

Horticulture : A Key to All Round Growth of Agriculture

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Sant Bahadur* Horticulture is perhaps the most profitable venture of all farming activities as it provides ample employment opportunities and scope to raise the income of the farming community. It also has tremendous potential to push the overall agriculture growth to more than the targetted 4 per cent. The climatic conditions prevailing in our country are favourable for a large number of horticulture crops such as fruits, vegetables, roots and tuber crops, ornamental, medicinal and aromatic plants. Production of horticultural crops has witnessed a significant improvement over the years, of the 11 per cent of the total cropped area, horticulture accounts for about 28 per cent of agriculture GDP in India. India ranks second in the global production of fruits and vegetables next to China. It's share in the World fruit and vegetable production is about 9.2 per cent and 9.24 per cent respectively. India is the largest producer of mango, banana, sapota and acid lime and has the highest productivity of grapes per unit area in the World. Despite this, India's share in fruits and vegetables trade in the World is very low. The Government has taken many initiatives to boost horticulture sector in the country. These include National Horticulture Mission (NHM), National Horticulture Board, Technology Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture in North-East and Himalayan States and financial assistance to private sector and Government agencies to set up post-harvest infrastructure such as warehouses and cold storages etc. At present, 371 districts in 18 States and 3 Union Territories are covered under the National Horticulture Mission. Apart from States and Union Territories, 13 National Level Agencies have been included for providing support to the developmental efforts which require inputs at the national level. The total approved outlay for the National Horticulture Mission for the 11th Plan is Rs. 8809 crore. Out of this, an amount of Rs. 3200 crore has been spent during first 3 years of the Plan. NHM is a centrally sponsored scheme in which the Centre's contribution is 85 per cent and the remaining 15 per cent is met by State Governments. Production of planting material, vegetable seed, seed infrastructure in public and private sector, establishment of new gardens in farmers' land, rejuvenation/replacement of senile plantation, technology dissemination through front line demonstrations, post-harvest management etc., are covered under the scheme. From 2010-11 the National Horticulture Mission guidelines have been revised to accommodate new interventions such as High Density Plantations, mushroom cultivation, horticulture mechanisation, and certification of good agricultural practices. Cost norms of some of the activities like setting up of nurseries, area expansion and protected cultivation have been enhanced to provide better incentives to the farmers adopting improved technologies. The cost norms and assistance for post-harvest management have been enhanced and new components introduced to encourage private sector participation in creating NHM infrastructure. States have also been advised to ensure holistic development of horticulture sector by convergence of schemes implemented by other Government Departments. At the national level, efforts are being made to ensure convergence by dovetailing the resources of the concerned Departments viz. ICAR for research, Ministry of Food Processing Industries for coordinated development of Agri Export Zone (AEZ) for horticultural crops and Department of Rural Development with Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme and also for providing road connectivity to the crop clusters in the NHM districts. At the level of the Ministry of Agriculture, convergence is ensured with the scheme on micro-irrigation, Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojna (RKVY) and Watershed Development Programmes. During 2005-09, 2192 new nurseries have been set up. Additional area of about 16.57 lakh hectares was brought under new gardens of various horticultural crops. 2.78 lakh hectare of old and senile orchards was rejuvenated to enhance productivity. An area of 1.37 lakh hectare was covered under organic farming. Integrated Nutrient Management (INM) and Integrated Pest Management (IPM) were adopted in 7.48 lakh hectare apart from setting up of 66 disease forecasting units, 78 bio-control laboratories, 98 plant health clinics and 67 leaf/tissue analysis laboratories. Funds have been provided for setting up of 1093 pack houses, 285 cold storage units, 14 refrigerated vans and 264 mobile/primary processing units, under post harvest management. Nine

wholesale markets and 163 rural markets have been set up to ensure proper handling and marketing of agricultural produce. Apart from this, 7.74 lakh farmers have been trained under various horticultural activities. As per mid-term evaluation study conducted by the National Productivity Council during 2007-08, area under horticultural crops increased by 12.4 per cent. According to the study, availability of planting material has also improved substantially in almost all the States. In addition, 190 million man days employment opportunities have been generated and organic farming has been gaining popularity. Under the new component of Terminal Market Complex (TMC), which envisages a hub and spoke model for the development of markets under PPP, one TMC has been approved for Patna in Bihar during the current financial year with NHM subsidy of Rs. 33 crore. Three such TMCs have also been approved in Maharashtra, Orissa and Tamil Nadu. The projected production of horticultural crops during 2009-10 has gone up to 226.87 million tonnes. It includes 73.53 million tonne of fruits and 136.19 million tonne of vegetables from an area of about 21 million hectares. The growth rate in horticulture production between 2004-05 and 2008-09 has been to the tune of 7.2 per cent. Cultivation of horticultural crops is now increasingly becoming an option to improve livelihood security, enhance employment generation, to attain food and nutritional security, and increase income through value addition. Cost of horticulture products being less than half of those in other parts of the World due to relatively cheap and skilled manpower, Indian farmers are in an advantageous position to exploit the untapped potential. ✖ ***Assistant Director(M & C), Press Information Bureau, New Delhi.**

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