



Kisan Swaraj Yatra

Food • Farmers • Freedom

From Sabarmati to Rajghat, through 20 states

Oct 2nd to Dec 11th, 2010

www.kisanswaraj.in

Towards a Kisan Swaraj Policy

Farmers and citizens around the country, particularly through a pan-Indian outreach effort called the Kisan Swaraj Yatra covering 20 states and involving dialogues with tens of thousands of citizens, are demanding that the nation should devote urgent attention to the continuing agricultural crisis and allocate highest priority to the agriculture sector, ending decades of neglect. India needs a comprehensive policy which aims at making farming a viable livelihood for crores of medium, small and marginal farmers – this is essential for the nation's food security and for ensuring a vibrant rural economy as the backbone for a vibrant India.

It is clear that the Western model of agriculture cannot show the way forward for India – with its high environmental and health costs, enormous subsidies to support a few agri-businesses and only 2% of the population. This is untenable here, especially given that millions of Indians live off agriculture - their livelihoods depend on the conservation of resources and appropriate technologies for existing landholdings, and any large scale displacement poses legitimate questions on the need for such a displacement and opportunities in other sectors. India's own experiences of successful ecological farming and very productive small-farmer agriculture are in fact a beacon of hope. At this historic juncture, India can and should build an approach that gives primacy to farmer's livelihoods, its soil, water and ecology, and people's health, setting an example to the world.

The new policy framework (Kisan Swaraj Policy) should be based on the four pillars of **economic sustainability** of agriculture-based livelihoods, **ecological sustainability** to preserve the productive natural resources, **people's control over agricultural resources** including land, water, forest, seed and knowledge, in addition to **ensuring non-toxic, diverse, nutritious and adequate food for all Indians**.

1. Economic Sustainability and Income Security for Agricultural families

The economic policies adopted by the Governments regarding agriculture have not improved the economic status of farmers; hence 'vibrant village economies' have remained only in dreams. The increasing impoverishment of farming had a cascading effect on all sections of people living off agriculture including agricultural workers and tenant farmers and it is also correlated to food and nutritional insecurity. Various government policies including the agricultural pricing and food security policies have neglected the fact that a large population in this country is directly involved in food production; pricing policies keeping only consumers and industry in focus have led to serious problems for the producers. Policies targeting the poor as mere consumers to be ensured cheap goods undermine the livelihoods of rural producers who ironically constitute a majority of the nation's poor. The National Farmers' Commission stated, "Progress in agriculture should be measured by the growth rate in the net income of farm families... moving away from an attitude which measures progress only in millions of tonnes of food-grains and other farm commodities."¹

Governments continue to talk about their support to agriculture in terms of how many thousand crores have been spent on subsidies or loan waivers, but with no assessment of how far the policies are improving the economic status and farmers' incomes. The real incomes of farmers have

¹ <http://krishakayog.gov.in/4threport.pdf>

stagnated, with the average being Rs.1650 per family per month as per the NCEUS report² of 2007. The study also shows that the average family expense in the villages is Rs.2150 per month – while this still represents below-poverty-level consumption, it already puts them in a big deficit, pushing them into debt. This situation has been created by some serious underlying problems.

a. No remunerative Prices: Current pricing policies adopted by CACP for crops like paddy, wheat, sugarcane etc do not take into account the real costs of production (either ignoring or undervaluing the costs of family labor, land, water, management expenses, farm inputs like composting, own seed, etc.) or the rising living costs of farmers.

- Policies such as price determination, levies, transport restrictions and export restrictions are geared towards providing food at low cost to consumers and raw material at low cost to industry.
- Inflation increases both input costs and living costs for farmers, but the government response is typically to lower agricultural prices, resulting in a triple squeeze.
- Opening up of the markets after signing on WTO, regional trade blocs like ASEAN and several bilateral agreements have led to (unfair) cheap imports from other countries.

These policies have kept the output prices low, often amounting in a negative subsidy, with farmers ending up subsidizing others.

b. Living costs not accounted: Living costs are increasing due to withdrawal of governments from providing the basic services like health, education etc and have multiplied over the past two decades. However, this is not accounted in the calculation of support prices given to farmers.

c. Financial Support systems not reaching farmers: The financial support systems like subsidies, credit, and insurance also did not benefit a large numbers of farmers, both in their design and in their implementation.

