Empowering small farmers

Why in News?

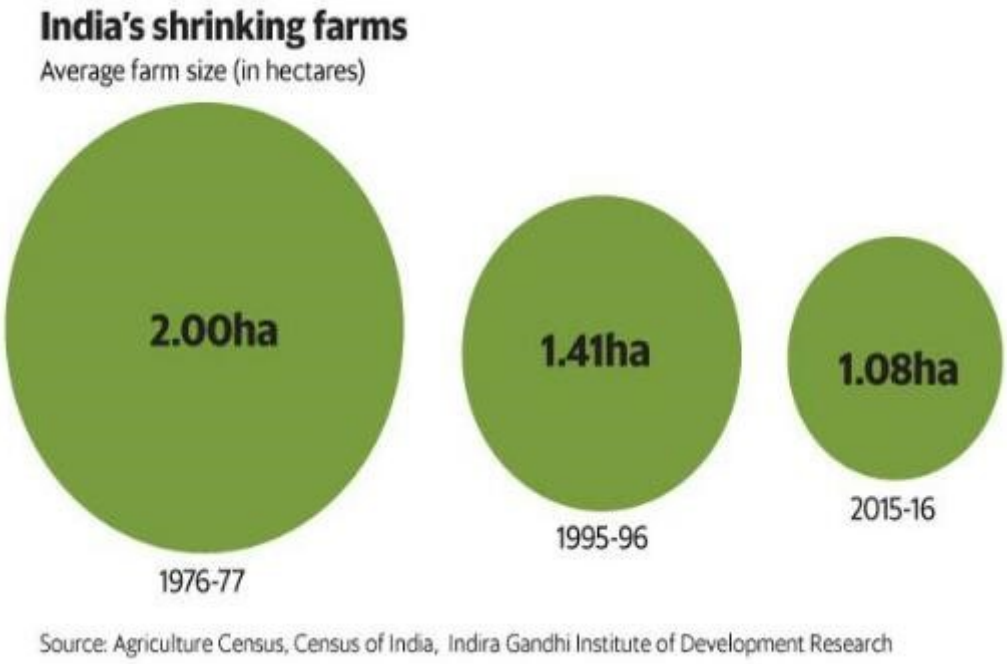
Recently , Principal Secretary to Prime Minister stressed the need of improving small farmers to improve overall agriculture system.

How are the agricultural landholdings distributed in India?

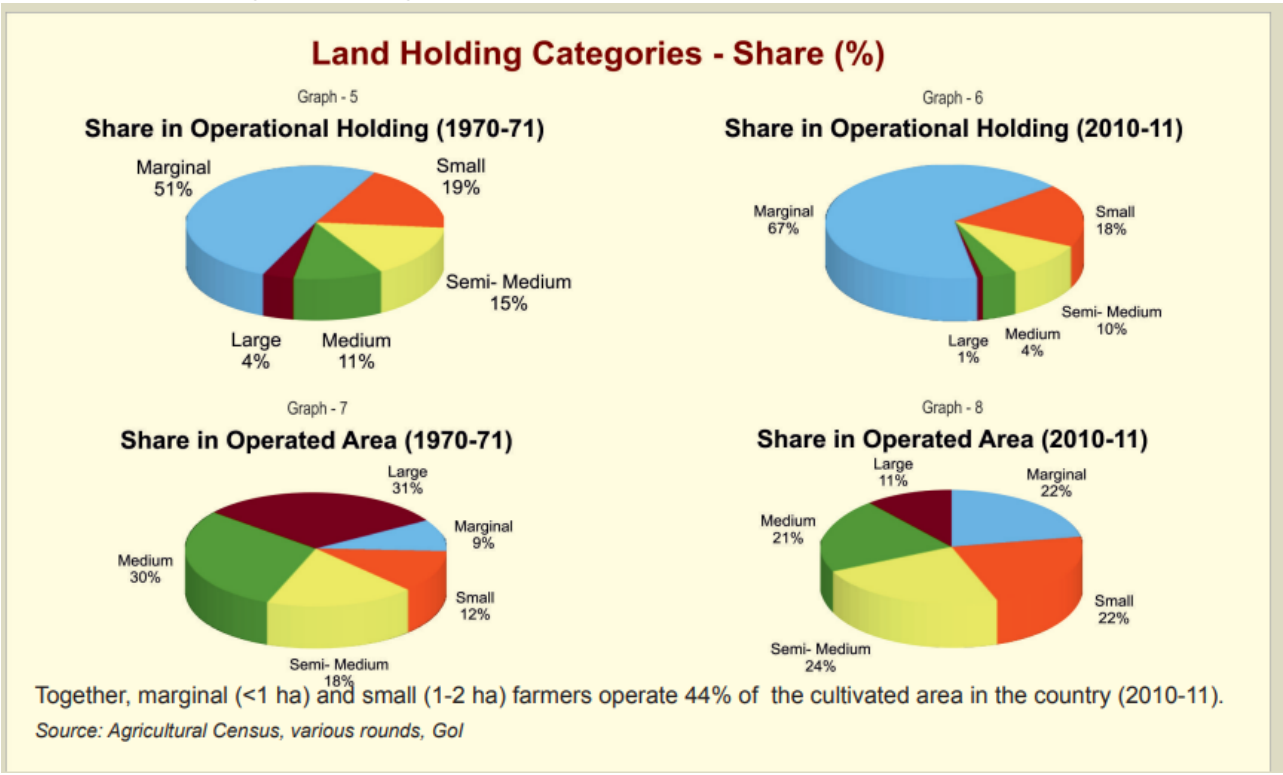
- **Land** – It is the basic means of production in an agrarian society without which no agricultural production can take place.
- Two aspects of land that affect the agriculture efficiency are
    - Size and distribution of land holdings
    - Land tenure system.
- **Operational Holding**- All land which is used wholly or partly for Agricultural production and is operated as one technical unit by one person alone or with others without regard to the title, legal form, size or location.
- **Small and marginal farmers** – 85% percentage of farmers in India are small and marginal farmers.

