

New urea policy could lead to its excessive use, impact human health

Vishwa Mohan & Dipak Dash | TNN

New Delhi: The government's decision not to hike urea price for the next four years under its new policy approved on Wednesday, may help this nitrogenous fertilizer remain the king among fertilizers, but the move has the potential to further fuel its excessive use eventually leading to soil degradation, groundwater and air pollution. This could have a serious impact on overall productivity and human health.

Though excessive use of Urea is mainly noticed in states having strong irrigation network like Punjab, Haryana, western Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh, there have always been deep concern about its excessive use elsewhere too.

While urea is selling at Rs 5,360 per tonne, DAP costs about Rs 24,000 and grades of NPK fertilizer cost about Rs 22,000. The skewed ratio in favour of nitrogenous fertilizer (N) in the overall fertilizer basket has always been resisted by the experts including agriculture scientists due to its long-term adverse effect on soil and environment.

"Urea, being the most common nitrogenous (N) fer-

CONSUMPTION OF UREA IN INDIA

Ideal NPK ratio for soil 4:2:1	
Prevailing usage 8.3:2.4:1	
Nitrogen content in chemical fertilizers Urea (46%), DAP (19%), NPK (10-28%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Urea is the most common nitrogenous fertilizer > Soil analysis reveal widespread deficiency of at least six nutrients in the soil in different parts of the country Nitrogen (N), Phosphorus (P), Potash (K), Sulphur (S), Zinc (Zn) and Boron (B)
Chemical fertilizer sold in 2014-15 Urea (30.9 million tonne), DAP (7.5 million tonne) & NPK (8.6 million tonne)	
Share of fertilizer in agriculture input 9%	

Figures are approximate

tilizer, is indiscriminately used irrespective of scientific prescriptions. Its excessive use leads to several adverse implications on soil, crop quality and overall eco-system", said B S Dwivedi, head of the soil science and agriculture chemistry division of the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI).

Pitching for balanced use of urea, Dwivedi, however, expressed his hope that the government's move to provide 'Soil Health Cards' to all farmers across the country in next three years may help them take "judicious deci-

sion based on nutrient-related information for different soil types". He told TOI that the efforts to create awareness among farmers about excessive use of urea and certain policy intervention on supply side through pricing will help in the long run.

Though the experts have long been demanding policy intervention to encourage balanced use of Urea in the N, P and K basket, any bold step in terms of price hike of urea has always been resisted by successive governments due to its possible political fallout.

It is however suggested

that steps to maintain the balance on supply side through production and pricing decisions can be taken in a phased manner (staggered over years) so that it may not impact farmers immediately.

Sudhir Panwar, president of the Kisan Jagriti Manch, said, "The government should rationalize the overall fertilizer subsidy. It may reduce the subsidy on urea and increase the subsidies on Potassium (K) and Phosphoric (P) fertilizers by transferring the same amount without any impact on exchequer. It can be done in phased manner so that farmers do not feel the pinch of it".

Panwar also favoured creating awareness among farmers about adverse impact of excessive use of urea on soil fertility and crop productivity.

IFFCO managing director and CEO U S Awasthi said, "Keeping low price of Urea is not good for farmer and the soil. The only best solution is to give direct subsidy to him (farmer) and let him decide how much N, P or K he is going to use for his yield... The current price of urea is quite low and subsidy given at that price is not helping our farmers, as they are not using it in judicious way."

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 2- निजी सचिव, संयुक्त निदेशक (अनुसंधान)
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 7- प्रभारी कट्ट

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