

SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE ON THE OCCASION OF THE DISTRIBUTION OF KRISHI KARMAN AWARDS

15th January 2013, Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi

I am pleased to be here today for distributing the Krishi Karman Awards for the year 2011-12 to State Governments for exemplary performance in increasing food grain production. It is heartening to note that the record production achieved in 2011-12 was substantially broad-based covering over $2/3^{\text{rd}}$ of the total cropped area in 18 States of the country. This is indeed a unique laudable achievement.

2. I congratulate the Union Agriculture Minister Shri Sharad Pawar for taking the initiative for setting up these Awards. These have been received enthusiastically by farmers and the State Extension machinery, as reflected in the record food grain production over two consecutive years i.e. 2010-11 and 2011-12. The achievement is all the more significant considering that a set of new States like Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu, Nagaland and Manipur have been awarded this year.

3. Agriculture is a challenging sector which is critically dependent on climatic factors and availability of natural resources. The challenge is accentuated by the continuously rising pressure of demand for food, fodder, fibre, fuel and fertilizer. There is greater need today for achieving higher production in an environmentally sustainable manner. Under these circumstances, it is to the credit of our scientists and stakeholders, both in the public and private sectors, that better technologies to address the challenges are being developed and innovatively promoted amongst farmers to derive optimal returns from available resources.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

4. We can meet the Twelfth Plan targets period agricultural growth target of 4% per annum only through measures such as crop diversification, developing high yielding disease resistant seeds, improvement in water management practices, promotion of balanced use of fertilizers and pesticides etc. Further, better and increased use of satellite communication for weather forecasting and effective information dissemination to the farming community would help in preventing crop failure.

5. All-round progress in agriculture and allied sectors is a sine qua non for holistic rural development in the country. During my tenure as the Union Finance Minister, I had outlined a four-pronged strategy as part of the Union Budget for 2010-11 to propel growth in the agriculture sector. The four components of the strategy comprised of extending the green revolution to the Eastern region of the country, reducing the significant wastage in storage as well as in the operations of the existing food supply chains, improving credit availability to the farmers and providing further impetus to the development of the food processing sector by making available state-of-the-art infrastructure. These strategies have led to positive outcomes and we need to build-on these initiatives to induce further improvements in the agriculture sector.

6. We are all aware that a number of issues are confronting farmers especially when the communication revolution is integrating the world into a global village. Economies are simultaneously becoming knowledge and capital intensive. Our farmers have to quickly adapt in order to cope with the changing times. They have to upscale from engaging in agriculture for subsistence to taking up agriculture as a commercial venture.

With a large number of small and marginal farmers who rank at the bottom of the prosperity pyramid, the task is enormous and would need adequate support from Government.

7. Government would simultaneously need to focus on creation of employment opportunities in other sectors to provide income diversification to rural families who today are dependent for their livelihood solely on unviable land holdings. Economies of scale through aggregation of produce can be catalysed through creation of additional on-farm and non-farm employment opportunities in rural areas. In this regard, it is the collective responsibility of different departments and Ministries in Government of India to work in unison and at a scale that creates the desired impact.

8. Agriculture also needs to be given priority access to power, credit, water and fertilizers. It is essential to create rural infrastructure in the form of all season roads, multi-mode transportation, quality power supply, transparent markets, thriving financial institutions etc. to ensure remunerative returns to farmers. We also need to set up farmer interest groups that link farmers to the markets, reduce information asymmetry and make available both information and effective choices to farmers

for supply of inputs and sale of produce. It needs no reiteration that food and nutrition security is important for India considering the size of our population and the large number of undernourished and malnourished living in extreme poverty. Increased food production would not only give a boost to our efforts for improving access to food for all but would also positively impact household level food availability.

9. I once again applaud the efforts of the Agriculture Ministry in instituting the Krishi Karman Awards and congratulate the State Governments for their dedicated, sincere and tireless efforts in achieving a record production of food grains. I am confident that these initiatives will make all stakeholders work even more closely towards realising the twin objectives of higher agricultural productivity and more sustained and durable economic growth. I once again congratulate and wish all of you success in your endeavours.

Jai Hind!