Concerns in Horticulture Promotion Policies

Why in news?

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Official estimates indicate that the output of horticulture has outstripped that of foodgrains for the sixth year in a row.

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What is the horticulture production status in India?

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- The agriculture ministry’s latest crop estimates for 2017-18, which indicate that the output of horticulture has outstripped that of foodgrains for the sixth year in a row.
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- While the food grain harvest has been oscillating, dipping markedly during the back-to-back drought years of 2014 and 2015, horticulture production has maintained a steady uptrend, regardless of the monsoon’s performance.
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- The area under vegetables, fruit and other horticultural products, such as spices, herbs, flowers and plantation crops, has also been expanding.
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What is the significance of increased horticulture production?

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- Agriculture has begun to diversify with farmers and farm land shifting gradually to relatively lucrative and quick cash-yielding fruit and vegetable farming.
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- Horticulture, together with livestock husbandry and fisheries, comprises the high-value segment of agriculture, which, if prompted to grow to its potential, can mitigate farm distress.
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- This trend assumes significance also because it has come about without much official backing.
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What are few concerns which needs to be addressed?

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- At present, India’s share in the global bazaar of fresh and processed fruit and vegetables is meagre though even today the country is the world’s second-largest producer of these items.
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- Admittedly, priority to foodgrains was justified in the past to combat widespread hunger, this goal has, more or less, been achieved.
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- In 2017-18, too, the output of Tomato, Onion and Potato registered a decline, bucking the overall uptrend in horticulture production.
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- The absence of stable import-export policies concerning these rapidly decaying products is partly to blame for their price volatility.
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- Though a price stabilisation fund for perishable farm produce exists for years, it serves little purpose because of its meagre corpus and shoddy administration.
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- Unfortunately, none of the fruit or vegetables figures in the present list of over 20 farm commodities for which the minimum support prices are routinely announced by the government.
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What measures needs to be taken?

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- Emphasis should now shift to augmenting the availability of relatively nutritious fruit and vegetables to alleviate malnutrition, which still persists.
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- Assured marketing at remunerative prices for horticultural produce needs to be provided in the way it is proposed for many other crops.
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- Equally important is to facilitate the development of post-harvest value chain

of cold stores, refrigerated transportation and processing of perishable horticultural products.
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- Promoting organised retail with backward linkages with growers can also help provide assured marketing at reasonable prices.
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- It is imperative to include in MSP list some key fruit and vegetables, notably the three main mass-consumed kitchen staples tomato, onion and potato.
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- Government need to realise the need to create a prudent and longer-lasting policy environment to let the output of key vegetables and fruit move in tandem with their demand in the domestic and export markets.
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Source: Business Standard

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