

## Covid -19 and Agriculture in 2021

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In the second decade of 21<sup>st</sup> century COVID-19 has attacked in the world-wide population and has created unprecedented situation in the universe. It was the time when we were neither having any vaccination nor any guideline of treatment. We worked on the advisory of WHO and opted to go by lock down, shut down, curfew etc. this situation was havoc on agriculture but our agricultural workers, scientists especially Krishi Vigyan Kendras played a pivotal role in saving agricultural crops and other products. During such hard time Government of India played an important role and allowed relaxation on agricultural activities. Union Ministry of Home Affairs notified to exclude movement of farmers, farm labourers, harvesting and sowing -related machines from the lock down.

During the first wave of COVID-19 lock down was at the peak of rabi and crops like wheat, rice (rabi), pulses, lentil, mustard, etc. were at harvestable stage or reaching at maturity. Most of the labour started to migrate from the working place to their native areas respectively and it was another man-made hurdle. There have been more global concerns, rather speculations on restrictions of export of agricultural products by international businessmen. Our nation was having a surplus stock of rice, tea, spices, horticultural products etc. may seize opportunities by exporting such products on the basis of stable agric- export policy. Development of export supportive infrastructure and logistics needed higher investments and support.

The second wave of pandemic COVID-19 attacked in April 2021 and up to this time vaccines were also not available among farmers

and people living in countryside areas. The unusual situation created by second wave of COVID-19 has crashed value chain of almost all agricultural commodities. This has created unprecedented loss as some of them suffered owing to restrictions on carrying out farm operations, shortage of labour, machineries and services to carrying out farm operations at the harvest or post-harvest of maturing crops, disposal of perishable surplus, and even feeding produce to assure marketing system e.g. mandi etc. This has created unprecedented loss not only to the farmers who produce crops and commodities, and more over who are playing a visible or invisible role in keeping alive the commodity value chain.

In Fisheries sector shrimp dishes are important delicacies in restaurants in all over country. The lockdown also caused shut-down of hotels and restaurants who were also a major buyer of the cultivated shrimps especially along the urban areas comprising of metropolitan cities. The processed shrimp products find their way into the life of urban Indians but shut down of processing plants due to labour shortage has affected fisheries and aquaculture industry. During lockdown 4.0 period, there were relaxations. As shrimp contributes to economic security yet because of the food security of the nation whether or not the International markets be encouraged to stay the system alive.

Our analytical study showed some broad measures that we need to start to mitigate the continuing effects of COVID-19.

- To sustain the demand for agricultural commodities, investment in key logistics, needs to be enhanced. However, digital agriculture, e- commerce, start ups, and delivery companies need to be encouraged.

- The small and medium enterprises, running for raw materials from agriculture and allied sectors also draw attention so that we may strong rural economy.
- To prevent immediate scarcity of farm labour owing to migration, policies must facilitate easy availability of machinery to state entities, Farmer Producer Organisations and Custom Hiring Centres with suitable incentives.
- MANREGA funds must be explored to pay part of farm labours so as to enable them to reduce to fiscal worden on farmers while ensuring wage to lessen monetary worden on farmers.
- Agri-inputs like seeds, fertilizers, chemicals need to be pre-positioned for easy availability. These may be stood by private sector.
- Structural reforms like land leasing, contract farming and private agricultural markets must be promoted to invest more in agriculture sector and promote its economic growth.
- Institutional lending of crop loans should be expanded and facilitated for smooth sufficient flow of credit to borrowing farmers.
- Local markets should be strengthened and encouraged to strengthen agri-economy.
- There is need to facilitate marketing of mushroom, fruits like banana, flowers, vegetables, and other horticultural crops, milk along with their transportation, fish marketing, mask and sanitiser. Self-help Groups and Krishi Vigyan Kendras have played an important role in facilitation of mentioned products.

Therefore post -COVID 19 situation has alarmed us to get ready, any time it may attack and affect on agriculture sector. Now both Central and State Governments are getting ready to face third wave of COVID-19, if comes across. Vaccination is also being done among Indians.

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