S.No.	Size-Groups		Classes (in hectares)
I.	**Marginal**	1.	Below 0.50
		2.	0.50 – 1.00 (0.50 < 1.00)
II.	**Small**	3.	1.00 – 2.00 (1.00 < 2.00)
III.	**Semi-Medium**	4.	2.00 – 3.00 (2.00 < 3.00)
		5.	3.00 – 4.00 (3.00 < 4.00)
IV.	**Medium**	6.	4.00 – 5.00 (4.00 < 5.00)
		7.	5.00 – 7.50 (5.00 < 7.50)
		8.	7.50 – 10.00 (7.50 < 10.00)
V.	**Large**	9.	10.00 – 20.00 (10.00 < 20.00)
		10.	20.00 and above

- **Increase in operational holdings** - The number of operational holdings has increased from 71 million in 1970-71 to 146.5 million in 2015-16(10th Agri census data).
- **Decrease in average landholding** - The average size of holdings had continuously declined from 2.28 hectares in 1970-71 to 1.08 hectares in 2015-16.



- **Increase in operated area** - The operated area which was 162.3 million hectares in 1970-71, initially increased to 165.5 million hectares in 1990-91 and thereafter has shown a declining trend in general.



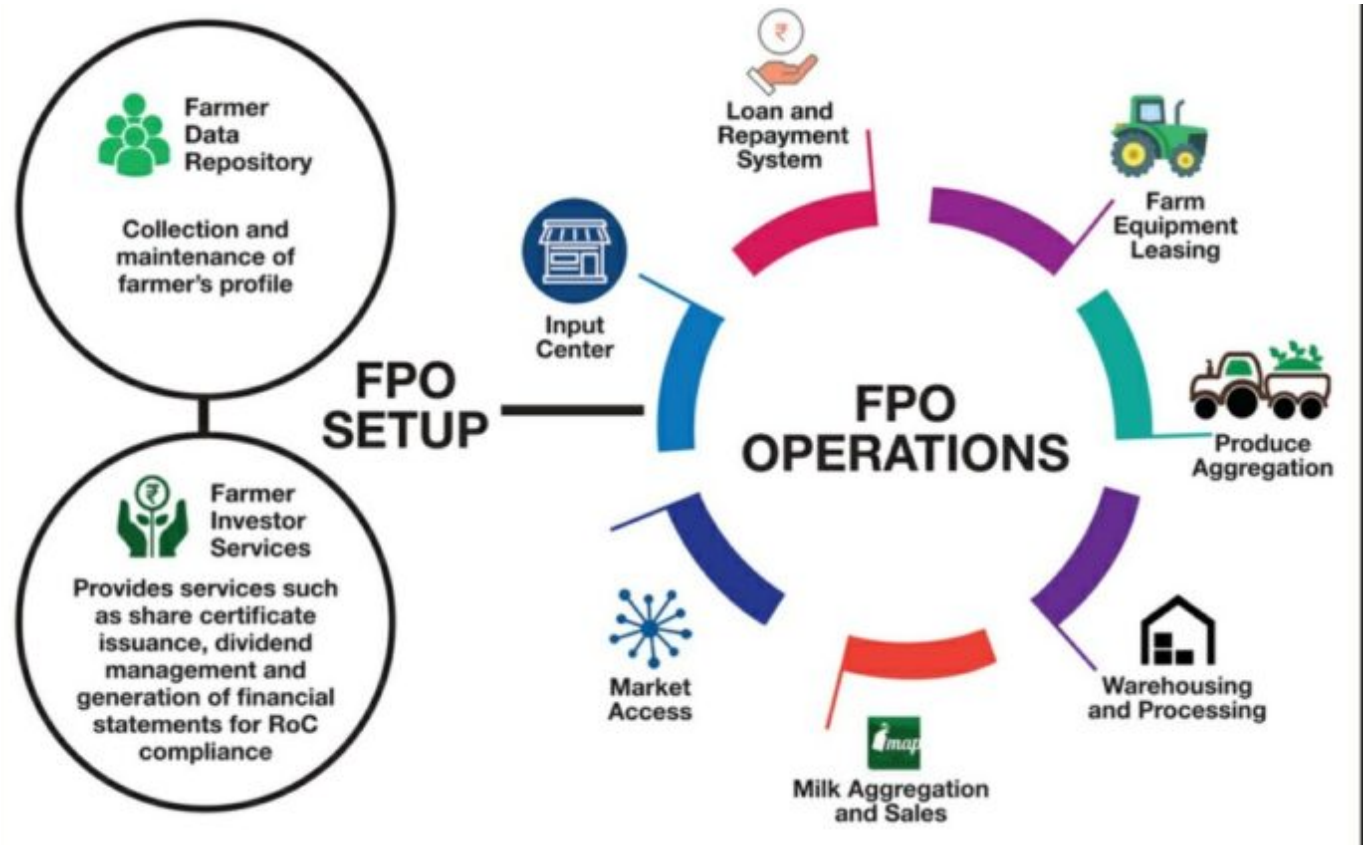
What are the challenges faced by small farmers?

