Preventing Post Harvest Losses

What is the issue?

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Despite India's considerable agricultural produce, the inadequacies in harvest and post-harvest stages lead to huge losses.

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What are the concerns?

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- India is one of the largest producers of over 80% of agricultural products, including some cash crops.
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- Conversely, harvest and post-harvest losses are a constraint in reaping the full benefits of the produce.
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- Post-harvest losses vary depending on crops, agricultural practices, climate, etc.
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- However, inadequate storage and transportation facilities are primary reasons in most cases.
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- **Storage** - Most harvested grains, fruits and vegetables are stored in traditional structures, made of grass, wood or mud.
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- Lack of scientific design make them susceptible to pest attack and decay.
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- Only 10-11% of fruits and vegetables cultivated in India use cold storage, due to the financial and infrastructural inadequacies.
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- Resultantly, a bulk of stored commodities is lost to insect infestation, rotting and mould growth.
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- **Financing** - Due to excess supply in the market immediately after harvest, farmers do not realise the best price.
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- But to prevent storage loss, farmers are compelled to sell their produce immediately, within days of harvest, at any prevailing rate.
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- **Transport** - Transferring goods from cultivation centres to processing centres or markets is another impediment.
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- Inadequate transportation infrastructure lead to damage of commodities.
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- Also, heat and humidity, in the absence of cold chain transportation, spoil the produce.
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What should be done?

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- **Storage** - Technology intervention is essential to improve the storage structures and logistics.
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- Adequate cold chain and scientific storage infrastructure facilities are required.
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- It prevents storage losses and facilitates funding of post-harvest activities.
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- **Funding** - Warehousing receipts, from certified warehouses, can be used as collateral for funding from banks, etc as provided by Warehousing (Development and Regulation) Act of 2007.
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- Access to funds can enable farmers meet the consumption and working capital requirements.
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- They can also monitor market prices and sell their produce as per their preference, when prices reach profitable levels.
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- **Transport** - Use of enclosed structures and cold chain transport facilities can reduce post-harvest losses due to transportation.
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- Freshness of fruits and vegetables and seed viability can be ensured.
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- In all, preventing post harvest losses can increase farmers' revenues and can also notably aid the food security initiatives.
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Source: Financial Express

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