# High Powered Committee for Agriculture Reforms

## Why in news?

Prime Minister announced a high powered committee to recommend structural reforms in agriculture, at the 5th meeting of the Governing Council of NITI Aayog.

## What is the objective?

- The proposed committee would include some Chief Ministers.
- It would take a holistic approach on the subject, including allied activities of agriculture.
- The key issues marked out for reference to the proposed committee include -

i. private investment in agriculture
ii. logistics
iii. value-addition
iv. marketing support
v. irrigation, especially drip and other means of micro-irrigation
vi. legislative changes required to revamp agriculture and its allied activities

## What were the earlier committees?

- The most notable among panels in this regard are -
  i. the M S Swaminathan-headed National Commission on Farmers
  ii. the Shanta Kumar-chaired committee on food sector reforms
  iii. the Ashok Dalwai-led empowered committee on doubling farmers' income
- **The Swaminathan commission's report** (2006) had sought a paradigm shift in the focus of agricultural development programmes.
- It called for shift in focus from increasing production to raising farmers' income.
- But this took over a decade for the government to realize the importance of this counsel and begin acting on it.
- However, many other equally sensible recommendations of this commission still remain unattended.
- **The Dalwai committee's report** (2018) had a key focus on the structural reforms and governance framework for agriculture.
- Being the latest, its recommendation were most relevant to the prevailing agrarian situation marked by widespread farmers' distress.

- Besides, there is the government's own think tank, the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog.
- The three-year action plan for agriculture crafted by NITI Aayog also addressed current challenges in the agriculture sector.

## How effective will the new committee be?

- Most of the issues marked out for reference to the proposed committee have been dealt comprehensively before by the above panels.
- They have come out with some well-judged inputs for reforming the key segments of the farm sector.
- But invariably, many of the workable and wise recommendations in these reports remain unimplemented.
- Given this, the real need for the new committee is highly contentious.

## What are the real challenges?

- Agriculture, according to the Constitution, is a state subject.
- So the truth is that the Centre has a very limited authority to intervene in matters related to agriculture.
- It can do little without the cooperation of the states which, often, is unavailable in adequate measure.
- The meager success of some of the Centre's key initiatives in agriculture stands as proof.
- E.g. the efforts at reforming agricultural marketing, legalizing land leasing and regularizing contract farming
- The model Bills drafted to serve as the guides for the amendment of the state laws have failed to deliver the desired results.

## What is the way forward?

- The Swaminathan commission chose to recommend shifting of agriculture from the State List to the Concurrent List.
- This could be firmly considered as this would allow the Centre to play a more meaningful role in the agricultural sector.
- At the same time, it would not significantly dilute the powers of the state governments.
- If the government is truly serious in reforming the farm sector, it can just examine the earlier reports and pick up the appropriate suggestions.
- Significantly, concerted efforts at implementing them in a time-bound manner should be taken up.
- The Centre's ability to take the states on board through statutory means or persuasion is essential for meaningful reformation of the farm sector.

**Source: Business Standard**

