

# DRAFT – Not Circulated

## A Note on the Draft National Policy for Farmers

### Introduction

1. On the onset we wish to appreciate the National Farmers Commission for acknowledging the agrarian crisis in the country, specifically the tragic case of farmer suicides and for having concluded that a draft policy for farmers is needed.
2. Farming is a way of life in India, and 65% of our population depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Food security and ensuring health and economic welfare of the country depends on this section of the population and we can ensure it only by protecting agriculture, which is mostly sustained by small and marginal farmers (peasant agriculture). **This also means that whatever we plan for the overall development of the country, including the five-year plans, farmers welfare must be a central objective.**
3. But it is very unfortunate to see that with fifty years of planned agricultural development in the country, 40% of this population wants to quit agriculture (NSSO study). And it is a shame that one lakh farmers have suicided all over the country in the last 10 years. This is clearly linked to a fundamental flaw in the policy and our trade regime. **Hence it is important that we do an analysis of this crisis and draw lessons before deciding on the approach and a policy that is intended to correct the situation.**
4. Fifty years of development in the agriculture sector has changed the face of farming in the country – from a predominantly subsistence level agrarian system to an unsustainable and hopeless situation for the farmer. The young people have developed a sort of fear and distaste for farm jobs and the youth in the farms are decreasing drastically. On the other hand, the agro-ecosystem, and resources including time-tested traditional knowledge that sustained farming in the last 10,000 years in the country have been thoroughly eroded. A farmer's policy has to recognise and effectively address these issues, if the government really wants to improve farming situation in the country.
5. And lastly, we have to recognise that farming in the country has reached a tipping point, where cosmetic solutions will not be enough. **What is needed is a paradigm shift, with the farmers and the farm lands becoming sustainable.** Central to this shift in paradigm would be an approach which ensures
  - a. An ecologically sustainable production considering the agro-ecology of the area and through soil conservation, natural/organic, low cost and locally produced inputs and non-chemical pest control, and the reincorporation of rural and urban populations into agriculture.
  - b. Restructuring agricultural production, distribution and marketing systems within an environmentally and socially sustainable framework.
  - c. A shift away from production systems based on external inputs of fuel, fertilizers, pesticides and high-tech equipment towards ecological, low-capital, self-reliant farming systems.

### Farmers Policy – Approach

6. Any Public policy can be generally defined as a system of laws, regulatory measures, courses of action, and funding priorities concerning a given topic. It should spell out a plan or course of action intended to influence and determine decisions, actions, and other matters, to achieve the set out societal goals. This implies that it should have the following
  - a. well defined goals
  - b. instruments to achieve the goals
  - c. institutions to use the instruments
  - d. resources
  - e. assurance/ guarantee

A basic problem with the draft policy is that

- f. It lacks or seems to have avoided any analysis of the present crisis, hence there is a serious mismatch between the mission statement and the suggested course of actions.
- g. The time horizon for the policy is not clear.
- h. A macro frame work for the policy is completely missing.

Overall this policy takes a rather simplistic approach to solve the problems, which is insufficient to remedy the agrarian crisis and bring better welfare into farmer families. **Moreover, we should remember that it is such an approach that first of all got us to this situation in the country.**

#### **Raising a few questions**

1. **Sustainability** does not seem to be a criterion in the policy. Especially for the small and marginal farmers. Schemes and programmes that increase external dependence on inputs, technology and markets, as suggested by the policy, cannot achieve sustainability.
2. **Process of policy formation** – Top-down or Bottom-Up ? Agriculture is a State subject and implementation of schemes is being devolved to panchayath level. Hence any policy formulation should have started with discussions at the lowest units of planning and development – the panchayath, and moving up to the States and finally at the Central level. Ultimately state government and panchayats are responsible for implementing any such policies. Now, in this draft policy there are inherent difficulties to make drastic changes, especially to incorporate the concerns of states like Kerala. **The top-down approach also fails to recognise various experiences at the farmer level and much of these newer experiences are excellent, diverse and sustainable models, but have not been captured in the policy.**
3. **Definition of farmers.** Bringing the entire farmer community including the small, marginal and the big together into one definition, will have its inherent problems especially as many of the policies would address all in one blanket. In reality this will always marginalise the small, marginal and landless farmers. Farmers and farm labourers are two categories, so are tribal farmers, and policies should also address these inherent differences. Similarly in many areas small and marginal farmers are also farm workers. It is also not advisable to include fishermen as a farmer, even while farmers involved in marginal fishing activities need to be included. Explicit exclusion

of corporate house farming, MNC's etc from the purview of the farmer must be done. Different approaches are needed for these different categories.

