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MS SWAMINATHAN

'Country of Green Revolution in deep agrarian crisis'

CHENNAI: A pan-political consensus on farmer issues is a must to revive agriculture and farm fortunes, says Prof MS Swaminathan, the father of India's Green Revolution, who submitted a report on agrarian reforms nine years ago. KV Lakshmana of Hindustan Times met the distinguished agronomist for his views on the current agrarian crisis and farmer suicides.

How do you see the untimely rain and an El Nino forecast affecting the farm sector?

The situation is going from bad to worse. There are two reasons: one is bad weather and the other is the market. In West Bengal, farmer suicides are related to low prices of potato. They had a good harvest but the prices crashed to Re 1. In other parts, rain ruined crops. Weather and the market are the determinants of a farmer's well-being. Confounding the problem is political infighting. I gave my report in 2006 but nothing seems to have been done. Without a pan-political commitment to address farmers' issues we would not see much progress.

What can be done to tackle the crisis?

First, improve the economics of farming through pricing, procurement and minimum support price. The input costs are high and output costs low. Secondly, ecological conditions of farming have to be improved. Soil health has to be monitored at the panchayat level. Thirdly, young people have to be attracted to farming.

Do you see any realistic improvement in the farm sector?

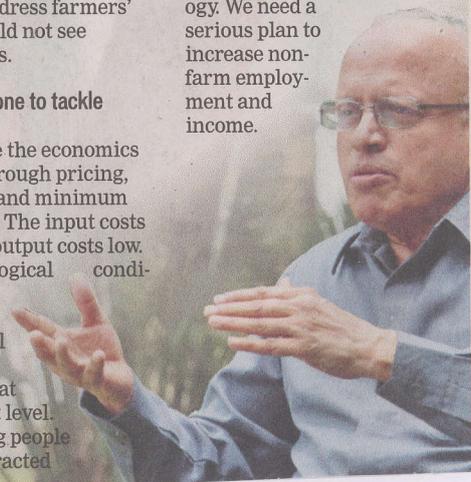
There is no other way. We have had good stocks but in another year these will disappear. We cannot buy so much food. This very reason will force the government to attend to farmer problems. There is lip sympathy now ... a palliative, such as ₹1 lakh. But life is not like that. It won't work.

What will work?

We must devise and implement a deficient-monsoon management strategy. Special attention should be paid to livestock since the first sign of distress is the sale of farm animals. If we don't, there will be more suicides. The country of Green Revolution has become a country of deep agrarian crisis.

Where is the answer?

Answers vary from area to area. We have to see how to produce more as well as increase farm incomes. In India, there is a mismatch between production technology and post-harvest technology. We need a serious plan to increase non-farm employment and income.



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