- **Subsidies** to agriculture are relatively very low in India. Large chunk of the subsidies are in the form of input subsidies and Food Subsidy for PDS. A major portion of the agri-input subsidy from the Centre goes towards Chemical Fertilizers (nearly one lakh crores amounting to 12 % of Government of India's budget two years ago). However, there is no support provided to farmers who use local methods of improving soil fertility or use their own seed.
- Though Banks have to give 18% of credit to agriculture, bringing in input industry and food processing under the priority sector has led to a situation where small agriculture loans of less than Rs. 25,000 has reduced by 75% in 2006 compared to 1990. Their share in total loans has reduced from 49.6 % to 13.3 %. Given that the scale of finance remains low (Rs. 3000 to 7000/acre for most crops) and that 85% of farmers own less than 5 acres of land, it is clear that much of the credit is going to large farmers and industry. During the same period, loans of more than one crore have increased by 400%. The share of rural branches has decreased from 58.42 in 1993 to 41.38% in 2007. In absolute terms, this amounts to 4829 from 35389 in 1993 to 30560 in 2007³. As a result, dependency on local moneylenders and Micro Finance Institutions has increased, thereby raising costs of credit and worsening the terms of credit.
- Tenant farmers do not receive any benefit of government support as the tenancies are mostly unwritten. The increase in land rent (ranging from Rs. 10,000 to 25,000 per acre per year in many areas) and increase in credit costs (interest rates ranging from 30% to 60%) are making the costs of cultivation unviable for them.

In this context, the government needs to focus expressly on bringing in economic sustainability in farming and bring about an increase in family income levels in agriculture – the government has to

² <http://nceus.gov.in/>

³ All the above data is compiled from various Reserve Bank of India documents <http://www.rbi.org.in>

ensure income security. This will not only address the deep distress among farmers, but also generate a positive dynamic in the entire rural economy by enabling farmers to make positive investments into improving agriculture, by increasing their purchasing power, and by retaining more youth in rural areas.

Ensuring Minimum Living Incomes: The learnings from the global food crisis have shown that food security lies in viability of small farms; hence, retaining small farms is very important. Reducing employment opportunities in agriculture and dismal efforts at increasing agricultural prices and wages has led to lower incomes for the small and marginal farmers and landless agriculture workers. The minimum income level should be estimated based on the living costs of the entire family.

The global food crisis has shown that the food security lies in viability of the small farms and not in the industrial farming by corporations. The IAASTD, a unique collaboration initiated by the World Bank in partnership with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), the World Health Organisation (WHO) and representatives of governments, civil society, private sector and scientific institutions from around the world, in its report⁴ arrived at the conclusion that to ensure food and livelihood security, small scale farmers should have access to land, markets and economic resources. This has to be combined with many cooperative endeavors and partnerships among farmers, scientists and external stakeholders.

2. Ecological Sustainability of Farming

Agriculture as an occupation and a way of life is directly dependent on Nature. The ecological damage caused by decades of intensive chemical-based agriculture is becoming increasingly clear and the adverse consequences are being faced by farmers on a large scale.

Soil health and fertility has declined drastically; the farm ecosystem which includes earthworms, beneficial insects, birds and diverse plants, has been badly disrupted in chemical farms; water systems have been poisoned; and groundwater has been depleted creating extensive dark zones. Farmers are seeing productivity declines despite heavier fertilizer application. The government's chemical fertilizer subsidy bill almost reached Rs.1 lakh crores and has become unsustainable. As per the government's State of Environment 2009 report, says, "Direct consequences of agricultural development on the environment arise from intensive farming activities, which contribute to soil erosion, land salination and loss of nutrients. The introduction of Green Revolution in the country has been accompanied by over-exploitation of land and water resources and excessive usage of fertilizers and pesticides."⁵ The report shows that about 44 Million hectares of land in India are degraded due to salinity, alkalinity, acidity and waterlogging, compared to the net cultivated area of 142 MHa.