4. **Land Use Policy** – While much is talked about the Land reforms, Kerala is a best example where land reforms were implemented but fragmentation of land led a major loss of land available for agriculture, especially rice cultivation and homestead farming which is suitable to the unique nature of the State. Only a land use policy, specifically protecting food diversity, water and soil can ensure food security. Also the policy should specially consider fragile agro-ecosystems, and support must be provided to farmers for its maintenance considering its ecological importance. The wetlands of Kerala, the Himalayas etc are some such regions. Hence what is needed is land reforms with a land use policy based on agro-eco systems and protecting food production.
5. **Investment in misplaced and anti-farmer priorities** - The document has highlighted some of the Silver Line initiatives of the Government. Now a closer scrutiny of these itself show how many of these were misplaced priorities and have turned out to be anti-farmer (mostly the small and marginal farmers). For example, would programmes like Bharat Nirman improve the lives of farmers by improving production, economic returns and sustain it in the long run ? Infact, the River linking project, which the policy document covertly accepts, has a huge and yet to be assessed impact on the farms in the country. It is also quite well know that missions like the Horticultural Mission, even though has contributed to increase farmer income in some areas, have been detrimental to food production in places like Wyanad, especially through its intensive and heavily subsidised approach to encourage crops for export. They may be new initiatives but a deeper analysis may actually be needed and more substantial evidence drawn before we can consider them as beneficial projects (silver lines). Moreover, any new schemes suggested must go through some sort of a simulation test to prove its real and overall benefits to the farming community, especially small and marginal.
6. **Food Security and Nutritional Security** – While this is recognised and highlighted, especially nutritional security, the policy has very few realistic suggestions to ensure food security, sustained production of food grains and pulses for nutritional security? Use of local nutritional resources by villagers (common fruit trees, medicinal and other nutritional plants, water bodies etc) has not been recognised. One needs to have schemes to protect such systems. Ensuring government procurement and supply through a strengthened PDS has not been addressed. Protecting the land available for food grains/ cereals /pulses from being developed for other activities such as construction, infrastructure, farming of non-food crops has not been addressed. For example, in Kerala, the promotional programmes of the Rubber Board and Horticultural Mission are to be partly blamed for the loss of paddy fields. How are food producing fields and farmers going to be protected, when large-scale land grabbing is happening for big roads, industries, universities, mining as in Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and other states. How is the food grain - production, procurement and distribution going to be ensured with remunerative prices to farmers at a time when the government is also opening the rural procurement, retailing and farm services sector to the big corporate groups? One can expect even

projects like PURA, slated to help the rural sector could turn out to be detrimental to the food-producing farmer, if necessary protection and ceilings are not established. Such issues cannot be wished away, and there is no effective systems suggested in the policy.

