

1. Zero Budget Natural Farming

Context:

- ▶▶ Prime Minister Narendra Modi, addressing the 14th Conference of Parties to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification on Monday, mentioned that “we are focusing on ZBNF”.

Indian Context:

- ▶▶ Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF) is a set of farming methods, and also a grassroots peasant movement, which has spread to various states in India.
- ▶▶ It has attained wide success in southern India, especially the southern Indian state of Karnataka where it first evolved.
- ▶▶ The movement in Karnataka state was born out of collaboration between **Mr Subhash Palekar, who put together the ZBNF practices**, and the state farmers association Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha (KRRS), a member of La Via Campesina (LVC).

What is Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF)?

- ▶▶ Zero budget natural farming (ZBNF) is a method of chemical-free agriculture drawing from traditional Indian practices.
- ▶▶ It was originally promoted by Maharashtrian agriculturist and Padma Shri recipient Subhash Palekar, who developed it in the mid-1990s as an alternative to the Green Revolution’s methods driven by chemical fertilizers and pesticides and intensive irrigation.
- ▶▶ He argued that the rising cost of these external inputs was a leading cause of indebtedness and suicide among farmers, while the impact of chemicals on the environment and on long-term fertility was devastating.
- ▶▶ Since these also do not have to be purchased, it makes farming practically “zero-budget”.

Opinion on Direct Transfer and Agriculture Subsidies:

- ▶▶ The PM-Kisan Yojana (PMKY) – an income support of Rs 6,000 per year to small and marginal farmer households – was announced before the parliamentary elections.
- ▶▶ The 2019-20 Union budget has provisioned Rs 75,000 crore for this scheme.
- ▶▶ This scheme will be meaningful if other subsidies – such as those on food, fertiliser, power and irrigation, and agri-credit – are clubbed with the PMKY and given directly to farmers.
- ▶▶ The move should be complemented by allowing market forces to set prices.
- ▶▶ **PMKY may come at the cost of investments in agriculture**, which have fallen from a peak of 18.2 per cent of the agri-GDP in 2011-12 to 13.7 per cent of the agri-GDP 2017-18.

With such a fall in investments, the dream of doubling farmers' incomes by 2022 cannot be fulfilled.

Opinion on ZBNF:

- ▶▶ In India chemical fertilisers are not used rationally by our farmers.
- ▶▶ The optimal ratio of using nitrogen (N), phosphate (P) and potash (K), differs from plot to plot, at the all India level, it is generally agreed that the optimal combination of N, P and K should be in the ratio of 4:2:1.
- ▶▶ Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS) scheme almost freed prices of P and K from government control and provided some fixed subsidy on these fertilisers on a per tonne basis.
- ▶▶ However, N (urea) was excluded from this scheme. As a result, while DAP (di-ammonium phosphate) and MOP (muriate of potash) carry a subsidy of about 25-30 per cent of their cost of production, urea has a subsidy of more than 75 per cent on its cost of production.
- ▶▶ The **Indian urea prices are perhaps lowest in the world**, and certainly lowest amongst the major countries
- ▶▶ **Concerns**
 - ❖ There could be serious questions if the government's intention is to completely jettison chemical fertilisers.
 - ❖ has the Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR) studied the possible impact of ZBNF on yields of major crops like wheat and rice in comparison to chemical fertiliser-based farming?
 - ❖ It needs to do large scale testing in different regions to see the nationwide implications of ZBNF on the overall production of major crops.
- ▶▶ The limited information that is available suggests a 30 to 50 per cent drop in yields. That could puncture a big hole in India's food security basket.
- ▶▶ Then we can go back to the "**ship-to-mouth**" situation of the mid-1960s?
 - ❖ Ship to mouth meaning relaying on imports for food.

Concern on Fertilisers and ZBNF:

- ▶▶ if the government wants to cut fertiliser consumption by half by 2022, why is the government investing in new urea plants of 1.27 million tonne, each under the public sector —at Gorakhpur in UP, Barauni in Bihar, Ramagundam in AP, Sindri in Jharkhand and Talcher in Odisha.
- ▶▶ The combined capacity of these plants is likely to be about 6.35 million tonne and the production cost more than \$400 per tonne.

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- ▶▶ It seems that there is no coordination between these fertilisers production and Zero Budget Natural Farming.

Way Forward:

- ▶▶ Fertiliser subsidy, which is budgeted at Rs 80,000 crore for 2019-20, be given directly to farmers on a per hectare basis and **allow them to decide whether they want to do ZBNF or chemical-fertiliser based farming.**
- ▶▶ The fertiliser prices will then be market determined, ensuring their efficient usage, stopping their diversion to non-agri-uses as well as to neighbouring countries.
- ▶▶ It will be a win-win situation from several perspectives.

Source: Indian Express