Pesticide poisoning is killing thousands of farmers every year and pesticide residues and water contamination due to agrochemicals are causing diseases like cancer, birth defects, premature deliveries, impotency, kidney problems etc. There is alarming increase It is important to acknowledge the various environmental and environmental health related problems that are caused by synthetic pesticides in our agriculture and address this squarely.

When it comes to **Water**, the competing demands for water, depleting ground water and variation in rainfall due to climate change have become a regular phenomenon. Drought and floods have become the single largest reason for losing crops and livestock. The rapid increase in agro-chemical

⁴ Indian government approved this report in 2008. <http://www.agassessment.org/>

⁵http://www.moef.gov.in/soer/2009/SoE%20Report_2009.pdf

use in the past five decades, has contributed significantly to the pollution of both surface and groundwater resources, says the State of the Environment report, 2009. Promotion of water-intensive crops in unsuitable areas and increasing tubewells are leading to groundwater depletion and increasing debt burden. Water-efficient crops (like millets, pulses and oilseeds) and production practices (SRI, micro irrigation etc) need to be promoted. Rainfed agriculture needs a separate dispensation as most of the current subsidies are designed for irrigated areas.

There seems to be a mad rush towards **Genetically Modified crops** ignoring biosafety and other concerns. Without assessing the need, alternatives available, bio-safety, political rights of farmers and trade security, releasing of Genetically Modified (GM) crops into the environment would be a disaster for farmers, consumers and our environment. The experience with Bt cotton in India clearly shows that the biosafety tests done were very inadequate to conclude that the crop is safe to human and animal health. More than 2500 livestock deaths in Andhra Pradesh, large numbers of farmers and agri-workers reporting about and suffering from skin allergies and soils getting depleted were observed during the last five years of Bt Cotton cultivation. Public opinion on GM crops was against their release and various state governments also have raised their concern. The health concerns with GM food crops are increasing. In addition, the genetic contamination by Bt cotton has led to rejection of organic cotton from India. The recent controversial and discredited report on biosafety of GM crops in general and Bt Brinjal in particular by six Science Academies put a huge question mark on the abilities of the Indian scientific establishment to assess GMOs in an independent, rigorous and unbiased fashion. All these experiences with regard to GM crops/foods point to the need for redesigning the biosafety assessment protocols and put up strong institutional systems for regulation. There is also a need to assess the technology beyond biosafety.

There is a need for an urgent push to re-orient Indian agriculture into an ecologically sustainable model. This is also supported by the IAASTD report which says, *“A powerful tool for meeting development and sustainability goals resides in empowering farmers to innovatively manage soils, water, biological resources, pests, disease vectors, genetic diversity, and conserve natural resources in a culturally appropriate manner.”*⁶

Sustainable agriculture methods are now shown to work at a large scale in many places – including 28 lakhs of acres in Andhra Pradesh under Community Managed Sustainable Agriculture, which is being considered as the world’s largest state-supported ecological farming project, lakhs of acres under System of Rice Intensification (SRI) and its variants in other crops like wheat, sugarcane and ragi in many states, organic farming in several states, zero-budget natural farming by Subhash Palekar and his team of farmers etc. – leading to good production and higher net incomes for farmers.

It can no longer be said that ecological agriculture cannot happen at a large scale or that it cannot feed the country’s growing demand. It is high time that we re-orient our support systems and research towards ecological agriculture, and create the synergies required to make any system successful at a large scale.

3. Ensuring Access and Control over productive resources to farmers

Land, water, forest and seed are the primary resources for the population engaged in agricultural occupations. It is imperative that the control over these resources remain squarely in the hands of the people whose lives and livelihoods depend on such resources and not taken over by large corporations. The trends are alarming. There is a large-scale shift of land from agriculture. Recent

⁶[http://www.agassessment.org/reports/IAASTD/EN/Agriculture%20at%20a%20Crossroads_Executive%20Summary%20of%20the%20Synthesis%20Report%20\(English\).pdf](http://www.agassessment.org/reports/IAASTD/EN/Agriculture%20at%20a%20Crossroads_Executive%20Summary%20of%20the%20Synthesis%20Report%20(English).pdf) (page 5)

studies show that in Andhra Pradesh lakhs of acres of agricultural land have been shifted towards other purposes in the past twenty years – with estimates ranging from 5% to 10% of the cultivated land area. A significant portion of the land is being held as land banks by companies, many of them involved in agri-business operations, flouting land ceiling laws. Large-scale forced displacement of farmers for SEZs, coastal corridors, highways and industry is a huge problem triggering protest movements across India from Uttar Pradesh to Tamil Nadu.