7. **Ensuring remunerative price** - No mechanism has been suggested to ensure price stabilisation and remunerative price to farmers. Increase in prices of commodities, especially food crops, is seen not to get translated to better prices for the farmers. Most of the time cartels, middlemen and now the futures trading seem to be taking away the increasing prices of commodities. Nothing substantial has been suggested in the policy to mitigate this situation. Infact, the present opening of the procurement to private groups, opening all crops to futures trading, and the spurt in private-organised rural retail is also going to increase this exploitation. Futures trading as a serious issue in the last two years have also not been addressed, and nothing suggested for mitigating this problem. The Commission suggests establishment of an ITO to address the trade-market and price related issues. How can this ensure remunerative prices for the peasants and petty producers? The strategies need to be made clear. What are its responsibilities and what accountability will it have ? How will it resolve disputes? Many such questions worry the common.
8. **Globalisation, Liberalisation, WTO, FTA's** - The policy completely fails to acknowledge that India is going through a process of Globalisation and Liberalisation dictated by the pressures from outside and inside. The decade of WTO (1995-2005) has wrecked havoc in the farming sector, and this is not addressed at all. WTO and FTA's have not yielded the proclaimed benefits, and have been instrumental in bringing down farmer income by way of fall in prices, trade distortions and market manipulations. Such issues have not at all been addressed, and such things cannot be wished away. India has to take a clear position vis-à-vis its small and marginal farmers and they cannot be compromised for the sake of trade and profits for a few corporates or for that matter other developmental concerns such a nuclear fuel, nor for national pride in the global scene. A thorough review of the EXIM policy is also needed at this time. The impacts of such externalities must be addressed and the policy must give a clear direction in this regard.
9. **Technology** - While farmers need technology, especially in the changing circumstances, it is important to have a proper perspective of what technology is appropriate for the farms and what are the criteria for introducing such technology into the farmer's lives and fields. The policy document is seen to be heavily biased towards introduction of frontier technologies such as genetic engineering, nano-technology, IT, developing techno-infrastructure, and continuing the lab based science and private funding for the same. Such approaches have been done on a blanket scale even before. For instance, introducing hybrid seeds of rice, irrespective of the peculiarities of a region have driven many traditional and quality seeds out of the fields and today the country has been rendered poor in its genetic diversity. Similar are the issue with introducing machineries that may not be suitable at all to the land or the farmers actual use. Many a times this has increased the burden by making him/her more dependent on external inputs like fuel, heavy repairs, related credits etc. At the same time, the

policy also does not recognise many small innovations from the farmers and local innovators, which has been culturally and socially suitable to them.

10. **Water and Irrigation** – The policy document raises concerns of ground water exploitation. It also proposes expanding the area of irrigation especially through authorities such as the Rain fed Area Authority. Another solution they say is rain water harvesting and ground water recharge. Even solutions such as river interlinking are also endorsed. But the main problem that led to a shortage of water is not addressed. Cropping in the country cannot be a unified pattern, and has to take an agro-climatic approach. Crops which need large amounts of water should not be encouraged in areas where there is water shortage. Dry Cereals that do not need irrigation have been replaced with grains, when irrigation facilities were brought in. This should not be done. Drought proofing is another high priority, and can be implemented with local knowledge and practices. Expanding irrigation is not the solution. Instead Drought proofing, rain water harvesting and adopting an agro-climatic approach in selecting crops and farm practices should be the approach for addressing the water and irrigational needs. Large capital investment projects like River Interlinking should be avoided, and they tend to destroy more of productive land, and increases the threat of flooding areas hitherto not affected. They only shift the problem from one region to another and do not solve the problem. It can also increase water-based conflicts between farmers, states and regions.
11. **Input** – Ensuring high quality inputs such as seeds, manure, pest control measures even while keeping the cost of such inputs minimal is the need of the time. This has not been addressed in the policy. Many initiatives like the Low-External Input Sustainable Agriculture (LEISA) are excellent models. Even Organic / Ecological farming as practiced by many small and marginal farmers in Tamilnadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra, West Bengal etc have shown to keep input cost to the minimal, at the same time ensuring locally produced excellent quality manure, seeds and natural pest repellents. Such initiatives are farm based and much research support needs to be provided for developing such kind of inputs and community models.
12. **Labour** - A major population in the farming sector is dependent on wage labour. This group of people are usually beyond the purview of any farm reforms. Ensuring price security or market availability addresses the farmer concerns, but not the labourers concerns. How can this be effectively addressed? There is no clear analysis of the labour displacement issues and so no effective suggestions as well. Employment guarantee schemes such as NREGP, providing social security and health welfare to labour families etc also needs to be brought in. A concept of farm labour banks and ensuring round the year employment to them also needs to be thought about.
13. **Procurement and Marketing** – An analysis of the present agrarian situation shows that the worst impact has been in the cotton belts and the cash crop intensive areas producing for an external market. The dependence solely on external markets, controlled by shifts in prices, duties and tariffs makes farmers vulnerable. Kerala, especially cases of those farmers into production of Pepper, Coffee, Ginger, Cardamom etc are classical example of how farming as well as lives of farmers are dictated by the international trade

