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IMPACT OF CORONA VIRUS PANDEMIC ON AGRICULTURE SECTOR IN INDIA[#]

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Abstract

Since, COVID-19 is the most terrifying thing that is happening all over the globe, and it is really becoming unbelievable for us that we are really living in this "Corona Era". So, COVID-19 stands for Corona Virus Disease-2019 as it penetrated its roots in late December, 2019, when its pandemic has caused a significant number of human cases related to respiratory infections and further deaths in China¹. The outbreak of this deadly disease has first started from a small city of China, Wuhan which then has affected the whole world and India has started reporting its cases from January, 2020 onwards and it has led various curfews and whole countries' lockdowns like it is currently going on in our India and National quarantines in country like Italy which is currently an epicenter of Corona outbreak². We all are currently well-aware of this health crisis caused by the 2019-nCoV, thanks to all awareness campaigns done by our Government and off-course social media platform, but we can't ignore the fact that this epidemic has also affected our agriculture in the same way. Agriculture is the main root of Indian economy and most of our population is dependent on it for food. It provides income as well as employment to approximately more than half of our population and it plays an important role in providing basic raw materials to the processing industries. Although the share of agriculture, including forestry and other allied is decreasing, its contribution to national GDP was improved (15.87%) in 2019 as compared to previous years³. The country's EXIM (Export-Import) policy also plays a significant role in increasing our national GDP as it covers almost all regions of the world and in case of livestock, as we all know, India holds the first rank in producing milk all over the world⁴. In horticulture too, India has performed fairly well in the scenario of production of fruits, vegetables and flowers and this also plays an important part in country's trade portfolio too.

[#]General Article

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Introduction

So, all this has led to raising of the most important question: Is this new Corona virus impacting agriculture supply and demand? The answer to this question is: Yes! The impact of this deadly disease has started affecting agriculture supply and demand side in real and its rippling effects are clearly visible on all food markets and other food-related items. Every day, we all are listening, viewing and even facing the problems of Jamakhori (huge stock of money or goods in secret) and Black marketing (trading of commodities at a higher price than usual)⁵.

Current Scenario of This Problem

However, according to current situation, most of the expert's opinions on this matter remain very cautious and most of them are carrying a similar view, "The only thing we know right now is that nothing is certain at this moment." As we all well-aware about this fact that India will soon entered in the "Third Stage" of this Corona transmission, so, the evolution of this deadly virus during coming days and weeks will be very crucial, and its impact on agriculture sector as well as our economy will depend on the duration of time required to stop its spread⁶. Hence, analyzing the impact of Corona virus on the agriculture sector is therefore not enough mature or more accurately we can say, "Pre-mature" and we can only stay speculative at this stage. We will also rely on this condition that how long this health emergency situation will going to last and various lock-downs in several states will remain in their places before everything can be resumed to normal. While these lockdowns and restrictions are necessary for reducing and controlling the spread of the disease, we can't deny the fact that they also lead to disruption of the marketing channels and trading of agricultural/horticultural products, with the significant potential impacts on our farmers that depend on them for their livelihoods, food and nutritional security and in such cases, we all know that local economies are the "Worst hit" as the businesses remain shuttered and consumers remain locked down in their homes. The grape crops in Karnataka, papaya crops in Maharashtra, various vegetables in Uttar Pradesh, wheat in Punjab etc. are suffering due to lockdown, as they are unable to find consumers and most of the crops are left for rotting due to absence of sale⁷. Milk sellers in several states are pouring milk in the drains as no one is buying milk from them⁸.

Relief Measures Taken by the Government

Further, this current pandemic is also happening in the aftermath of "Bird Flu" in 2006 that had severely affected the poultry animals in the Maharashtra and in other parts of the country, and led to an increase in phobia among consumers about contamination of flu virus i.e. H5N1 virus and income loss among the poultry industry and similar was the case for "Swine Flu" in pigs⁹. But, this pandemic is much worse than that, hence to encounter its adverse effects in rural areas and even in urban areas too as population is more dense there, the Ministry of Agriculture is carefully evaluating the conditions of the farmers and has taken a series of steps to ease the stress on the farmers as the current problem, which the farmers facing right now is the deficiency of labour for the harvesting of rabi crops as most of these crops are ready for harvest, and second is the sale, how will they sell their produce in the markets amid lockdowns. So, some state government has

announced that they will purchase from the farmers at suitable prices and even provide desired labour and sanitized instruments to them. Also, there was an announcement made by the Rajasthan Government that the date of return of crop loans for kharif season was extended to 30th June, 2020 without interest and if the conditions didn't improve, the date will get extended, so that this will not create stress on the farmers¹⁰. Government has also provided the facility of getting information related to agriculture, animal husbandry, fisheries, sericulture etc. on Kisan Call Center (KCC) and during this period of lockdown, government has directed connected the farmers with agricultural scientists by diverting KCC's number to their mobile number to solve their issues related to agriculture¹¹. Government is also providing proper guidelines for effective procurement and storage of rabi harvest, cold storages and relief measures for the poultry industry. Some state Governments has even declared that if farmers can't sell their produce in Mandis, they don't need to worry; the Government itself will make arrangement to collect the produce from the farmers. So, what else our farmers would demand? Even the jamakhors and black-marketing traders are not spared; necessary legal actions are also taking place against them, if someone has filed complaint against them.

Conclusion

So, all this has led to the conclusion that our country is trying to do its best to fight the agriculture, poultry etc. related problems amid lockdowns and also providing various subsidies and other measures to reduce the income loss of the farmers caused due to Corona virus pandemic. Still most of the farmers in various states are suffering from this problem. Some of them have left their harvest for rotting due to lack of sale and others are facing the problems of transportation and labour. So, Government should focus on these areas and should try to tackle these problems because as we all know, Everything else can be managed in this lockdown, but we can't live without food; food is nothing without agriculture and agriculture is impossible without farmers!

So, at the end, Stay safe, stay home, fight Corona and flourish Agriculture!

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