

ECOLOGIC

Budget Sings Tunes of Sustainable Farming

The promise of Finance Minister Arun Jaitley to double farmers' incomes through over 40 welfare schemes will align our agriculture to the goals outlined at Rio +20 Conference: End hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition and promote sustainability in the long run



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The 2016-17 Union Budget has been unveiled and the emphasis on the rural sector has the country abuzz! An incredible ₹1.77 lakh crore has been allocated for the next five years in more than 40 programmes — the promise from Arun Jaitley, Union Finance Minister, to double farmers' incomes by improving irrigation, emphasis on organic farming, monitoring and improving soil conditions, introducing technology to wholesale marketing online and of course supporting prices for agricultural produce.

In fact, the Budget has introduced a new 0.5% Krishi Kalyan Cess on all taxable services to fund these very projects. All of these directly or indirectly lead to sustainable practices for agriculture and tie back to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) outlined in the outcome document of the Rio +20 Conference on Sustainable Development. SDG 2 as per the Rio+20

outlines: end hunger; achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.

As our population continues to grow, effort and innovation will be needed to increase agricultural output in a sustainable fashion. Measures will have to ensure that we improve the supply chain, decrease food losses and improve access to nutritious food for all.

Moreover, the SDG 2 recognises the inter-linkage among supporting sustainable agriculture, empowering the small farmers, ending rural poverty, tackling climate change and other issues addressed within the total 17 SDGs outlined in the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

In this evaluation of sustainability in agriculture it is also useful to study the Fair Trade movement, which is popular in the UK. Established as a social movement, the goal is to help producers achieve better trading conditions and to promote sustainability globally.



Farmers on a paddy field • Express

The Fair Trade System empowers farmers by giving them access to a better income — which in turn

means more money to buy food and the ability to invest in generating other food sources, such as growing

new crops. A tax on services of the urban class to fund or subsidise government's agricultural schemes for rural development is circuitous and may not be as contextual to address the food producers' concerns.

A secured income and reduced risks enable farmers to develop assets, pay for their kids' health and education

However they can be used to fix minimum prices for farm produce and support small farmers. Suicide by marginal farmers is perhaps the biggest social problem in India. Higher minimum prices increase their standards of living, cover risk and vulnerability of food producers. They provide a safety net for farmers to make them less vulnerable to natural calamities and price volatility. In turn, this can mean a

better cash flow, greater access to credit and the ability to save. The stability of the minimum price means that the farming community has better access to finances and loans.

For factory workers, the Fair-trade Standards can improve job security by ensuring correct employment processes, contracts and leave entitlements.

The combination of a secured income and reduced vulnerability enables farmers and workers to increase their assets, pay for education and health of children or improve their saving capacity. Holistically sustainable agriculture is linked closely to robust economic growth.

Stable incomes, reduced risk and vulnerability of the Indian farmers lead to economic prosperity and higher national GDP.

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