policies. But Government through support like the Horticultural Mission wants more and more farmers to become external-market dependent. There is no studied evidence to show that this has helped the farmer. On the other hand the small and marginal farmers sustain on the demand of the local market, and their only problem is prices. A price stabilisation fund is only an end-of-pipe solution, and does not address the core issue. Internal trade cartels and middle men have made life miserable for the farmer and is going to be worsened with the futures trading and speculations opened up by the Central Government. These issues are not at all addressed effectively. Moreover, there are good models of just trade practices, at the local level which has not been taken into consideration at all, like for example the Farmers market initiatives, Producer-Trader joint markets etc. No proposal has been put up to strengthen the current public institutions including the Government procurement system, Public distribution system, FCI, State Trading Corporation, State Warehousing corporations, Social and Health welfare systems related to rural sector etc.

**14. Corporatisation of Agriculture** – It is clear that some of the proposals in the policy are meant to help consolidation of the farming operations, so as to benefit the farmer. Organising the farming system is a challenge in itself. But systems such as Private-Public Partnerships, Corporate farming, Contract farming etc will only give way to corporatisation of even the small farming sector, making them even more dependent on a huge, sometimes monopolistic and exploitative system. These have never worked to the benefit of the small-marginal sector. Moreover, there are good examples where Contract farming and Corporate farming have actually exploited the farmer and even destroyed the land. Such examples unfortunately have not been studied before giving such prescriptions. On the other hand, there are good models which exist of farmer controlled organisation. Cooperative systems, family based and small community based farming have a great amount of advantages. Local seed banks, grain banks (where grains are stored locally and shared in times of need), local production of farm inputs, sharing of labour and farmer controlled market systems are some of the uniqueness of such approaches. This makes the system more sustainable, and need to be adopted and promoted.

**15. Panchayath Raj Institutions and Local Governance** – Organising the production, procurement, distribution and marketing should ideally happen under control of the village panchayath level. The document is not clear about the role of PRI's. It suggests the involvement of the panchayaths only in a few activities such as water management. The overall direction of policy is for centralisation of control, resources and implementation. And they suggest only some implementation with involvement of panchayaths. This is not what was envisaged by either the village republic concept of Mahatma Gandhi nor by the spirit of the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendment of the constitution. PRI's are mandated to develop plans based on local conditions and ensure sustainability at the local level. For this, a change in the present paradigm of governance of the State and central institutions is needed. Devolution of power is not just about conceding some components of power to the local, it is about strengthening the overall system to facilitate planning and implementation at the local village level. Moreover, while PRI's are expected to do a number of activities, there is no mention of where the resources for the same will come from.

