastructure leads to reduction in the cost of transportation and thereby the marketing costs can be reduced. The investments by public and private sectors can play a critical role for the agricultural growth in India. Farmers' suicides are an avoidable issue if appropriate and timely interventions are made in agriculture sectors. The policies and programmes of the government should be designed in such a way so that farmers can be facilitated at every stage of crops production and post-production chain. By the Soil Health Card Scheme, the farmer can learn the nutrient and physicochemical status of the soil and thus can decide the nature and quantum of fertilizers and amendments in soil. Such techniques can reduce the cost of cultivation. By e-National Agriculture Market (eNAM) information farmer can decide whether to sell the farm produce or to postpone for the time being. The Comprehensive Crop Insurance Scheme entitled as Pardhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana aims to insure the farmers' crops at the low premium rates.PM-KISAN is proving as a boon to the farmers. The interventions on food processing, supply chain and value chain management can help the farmers to realize their great monetary returns from their farm produce. Various central and state agricultural schemes and programmes can also be helpful increase the income of the farmers. There is need for the effective review and monitoring mechanism of all the activities at the field level supported by the appropriate Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Also there is crying need to develop climate resilient agriculture. All this can help to enhance the income of the farmers and also to sustain the crops production.

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help received from the department of Agriculture and the department of horticulture has been instrumental in the farm's success.

However, the farm extends beyond mushrooms and incorporates a diverse range of crops such as organic vegetables, fruits, and medicinal plants. This approach not only enhances the overall yield



but also promotes biodiversity and reduces environmental impact. As Gupta navigates the unclear waters of agritech, he hopes that his journey will inspire other entrepreneurs to diversify and contribute to the transformation of India's agricultural landscape.

"We need to embrace change and invest in

sustainable practices for the long-term benefit of our nation. Agriculture is not just about cultivation; it's about nurturing the land that sustains us all," he asserts. As Mushroom Farm continues to blossom, it serves as a beacon of hope for a new era in Indian agriculture, one where technology and tradition combine to yield prosperity for both the land and its cultivators.

J&K government is emphasizing upon stakeholders for encouraging and promoting Mushroom Cultivation, a potential entrepreneurship for youth in a big way. With the recent government interventions, forest-dwellers in Jammu Shivaliks are being given formal training and instructions about mushroom collection and processing techniques, market knowledge as well as market access, so that their efforts pay them their rightly earned share. Aside from training and other forms of support, the Jammu and Kashmir government has also been providing a 25% subsidy on the purchase of mushroom-growing racks and a 50% subsidy on a fixed number of ready-made bags for first-time mushroom cultivators.