

INTRODUCTION

The National Conference on Agriculture for Khariff Campaign 2007-08 was held on 3-4th April, 2007, at New Delhi. The conference was chaired by Dr. P.K.Mishra, Secretary (Agriculture & Cooperation). The participants of the two day Conference included Secretary (Fertilizer), Secretary (Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries), DG, ICAR, State Agriculture Production Commissioners, Senior Agricultural Scientists, Vice Chancellors of State Agricultural Universities, Senior Officers from Department of Agriculture and Cooperation, Planning Commission, Department of Food and Public Distribution and other related institutions and organisations.

2. The list of participants and the programme for discussion are annexed at Annexure I and Annexure II.

3. In his inaugural address, Secretary (DAC) stated that agriculture is at a crossroads but there are immense opportunities. He stressed on the need for achieving 4% growth in agriculture and allied sectors. He referred to the constraints which the agriculture sector is facing like agrarian distress, agricultural risks, spatial and temporal climatic aberrations and vulnerability for food security. He also referred to the problems of land degradation, soil nutrient deficiency, imbalanced use of fertilizers, depleting water resources which need urgent attention. He highlighted the need for concerted efforts to revamp the seed management system, agriculture extension system and development of horticulture sector. He stressed that there is a need now for preparing an action plan which could be implemented in the medium term for identified areas such as food security, production of pulses and oilseeds, availability of quality seeds, extension system, horticulture sector and the present Conference should come up with a road-map for revitalizing the agriculture sector and enhancing income of farmers.

4. On 4th April 2007, Honourable Union Agriculture Minister, Sh. Sharad Pawar, also addressed the Conference. Secretary (DAC) welcomed the Agriculture Minister and gave a brief account of the discussions held in the Conference so far. He also invited senior officers from Haryana, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan to briefly intimate the efforts made by their State Governments in increasing the wheat production and likely production estimates this year. The State Government officers informed that despite few losses due to rains during February/March this year, the wheat production prospects are very bright and it will be quite high as compared to last year. The Agriculture Minister also highlighted measures taken by the Union Government this year for increasing wheat production like increase in MSP and bonus. He expected that with high availability of wheat this year, procurement would be adequate to meet PDS requirements and prices will be relatively comfortable. As desired by him a presentation was made by National Centre for Agriculture Economics and Policy Research of ICAR on demand and supply projections for the years 2011-12 and

2020-21. It was highlighted that the rate of growth of foodgrains at present is 0.7% and there is a need to increase it to 2.21% for meeting increasing requirements of foodgrains of the country for food and other uses. He added that requirement of foodgrains for feed, processed food and industrial uses has reached about 28% of the production. It was pointed out that over the years, rates of power supply, investment in agriculture, terms of trade, fertilizers consumption etc have not grown as per the requirements which have made the supply position of foodgrains very critical. He indicated that if the Terms of Trade are made favourable to the farmers and other input constraints are taken care of, the foodgrains production will rise positively. The Agriculture Minister stressed upon the need to adopt focused approach to give new direction to the 11th Five Year Plan in the areas of irrigation, power supply, seed replacement rate, extension system, remunerative prices to farmers, crop diversification including horticulture sector and credit. He emphasized on the need for associating Panchayat Raj Institutions as well as research institutes in the Kharif and Rabi campaigns for boosting foodgrains production.

5. The Secretary, Department of Fertilizers, assured the State Governments that his Department will ensure adequate supply of fertilizers. He referred to the innovative steps being taken in this regard such as maintaining buffer stock of fertilizers in the major States, arranging availability of 75% of the requirement of fertilizers by 1st of the month, and 100% of the demand by 15th of the month and online monitoring of the arrangements at the district and State levels. He urged the States to ensure equitable distribution of fertilizers within the districts.

6. The Secretary, Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries, referred to the alarming gap in the demand and supply of both dry and green fodder and informed that a Livestock Food Production Corporation is being set up for promoting production and consumption of nutritious fodder and feed by the animals. She also referred to the shortage of maize being felt by the poultry industry and rising prices of maize in the market which need urgent attention. She added that a National Fisheries Development Board has been set up to realize the untapped potential of the fisheries sector which can contribute towards growth of agriculture and allied sectors. She stressed the need for maintaining symbiotic and complementary relationship between agriculture and livestock.

7. Agriculture Commissioner in his presentation referred to increasing demand for foodgrains and the problems being faced in increasing their production such as untapped yield potential, imbalanced use of nutrients. He also referred to the interventions required such as targeting potential areas, increased use of hybrids, increasing seed replacement rates, use of modern agricultural practices, development of improved varieties, bringing fallow land under cultivation, promoting inter-cropping in case of pulses, improving quality seed production and encouraging seed treatment with fungicides.

8. Presentations were also made relating to area based approach for horticulture development, improvement of agricultural statistics, revamping of extension system at the grass root level, promotion of seed treatment, quality control of pesticides, adequate

and timely availability of fertilizers and on indigenous innovations in agriculture. An interactive session on emerging issues also took place.

9. The State Governments in their presentations highlighted area coverage and likely production estimates during 2006-07 and the state of their preparedness for upcoming Kharif 2007. The States expressed their optimism about agricultural production during 2007. They also put forward their road-map for achieving 4% growth in agriculture and allied sectors. Based on the assessments given by the State Governments, the third advance estimates of crop production for 2006-07 were also finalized.