- These farmers are caught in a vicious cycle of diminishing landholdings, lack of resources, and predatory moneylenders.
- **Insufficiency** - Small plots of land, often less than an acre, are insufficient to sustain a family.

- **Lack of access to resources** - Without access to reliable water sources, quality seeds, or market knowledge, these farmers struggle to make ends meet.
- **Indebtedness** - Many fall prey to moneylenders who charge exorbitant interest rates, pushing them deeper into debt.
- **Vicious trap** - The result is a cycle of poverty and despair, which has contributed to India's agricultural distress.

What is collective farming?

- **Land pooling** - Farmers retain ownership of their land but agree to pool their plots into a collective unit.
- This creates larger, contiguous areas for farming, which improves efficiency and scalability.
- **Collaborating with social entrepreneurs** - A non-exploitative social entrepreneur provides initial capital, access to water resources, seeds, and marketing channels.
- **Natural farming techniques** - Farmers are taught to prepare organic fertilizers to enhance soil fertility and reduce dependency on expensive chemical inputs.
- **Revenue distribution** - Farmers receive daily wages for their labour and after the harvest, revenue from the sale of produce is distributed.
- Operational expenses are deducted, and the remaining profits are shared among farmers based on their land contribution.
- **Education and the future** - To arrest further fragmentation of land, the model encourages farmers to document their children's names in land records.
- Earnings from the collective farming initiative can fund their education, enabling them to pursue careers outside agriculture.
- **Institutional set up** - small and marginal farmers in a contiguous area are grouped as Farmer's Interest Groups (FIG) and FIG's would be integrated into Farmer Producer Group (FPG).
- **SFAC** - Small Farmers' Agri-Business Consortium is an exclusive Society focused on increasing incomes of small and marginal farmers through aggregation and development of agribusiness.
- It is promoted by Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Govt. of India



What are the benefits of collective farming?

- **Economic stability -** By earning both wages and profit shares, farmers experience immediate and long-term financial benefits.
- **Sustainability -** Natural farming practices improve soil health and reduce environmental harm, creating a sustainable agricultural system.
- **Social Empowerment -** Collective farming fosters community cooperation, reduces dependence on moneylenders, and gives farmers greater bargaining power in markets.
- **Prevention of land fragmentation -** Joint ownership through a pooled model halts the physical division of land, ensuring its viability for future generations.
- **Focus on education -** Redirecting farm income toward children's education creates opportunities for upward mobility and diversification of livelihoods.

What lies ahead?

- The holistic collective farming model is not just an economic initiative; it is a vision for social transformation.
- By integrating traditional knowledge with modern sustainability practices, it offers a way to rejuvenate India's farming sector.
- To scale this initiative, government bodies, NGOs, and private stakeholders must come together.
- Financial incentives, such as subsidies for natural farming inputs or tax benefits for social entrepreneurs, could accelerate adoption.

Reference

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