An equally critical problem is of forest resources being alienated from the control of tribal communities, in violation of the special protections offered by the Constitution. Control over water resources, and the push towards water privatization are another area of contention over an agricultural resource, all the more important because of the alarming depletion of our water resources and contamination due to agriculture and industry.

Now, seed (*beej*) is another critical resource under threat, to add to *jal, jangal, zameen* which have been at the centre of resource struggles for decades. Privatization of the seed sector has been accompanied by poor regulation, and unbridled processes of handing over control of the most valuable seed varieties and germplasm to the corporate sector. The latest example is the agreements that five state governments have signed with Monsanto to pay the company hundreds of crores each year to purchase their hybrid maize seed and provide captive market, while protecting the company's claims of proprietary rights over the seed. Available information shows that these agreements are already worth about Rs. 200 crores – 5% of the value of India's entire seed market – in just 5 states mostly for a single crop – maize⁷. Many government research institutions have agreements with such MNCs to promote research which suits the MNCs' interests and not the interests of the farmers. Monsanto has cases ongoing against the AP and Gujarat governments arguing that the government cannot regulate the prices and royalties of seeds. Despite the concerted demands from farmer organizations, political parties and some state governments, the Seeds Bill tabled in the Parliament doesn't include provisions for regulation of seed prices and royalties, and doesn't empower state governments. It is important to recognize, conserve and promote farmers' seed varieties and knowledge/skills of breeding. Setting up of community seed banks, supporting farmer-breeders, emphasis on participatory varietal breeding etc., are urgent steps to be taken up by the government.

4. Ensuring non-toxic, diverse, nutritious and adequate food for all Indians

The issue of agricultural technologies, cropping patterns and practices is closely linked to availability of non-toxic, diverse, nutritious and adequate food for all Indians. Choices for consumers are getting squeezed on all these fronts. Interpretation of food security to only mean specific quantities of rice and wheat from a few pockets in India, in a centralized implementation framework, has jeopardized the food and nutrition security, which includes food safety, for most Indians. The right to safe food and right to informed choices of citizens of this country are being constantly threatened, including with the push for GM foods. On the other hand, the public financing burden on the government, first in terms of support to wrong technologies that are eroding farmers' productive resources and then to support a centralized PDS, is ballooning year by year. The government should ensure that all Indians have access to non-toxic, diverse, nutritious and adequate food by promoting ecological farming based on agro-diversity, especially from the drylands of the country.

The specific demands and policy propositions in each of these areas are presented in the next section.

⁷ <http://www.downtoearth.org.in/node/2168>

Demands and Policy Framework for Kisan Swaraj

1. Economic Sustainability and Income Security for Agricultural families

- 1.1. Establish a mechanism to guarantee a minimum living income to farming families. Appoint a **Farmers' Income Commission** as a statutory body which examines farmers' incomes every year and makes specific recommendations to ensure adequate income levels, including through remunerative prices and new policy options like direct income support.
- 1.2. Recast methods of determining agricultural costs and prices to reflect the real cultivation costs (including correctly valued labour costs and farmers' own resources) as well as living costs that ensure a dignified living. The **Minimum Support Price should be fixed to ensure at least 50% profit over the real costs as well as to cover the living costs**. Any reduction in this should be compensated as direct income support.
- 1.3. **Restructure the Food Security Systems** to emphasize and ensure fair market to the farmers, for a variety of food crops. PDS should be organized on the basis of procurement directly from farmers and localized storage and distribution, transporting only the surplus.
- 1.4. For all 25 or more crops for which MSP is declared, establish **Market Stabilization Fund** to ensure that the MSP is realized by farmers and protect them against market fluctuations.
- 1.5. Invest in rural infrastructure through storage and processing units and financial support, for increasing farmers' holding capacity so that they can take advantage of the market.
- 1.6. **Direct subsidies to farmers:** Support farmers' own inputs, especially in case of ecological farming, on par with external inputs through subsidies directly delivered to farmers.
- 1.7. **Provide a labour subsidy for farmers for 40 days/acre/season in irrigated areas and 60 days/acre/season in rainfed areas for various crops.** This should be in addition to support to NREGA and efforts to converge NREGA and agriculture should continue.
- 1.8. Enact comprehensive social security legislation for all agricultural workers and farmers (incl. tenant farmers) to cover pensions, healthcare and accident/life insurance.

