Furthering Feminisation of Agriculture

What is the issue?

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- The ‘feminisation of agriculture’ is picking up pace in India.
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- Given this, the challenges women farmers face must necessarily be addressed by appropriate policy measures.
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What are the recent proposals?

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- October 15 is observed as International Day of Rural Women by the United Nations.
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- It is also the National Women’s Farmer’s Day (Rashtriya Mahila Kisan Diwas) in India.
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- In 2016, the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers’ Welfare decided to take the lead in celebrating the event.
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- It duly recognises the multidimensional role of women at every stage from sowing to planting, drainage, irrigation, fertilizer, plant protection, harvesting, weeding, and storage.
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- This year, the Ministry has proposed to discuss the challenges women farmers face in crop cultivation, animal husbandry, dairying and fisheries.
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- The aim is to work towards an action plan using better access to credit, skill development and entrepreneurial opportunities.
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How is women representation in agriculture?

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- According to Oxfam India, women are responsible for about 60-80% of food production and 90% of dairy production.
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- The Agriculture Census (2010-11) shows that out of an estimated 118.7 million cultivators, around 30% were females.
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- Similarly, out of around 144 million agricultural labourers, nearly 42% were females.
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- As per the latest Census (2015-16), out of a total 146 million operational holdings, female operational holders' share is around 13% (20.25 million).
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- At present, women farmers have hardly any representation in society and are less visible in farmers’ organisations and protests.
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- But they are the invisible workers without which the agricultural economy is hard to grow.
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What are the challenges and ways out?

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- **Land ownership** - The biggest challenge is the powerlessness of women in terms of claiming ownership of the land they have been cultivating.
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- In Census 2015, almost 86% of women farmers are devoid of this property right in land.
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- The foremost task for sustenance of women's presence in farming is to assign property rights in land.
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- **Credits** - Women with access to secure land, formal credit and access to market have greater propensity in making investments.
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- This helps in improving harvest, increasing productivity, and improving household food security and nutrition, across the world.

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- But women farmers are unable to approach banks for institutional loans as banks usually consider land as collateral.
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- Provision of credit under the micro-finance initiative of the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development without collateral should be encouraged.
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- Better access to credit, technology, and provision of entrepreneurship abilities will facilitate more women participation.
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- **Land holdings** - Land holdings have doubled over the years resulting in shrinking of the average size of farms.
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- Therefore, a majority of farmers fall under the small and marginal category (with less than 2 ha of land) which includes women farmers.
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- But a declining size of land holdings may act as a deterrent due to lower net returns earned and technology adoption.
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- Thus, the possibility of collective farming can be encouraged to make women self-reliant.
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- **Training** - Training and skills are now imparted to women by some self-help groups and cooperative-based dairy activities (Saras in Rajasthan and Amul in Gujarat).
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- These can be explored further through farmer producer organisations.
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- Also, government flagship schemes must include women-centric strategies and dedicated expenditure.
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- These may include National Food Security Mission, Sub-mission on Seed and Planting Material, Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana.
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- Krishi Vigyan Kendras in every district can educate and train women farmers about innovative technology.
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- **Pay** - Including the household responsibilities, women do more work (paid and unpaid) for longer hours than male farmers.
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- But women farmers can neither make any claim on output nor ask for a higher wage rate.
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- An increased work burden with lower compensation is a key factor

responsible for their marginalisation, which needs redressal.
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- **Machinery** - Female cultivators and labourers generally perform labour-intensive tasks in agriculture.
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- But most farm machinery is difficult for women to operate.
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- It is thus important to have gender-friendly tools and machinery for various farm operations.
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- Manufacturers should be incentivised to come up with better solutions.
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- Farm machinery banks and custom hiring centres promoted by many State governments can be roped in to provide subsidised rental services to women farmers.
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- **Resources** - When compared to men, women generally have less access to resources and modern inputs (seeds, fertilizers, pesticides).
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- Equalising access to productive resources could increase agricultural output in developing countries by as much as 2.5% to 4%.
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- Women farmers should be listed as primary earners and owners of land assets to elevating their place as real and visible farmers.
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- This will ensure their acceptance and their activities will expand to
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i. acquiring loans
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ii. deciding the crops to be grown using appropriate technology and machines
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iii. disposing of produce to village traders or in wholesale markets
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- In all, there is a need for an appropriate policy and doable action plans to sustain women’s interest in farming and their uplift.
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Source: The Hindu

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