

SPEECH BY SMT. RADHA SINGH, SECRETARY,
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & COOPERATION, AT
THE CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS FOR AGRICULTURE
AND HORTICULTURE FROM STATES

Hon'ble Union Minister for Agriculture, Shri Sharad Pawar; Hon'ble Union Minister of State for Agriculture, Shri Kantilal Bhuria; Hon'ble Ministers of Agriculture and Horticulture from States; senior officials of the Central and State Governments:

This conference has been convened at the initiative of the Hon'ble Union Minister for several reasons, primary being the need to take stock of the current situation under Rabi cultivation, as also to share the many initiatives that have recently been taken to bring growth, vibrancy and investments into the agriculture sector.

Foodgrain production estimates for Kharif show shortfalls, primarily due to aberrations in rainfall during June — September. Most States made determined efforts to

ensure that Kharif losses be minimized, with farmers showing great determination by going in for repeated sowings. Despite these efforts shortfalls have occurred which we will make good during the ensuing Rabi season by intensified use of improved agricultural practices and balanced inputs. Given the favourable weather conditions, we are hopeful that our Rabi production would be at record highs. The presentation and discussions following the Union Agriculture Minister's address will bring out the measures, policies and programmes that require to be adopted, in order to make this happen.

With the Union Minister's vast experience in the agricultural sector, especially horticulture, the Ministry has brought forward a major programme for Horticulture Development across the country. Given the country's agro-climatic diversity vast potential exists for horticulture development, including plantation crops, aromatics and

medicinals. The Bamboo Mission is also part of an effort to increase the viability of the sector, and increase its absorptive capacity not only in terms of investment, but also employment generation and enhancement of the income of the rural masses.

Taking note of the fact that water is a constraining factor in increasing production and productivity, on the anvil is a major programme for development of Micro Irrigation that would help optimize and conserve the present availability of water and enable its spread into areas that are water short. This will also provide an occasion for precision farming, including fertigation which, we firmly believe, is one of the key ways of increasing productivity.

Also under consideration is a new project for dryland farming which is an integration of crop, livestock and animal husbandry systems, through a multi-layered approach. This project is an attempt to provide on-farm capability for

protective irrigation during times when monsoon fails for some crucial weeks/days, leading to moisture stress and crop loss.

During the course of the day we would be touching on these and many other issues preceded by presentations from NABARD, the FCI, the Crop and Horticulture divisions of the Department of Agriculture & Cooperation.

With these words I welcome you all once again.