2. Ensuring Ecological Sustainability of farming

- 2.1. Implement a time-bound plan to transition Indian agriculture to ecologically sustainable methods – at the rate of 10% of cultivated land area each year – establishing support systems and incentives to enable this.
- 2.2. Phase out all Toxic Agri-Chemicals: All Class I (Class Ia and Class IIb) and Class II pesticides should be banned in India, and others should be phased out according to a time-bound plan. This is important in the context of constantly-emerging evidence on the adverse effects of such chemicals as well as the possibilities thrown up by rapid expansion of ecological farming methods, including of NPM (Non Pesticidal Management of crops).
- 2.3. Continue the moratorium on the commercial release of GM crops. Enact a comprehensive law for ensuring bio-safety in the context of the GM trials as well as processed foods entering Indian markets.
- 2.4. Focus on rain-fed agriculture and drought adaptation: Technology Mission with adequate budget allocations for rain-fed production systems to address issues across the value chain, establishing support systems for dryland crops like millets, pulses and oilseeds.
- 2.5. Allocate fifty percent agri-research funding immediately towards research on Ecological farming/sustainable agriculture using participatory approaches, and redirect the agenda of the NARS from corporate-driven high-input intensive technologies to farmer-led sustainable technologies. Democratize and make the NARS institutions accountable to the sustainability of agriculture.
- 2.6. The country's response to Climate Change and the National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture

should focus on resilient systems, locally adapted varieties, and ecological farming practices along with increasing biodiversity, which will act as the best adaptation for climate change, instead of pursuing “climate-proof” GM crops.

3. Ensure protection of communities’ rights and resources

- 3.1. **Intellectual Property Rights of any form should not be allowed on seeds and seed producing technologies, and knowledge belonging to the farming community.** The agreements by state and central governments and public research institutions with seed companies like Monsanto which have IPR implications should be immediately cancelled.
- 3.2. **Empower Government to regulate seed prices and royalties paid for technology licenses** through explicit provisions in seed legislation. State governments should be granted powers to regulate seed licenses, compensation for defective seed, the sale price of seeds and royalty paid on seeds.
- 3.3. Promote farmer-breeders and release farmer-bred varieties through the formal system; promote Community seed banks or seed centers at panchayat level for seed exchange.
- 3.4. **Stop Forcible acquisition and diversion of agricultural lands, both rainfed and irrigated, to non-agricultural and non-food uses.** The current Land Acquisition Act should be abolished and replaced by a pro-people Act based on prior informed consent. A mandatory land audit should be undertaken every five years.
- 3.5. The Forest Rights Act should be implemented effectively. Forced displacement of *adivasis* and destruction of invaluable forest land for industry and mining should be stopped.
- 3.6. Privatization of Water resources should be stopped; re-prioritization of water usage across sectors should be taken up, prioritizing drinking water and agriculture; small water bodies such as tanks should be developed and maintained under community control.

4. Ensure safe, nutritious, diverse and adequate food for all

- 4.1. Phase out all toxic technologies in farming so that the right to safe food for all Indians is safeguarded.
- 4.2. Recast all food security schemes including the PDS into universal and decentralized systems of local production, procurement, storage and distribution, while including millets, pulses and oilseeds as an integral part.
- 4.3. Ensure that consumers’ right to informed choices with regard to chemical residues and GM foods is ensured through proper standards and labeling regimes.

Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture (ASHA)

Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture is a network of individuals and organizations working to create an enabling environment for ecologically safe and economically viable sustainable agriculture. The Alliance is an effort to bring together practitioners, farmer organizations, researchers, policy makers and consumers onto a platform to promote successful experiences of sustainable agriculture for further scaling up and mainstreaming.

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