Covid-19 & Food Security

Why in news?

The agriculture sector needs to be reformed for ensuring food security.

What should be the priority?

- India has contained the mortality rate from Covid-19 infections at around 3.3% (global average 7%).
- The real test will come when the lockdown is lifted.
- Next to saving lives is the necessity of **having food to survive**.
- Despite initial disruptions in supply lines, India has somehow managed to feed its population of 1.37 billion.
- If there is any complaint, it is from the producer's side that the prices of perishables have collapsed in some parts of the country.
- But, for the consumer's side, supply lines were quickly restored and food is easily available in the markets at reasonable prices.

What needs to be complimented?

- Those in the government managing the food logistics deserve to be complimented for keeping supply lines for essential food running.
- States must also be lauded for having done a remarkable job of procuring the main rabi crop, wheat.
- A flawless procedure of issuing tokens to farmers and opening several additional wheat procurement centres is commendable.
- Also, having a good logistics facility to procure and move the products to states that face a deficit is also commendable.
- Since the India Meteorological Department has forecasted a normal monsoon, India's food situation may remain comfortable in FY 2020-21.

How will Agriculture be helpful currently?

- Agriculture may be the only sector that registers a respectable growth this year.
- This will help absorb the shock of the coronavirus on extreme poverty and malnutrition.
- We need to build on the success and resilience of agriculture.
- This calls for large-scale reforms in agri-marketing as well as in the public

distribution system (PDS).

What changes could be made?

- **APMC** - The APMC markets can keep doing their business as usual.
- But the channels for direct buying from farmers/farmer producer organisations (FPOs) can be opened.
- **Buyers** - Any registered large buyer must be encouraged by providing them with a license, which is valid all over India.
- Buyers should be exempted from any market fee and other cesses as they will not be using the services of the APMC market yards.
- **E-NAM** - It can flourish if grading and dispute settlement mechanisms are put in place.
- **Private mandis** with modern infrastructure need to be promoted in competition with APMCs.
- **PDS** - On the PDS front, we need to move towards cash transfers that can be withdrawn from anywhere in the country.

Source: Business Standard

