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Less than 4% Indian farmers have adopted sustainable agricultural practices: CEEW

New Delhi, 20 April 2021: Less than 4 per cent Indian farmers have adopted sustainable agricultural practices and systems, according to an independent study released today by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW). The study, supported by the Food and Land Use Coalition (FOLU), finds that scaling up sustainable agriculture would be critical to improve farm incomes and bolster India's nutrition security in a climate-constrained future. States such as Andhra Pradesh and Sikkim have already taken a lead in sustainable agriculture.

Dr Rajiv Kumar, Vice-Chairman, NITI-Aayog, said, "We need to rethink our current agricultural practices. Our focus is on promoting sustainable agriculture, especially natural farming, in India. This would benefit small and marginal farmers. It is also suitable in drier regions of the country as it requires lesser water. Embracing sustainable agriculture could not only lead to better incomes for farmers but also have multiple environmental benefits. I congratulate CEEW for publishing this study."

Dr Arunabha Ghosh, CEO, CEEW, said, "We need a fundamental rethink of how we grow food and what we eat. India needs to mainstream sustainable agriculture. It has the potential to help diversify farmers' sources of food and income, make farming climate-resilient, optimise use of natural resources and re-build ecosystems. It also offers a vital alternative to input-intensive farming. We must investigate more and follow the science. For sustainable agriculture to scale, policymakers must support long-term comparative assessments of sustainable practices and conventional farming, and increase budgetary allocation to promote practices and methods that have the most promise."

According to the CEEW study, organic farming has garnered the most policy attention among the eight sustainable agricultural practices receiving budgetary support under various central government programmes. However, it currently covers only 2.8 million hectares (ha) — or two per cent of India's net sown area of 140 million ha. Natural farming is the fastest growing sustainable agricultural practice in India and has been adopted by around 800,000 farmers. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) has achieved a coverage area of 5 million ha after decades of sustained promotion. Agroforestry and rainwater harvesting, which have received significant attention in national programmes, cover 25 million ha and 20-27 million ha, respectively.

Abhishek Jain, Fellow and Director at CEEW and an author of the study added, "It is imperative to broaden the national policy focus from food security to nutrition security and from merely chasing yields to valuing total farm productivity. It would not only reward farmers better, but help elevate the role of sustainable agriculture in India's nutrition and farmers income security."

The CEEW study recommends investing in capacity building and facilitating information exchange among farmers as most sustainable agricultural practices are knowledge and skill-intensive. Also, re-aligning government support to reward agricultural outcomes like annual farm productivity and resource-use efficiency would incentivise adoption of sustainable agriculture. Further, focus on rainfed areas would be particularly important to enhance farmers' incomes and resilience in a changing climate. Finally, it would be crucial that national and state-level agriculture information systems such as the agriculture census capture and integrate data on prevalence of sustainable agriculture practices. This would help raise awareness and scale up sustainable agriculture in the country.

Methodology

The CEEW-FOLU study is based on an in-depth review of 16 sustainable agriculture practices and systems such as organic farming, natural farming, integrated farming systems and conservation agriculture. It also included a primary survey with 180 civil society organisations (CSOs) promoting sustainable agriculture, as well as 40+ consultations with stakeholders such as the government and agriculture institutions.

The study, "Sustainable Agriculture in India 2021: What We Know and How to Scale Up," can be accessed here.

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About CEEW

The Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) is one of Asia's leading not-for-profit policy research institutions. The Council uses data, integrated analysis, and strategic outreach to explain – and change – the use, reuse, and misuse of resources. It prides itself on the independence of its high-quality research, develops partnerships with public and private institutions, and engages with wider public. In 2021, CEEW once again featured extensively across ten categories in the 2020 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report. The Council has also been consistently ranked among the world's top climate change think tanks. Follow us on Twitter @CEEWIndia for the latest updates.