16. **Biodiversity** - One of the strategies followed by many progressive farmers to ensure sustainability and protecting biodiversity is to adopt an agro-ecosystem based approach. Such an approach supported with locally developed techniques, inputs and local seed banks, conservation and sharing have improved not only the quality of soil, food and health of the farmer families, but also incomes. But this finds least importance in the document. Suggestions such as starting Genome Clubs are a distortion of the concept of biodiversity. The policy is suggesting that children start seeing plants and animal diversity as “genetic resources” and all living matter as genes. This is a techno-centric approach, and has no relation to farmers understanding of biodiversity. This is not correct science or literacy, rather it is a distortion of the same. If one needs to impart literacy on PVPFR or Biodiversity Act then what is needed are Biodiversity Clubs and sensible teachers with a holistic approach to life.
17. **Biosafety** - While Biosecurity finds a place in the policy, the important issue of Biosafety is not mentioned at all. Nothing has been mentioned about the bio safety issues – especially those related to Biotechnology research and issues surrounding the introduction of Genetically Modified Crops and Organisms. The introduction of GM crops has already devastated many farmer communities and destroyed the diversity of crops, and no review / analysis is done, instead the document further blindly pushes such untested “frontier technologies” without even considering the cost, need of the farmers and applicability of these technologies. It is like saying “We have developed these technologies, and you must use them in the fields”.
18. **Regulating chemical use** – One of the worst impact on the farming sector has been the increasing use of chemicals as fertilisers, pesticides, fungicides etc in farming and storage. Overuse and misuse are very common phenomenon, and farmers cannot be squarely blamed for this. Many are forced to use more and more quantities, simply to increase the falling efficacy of these chemicals against various pests. Pesticide use has made residues a common feature in food, water and beverages and even exports have been affected due to pesticide residues. The regulatory mechanism has completely failed to contain the issue of contamination. The policy has not even recognised this as a problem, inspite of the hue and cry over the last two decades. Why ? and what are we going to do to bring down its use / eliminate its need in the long run ? On the other hand, there are very good examples of Integrated Pest Management (IPM), No Pesticide Management (NPM) etc for almost all the crops and more research and priority needs to be given for the same.
19. **Crop diversification** as understood now only means changing from one crop to another – usually a less remunerative crop to a better priced one. This has not actually generated mass employment, but only other types of employment, and mostly substituting already available employment, and in some cases even reducing employment opportunity. This needs to be seriously analysed before suggesting solutions to regions. Wyanad, where crop diversification has been one of the causes for the increasing suicides among farmers is one such case. Moreover crop diversification should not be blanket decisions. The present thrust towards crops like Jatropha, should be

very carefully evaluated on an agro-ecological and agro-climatic basis before recommending them.

20. **Agriculture Research** – No proper, realistic approach has been suggested by the policy. Government funding for research is seen to be reducing each year, and research priorities are no more being set by farmer needs. Instead, research is being driven by external funding, especially from corporates and on technology and basic sciences that suites their business interest. Of late, through the new Indo-US initiatives it is understood that a huge amount of funding is going into just the “frontier” technologies that has shown no evidence of achieving any of the set out goals. The policy also gives great thrust to these frontier technologies like Biotechnology by completely sidelining farmer science initiatives, breeding and conventional approaches that have fed the nation till date. Much possibilities exist, but the policy talks about a research fatigue, the reason for which needs to be evaluated before jumping into technologies that have very little acceptance among the farmers and consumers – example Genetically Modified crops and pesticides. One also needs to go into why there is a research fatigue in the present research system. The financial outlay for agriculture research is being drastically cut each year, and universities are encouraged to get support from private companies and MNC’s. Public funding for agricultural research should be increased.
21. **Agriculture extension** as functioning now has failed to deliver. This is because the system is more prescriptive and not facilitative. The extension people are not in a mandate to learn from the farms but to teach, and this is a flawed approach making them redundant over time. This approach needs to change. Every Panchayath has a Krishi Bhavan. These need to be invigorated to take on a very pro-active role. They should develop model farms in every panchayath based on the farm system and agro-climatic conditions prevalent there. This must be done at the farmers level with the help of KVK’s, agriculture research stations, university departments etc. They must have action research programmes with the farmers. They must encourage production of local inputs, help build capacities for the same. At present there is no mechanism for crisis forecasting. Systems must be introduced so that the Krish Bhavans along with the farmers can develop plans based on markets and climate. These would go a lng way in mitigating the agrarian crisis.
22. **A Farm based approach** - The farmers policy should shift to a farm based approach rather than a crop based approach. This will actually be more effective in delivering welfare to the farmers, as crop based approach still focuses from the commodity angle rather than a farmer welfare angle. Hence an integrated approach towards production, distribution and marketing system must be developed with the farmer, his/her family and the farm as the pivot. For this farmers initiatives to sustain agriculture, especially farm-based research, development of seed banks, improving locally available technology, group farming initiatives, group endeavours in producing high quality farm inputs, alternative local marketing of produce, consumer-producer linkages under the control of small producers, participatory guarantee systems, internal control systems etc suitable for the small-marginal farmers need to be identified, developed and promoted. These must be community and region-specific, non-exploitative in nature

and culturally sensitive. Presently the thrust of this draft policy is more on externalities such as corporates, credits, intensive use of technology, dependence on officials and centralised institutions etc. This will take away the sovereignty of the farmer.

