How Punjab can Shine Again with Nutritional Security and Climate-friendly Agriculture

What is the issue?

Farmers in Punjab and Haryana are completely dependent on cereal crops such as paddy and wheat that poses huge threat to the ecosysytem and nutrition security.

What is the status of agriculture in Punjab?

> *As per the latest Situation Assessment Survey (SAS) of agricultural households conducted by the National Statistical Office (NSO), an average Indian farmer earned Rs 10,218 per month in 2018-19.*

- The highest income was received by a farming household in Meghalaya (Rs 29,348) followed by Punjab (Rs 26,701).
- If we normalise incomes of agri-households using the average holding sizes, Punjab's rank would go down to 11th.
- This implies that farmers in Punjab are earning higher incomes primarily because the size of their landholding is greater compared to other states.
- As per the recent Agriculture Census, the average size of operational holdings in India has decreased from 2.28 hectares in 1970-71 to 1.08 hectares in 2015-16.
- In Punjab, the rice cultivation is depleting the state's water table, emitting methane and other greenhouse gases and stubble burning is choking millions.

> *The Department of Agriculture, Co-operation and Farmers Welfare conducts agriculture census every five years.*
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> *It has been conducted since 1970-71 following broad guidelines of decennial World Census of Agriculture (WCA) evolved by FAO.*
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> *It is a Central Sector Plan Scheme and so far 10 censuses have been conducted in the country.*

How can farmers in Punjab augment their incomes with more sustainable agriculture?

- **Fund for switching to maize cultivation** - Punjab's idea to create a fund of around Rs 25,000 crore to help farmers switch from paddy to maize has to be focused with certain modifications.
    1. The fund should be under a five-year plan to shift at least a million hectares of paddy area to maize.
    2. The corpus should have equal contributions from the Centre and state.
    3. The Maize Corporation of Punjab (MCP) should be created to buy maize from farmers at MSP.
    4. MCP should enter into contracts with ethanol companies to absorb the surplus in maize production.
    5. The best seeds should be used to enhance the maize productivity .
- **Crop diversification –** More focus has to be given to fruits,vegetables, livestock and fisheries.
- It has to be backed by proper processing, grading and packaging infrastructure to tap its full potential.

How is this plan beneficial to Punjab farmers?

- The plan aids in achieving the government's target of 20 per cent blending of ethanol in petrol by 2030 and will also reduce GHG emissions in vehicular pollution.
- Punjab will arrest its depleting water table as maize needs less than one-fifth the water that paddy does for irrigation.
- Punjab will save much on the power subsidy to agriculture as paddy irrigation consumes much of the power subsidy.
- There will be lesser methane emissions and less stubble burning.
- This could result in a win-win situation for all — farmers, the Government of Punjab and the country
- The SAS data shows that the profitability is much higher in fruits and vegetables than in crop cultivation.
- Also, the horticultural crops and livestocks ensure nutritional security in line with sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture.

Reference

1. https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/how-punjab-can-shine-again-with-nutritional-security-and-climate-friendly-agriculture-7588562/
2. https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1605058

