

## OTHER SPECIAL POLICY INITIATIVES

### A. REHABILITATION PACKAGE FOR DISTRESSED DISTRICTS IN THE STATES OF KERALA, ANDHRA PRADESH, KARNATAKA AND MAHARASHTRA.

23.1 Incidents of farmers committing suicide in certain parts of India have been a matter of serious concern. In order to address this problem in distressed areas, the Government of India has identified 31 districts in the four states of Andhra Pradesh (16), Maharashtra (6), Karnataka (6), and Kerala (3), where the incidence of farmers' suicides has been very high. A rehabilitation package of Rs 16978.69 crore for the 31 districts in the said four states has been worked out, as per details given below:

*(Rs. in crore)*

i) Andhra Pradesh	9650.55
ii) Maharashtra	3873.26
iii) Karnataka	2689.64
iv) Kerala	765.24

23.2 The package is envisaged to be implemented over a period of three years. It includes both immediate and medium-term measures for establishing a sustainable and viable farming and livelihood support system through debt relief to farmers, improved supply of institutional credit, crop-centric approach to agriculture, assured irrigation facilities, watershed management, better extension and farming support services, improved marketing facilities and subsidiary income opportunities through horticulture, livestock, dairying, fisheries etc. For alleviating the hardships caused to debt-stressed families of farmers in the affected districts, ex-gratia assistance from the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund will also be provided. The major components of the package are indicated below:

- Ex-gratia assistance from the PM's Relief Fund to alleviate the sufferings of debt-stressed farmers.
- Debt relief to farmers
- Improved credit flow
- Interest waiver
- Assured irrigation facilities
- Seed replacement programme
- Watershed development
- Horticulture development
- Micro irrigation
- Extension services
- Subsidiary income activities like dairying and fisheries etc.

23.3 The broad mechanism for implementation of this package is indicated below:

- State-level committee consisting of the representatives of the central government and the state government concerned for coordination and supervision.
- Implementation through district-level committee and panchayati raj institutions.
- Creation of appropriate institutional structure and special purpose cooperatives/community-based organisations at the local level for delivery of the package and optimum utilisation of resources in a time-bound manner.

## **B. NATIONAL COMMISSION ON FARMERS**

23.4 The National Commission on Farmers was set up in February 2004 to examine and recommend policies, programmes and measures on various issues confronting Indian farmers and to suggest appropriate interventions for improving the economic viability and sustainability of diversified agriculture including horticulture, livestock, dairy and fisheries. The Commission was reconstituted in November 2004 under the chairmanship of Professor M.S. Swaminathan with revised terms of reference. The terms of reference of the reconstituted Commission, inter-alia, envisaged working out a comprehensive medium-term strategy for food and nutrition security. It also proposes methods of enhancing the productivity, profitability and sustainability of the major farming systems; suggests measures to attract and retain educated youth in farming; suggests reforms to enhance investment in agri-research; recommends measures for the credit, knowledge, skill and technological empowerment of women; and suggests methods of empowering elected members of panchayats.

23.5 During its term, the Commission submitted five reports on 29 December 2004; 11 August 2005; 29 December 2005; 13 April 2006; and the last one on the 4 October 2006. A Revised Draft National Policy for Farmers containing important recommendations made by the Commission in its reports was submitted by the Commission along with its fifth and final report. The Draft National Policy recommended by the Commission lays emphasis on the human dimension as the principal determinant of agriculture policy. The Draft Policy has recommended following 10 major goals, in brief, to stimulate farmer-centric development strategies:

- To improve farmers income and economic viability of farming.
- To mainstream the human and gender dimension in all farm policies and programmes.
- To complete the unfinished agenda of land reforms and initiate comprehensive aquarian reforms.
- To develop and introduce a social security system and support services for farmers.
- To protect and improve the land, water, biodiversity and climate resources for sustained advances in the productivity and profitability.
- To foster community-centred food, water and energy security system.

- To attract and retain youth in production and post-harvest phases of farming.
- To strengthen bio-security of crops, livestock, fish and forest resources.
- To restructure agricultural curriculum and pedagogic methodologies emphasizing entrepreneurship and gender dimensions.
- To make India a global outsourcing hub for sustainable agriculture including production and processes.

23.6 The key recommendations of the Commission contained in its reports are incorporated in the Revised Draft National Policy for Farmers and these include:

- Asset reforms covering land, water, livestock, and bio-resources.
- Farmer-friendly support services covering extension, training and knowledge connectivity, credit and insurance, assured and remunerative marketing, inputs and services.
- Curriculum reforms in agriculture universities.
- Placing agriculture in the Concurrent List of the Constitution of India.
- Setting up of a Food Security and Sovereignty Board.
- Making the CACP an autonomous statutory organisation.
- Rural non-farm livelihood initiative.

23.7 A Conference of State Ministers of Agriculture and allied sectors was organised on 22 December 2006, to elicit the response of the State Governments with respect to the recommendations of the Commission. The recommendations made by the Commission are under active consideration of the Government. Concerted efforts are also being made to firm up the Government's views on these recommendations in a time-bound manner.

### **C. AGRICULTURE COORDINATION COMMITTEE**

23.8 Keeping in view the critical role of agriculture in enhancing economic growth rate and removing rural distress, the need to enable a systematic approach to policy formulation in the various areas having impact on agriculture and to promote coordination and inter-departmental action, an Agriculture Coordination Committee has been established under the chairmanship of the Hon'ble Prime Minister. This Committee would be the key mechanism for providing institutional support to decision making in the field of agriculture. The Committee has been mandated to commission specialised studies as and when the need arises and also engage itself in the following tasks:

- Identify key areas that require fresh policy initiatives, particularly those of an inter-sectoral nature.
- Outline the follow-up action that needs to be taken to implement identified policy initiatives.
- Identify institutional mechanisms to implement policies and programmes.
- Monitor key policy initiatives.

- To oversee and coordinate the integrated implementation of the recommendations of the National Commission on Farmers that are accepted by the Government of India.

23.9 The Committee held meetings on 25 March 2006, and 22 June 2006, in which the following issues were taken up for consideration:

- Setting up of the National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB);
- Achieving 4 per cent growth rate in agriculture;
- Establishment of the National Rainfed Area Authority (NRAA);
- Problems of farmers' suicide with particular focus on 31 severely affected districts; and
- Agricultural credit.