

## Market Assurance Scheme

### What is the issue?

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- Central government proposes to launch the new “market assurance scheme” (MAS).
- Given the shortfalls with similar systems already in place, the proposal needs a relook.

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### What is the market assurance scheme?

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- It is a new price support scheme under which states would be free to procure from farmers all crops for which MSP is announced.
- States can procure any quantity of coarse grains, millets, pulses and oilseeds, except rice and wheat.
- As, rice and wheat are already being procured by the centre for the public distribution system.
- Under MAS, the centre will compensate states for any losses due to procurement, capped at 30% of the procurement cost.
- For hill states and those in the north-east, the ratio of compensation will be 40%.
- It will be the concerned states’ responsibility to dispose of the procured crops.

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### What is the need?

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- The proposal comes in the backdrop of protests and demands by farmer groups for remunerative crop prices and loan waivers.
- Currently MSPs are announced for 23 crops but only paddy and wheat procurement is effective.
- Procurement by the centre of pulses and oilseeds in small quantities calls for a better system in place to address farmer distress.
- Under MAS, states are given the freedom to choose which crop to procure and in what quantities, when wholesale prices drop below MSPs.
- States will also be free to use the procured crops for targeted nutrition support programmes or sell them in the open market.
- The scheme proposes to strengthen the procurement mechanism by ensuring farmers do not suffer from marketing inefficiencies.

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### What are the concerns?

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- **Markets** - Poorly functioning agriculture markets with lack of competition, cartelization and opaque price discovery which are causes of price distortions stand unaddressed.
- **Infrastructure** - The scheme will require the deployment of huge manpower and creation of massive infrastructure for purchasing, transporting and storing.
- Ensuring these may not be affordable for the state governments.
- **Agri practices** - The earlier physical market intervention-based system of price assurance in the case of wheat and rice has not been without its own disadvantages.

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- It has resulted in:

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- i. distortion of the cropping pattern
- ii. alienation of the private trade from the grain market
- iii. unwarranted accumulation of stocks on the government account

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- Replicating the same in other crops would be ill-advised.
- **Fiscal** - There is a concern that the scheme could place fiscal pressures on the Union government.
- There are also some unfulfilled preconditions in place for the successful functioning of a scheme that spends public money.

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## What should be done?

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- A lasting solution lies in making farming profitable by reducing production costs and improving returns on the produce.
- In this context, MAS is a more temporary measure and an eventual solution is to bring in greater competition in agricultural markets.
- Agricultural marketing reforms wooing private investment in setting up crop *mandis* to enhance competition must be expedited.
- The price deficiency payment mechanism is another novel way to address price distress. Click [here](#) to know more.
- There is also a need to put in place stable policies for agricultural pricing and trade, both external and domestic.
- In all, the Centre should take lead to put a proper system in place instead of passing on the responsibility to the states.

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**Source: Business Standard, Livemint**

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