**23. Fisheries** – The recommendations for the fisheries sector is too trivial and simplistic. It is suggested that it be completely reviewed or even better be left out of the present policy and a policy be separately drafted for the same. One cannot club together the marine fisher community and the inland fisher community. Even in the inland fisher community, there is much diversity, and one cannot club such fisherfolk dependent solely on inland water bodies such as lakes, rivers etc with those fisherfolk dependent on seasonal fishing in wetlands and paddy lands etc.

**24. Tribal sector** – This sector is also too narrowly addressed. The situation is so complex and varied that one cannot consider all tribals in the manner drawn in the policy. It needs to be discussed widely and then only taken up in the policy. Its linkages to the various other sectors like Forests, Common Property resources have not been considered in its totality. The needs of tribals are not at all similar to the needs of the common farmer. Many tribal community are not engaged in any sort of farming and there are many who are exclusively farm labourers.

### **Final Note**

Fifty years of intensive modern chemical-input approach to farming has brought the farming sector to the situation mentioned by the policy document in Chapter 1. But there is no accountability and there is no analysis of the situation. And then taking the farming sector into the next ever green revolution with gene and other frontier technology which is mired in controversies and unsafety, is not at all the right approach. If sustainability is the basis then we should think of an agro-eco-system based approach which is more holistic, suitable to the majority of the farmers, economical and safe.

Now we are at a cross roads - there are two ways – one is the Holistic and more deep rooted and culturally appropriate approach which the farmers have evolved over the years through farm based research – Organic farming, natural farming, IPM, seed banks, participatory guarantee systems, establishing consumer-producer linkages in a just manner, developing local markets, farmers cooperatives etc – and then there is the approach that a few scientists and corporate houses including multi-nationals are putting forward - Applying frontier sciences, technology driven, encouraging private-public partnership, contract and corporate farming, big private rural retail and farm services etc. The draft Policy for farmers leans towards the second frame, yet attempts to incorporate the first but ineffectively. One should understand that these two are diametrically opposite ways and may not go together.

**A complete reworking of the policy with a clearer frame work is suggested, to address all the issues noted above.**

Currently, we can see the policy is clearly biased towards

- a. Technology

- b. Shifting farmers from Agri-culture to Agri-Business
- c. Pushing farmers from Self reliance to Total Dependence on External factors ( in the name of helping, supporting and improving their lives)
- d. Shifting from Food crops to cash crops
- e. Moving from Food security to Food Dependence
- f. Commoditisation of Agriculture
- g. Narrowing down the perspective – from green to gene. The thrust till date was to move from a traditional–agro-eco-system approach to the techno-centric, mono-culture approach of the green revolution. Now the policy intends to drive this to the highly risky and unsafe genetic engineering driven gene revolution ( and schemingly calling it the ever-green revolution)

Alternatively, should not the actual frame work of the policy be the following

- a. Strategies to ensuring farm based livelihood
- b. Sustaining farming through an agro-biodiversity and agro-ecological system based approach, and ensuring biosafety and biosecurity
- c. Strategies to sustain and support Fragile ecosystems, that are both ecologically important and also productive to the farmer.
- d. Sustaining, protecting and improving on the traditional knowledge pool
- e. Ensuring food and nutritional security, safety and equitable availability of the same to all
- f. Ensuring better governance of agriculture through strengthening local governance and making officials and other participating organisations accountable at the local level itself.
- g. Ensuring that life is ethically seen and production is economic, ethical and efficient.
- h. Ensure gender equity and not allow actions / systems that take women out of the control of their work, lives and farms

This note has been prepared after a consultation with many organisations, experts and farmers working in the State. The main thrust of this paper is to say that we need a total shift in paradigm to address the crisis in the agrarian system. For this we appeal that wider consultation be done before finalising the policy for farmers.

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