

Revamping ICAR

What is the issue?

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ICAR needs a makeover as agriculture education is in a poor state.

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What is ICAR?

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- The Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR) is the apex body mandated with agriculture education, research and farm extension.

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- It acts as a nodal agency to agriculture research institutions & Krish Vigyan Kendras - KVK

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- Its contributions during the most challenging years of food scarcity were remarkable.

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- The success though came at an environmental cost.

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What is the current problem with ICAR?

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- We have achieved food sufficiency but farmer sustainability is far off, with agrarian distress & farmer suicides aplenty.

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- Far from being an autonomous body, ICAR has become an extension of the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.

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- ICAR has historically evolved with a strong bias in favour of crop sciences at the cost of animal husbandry.

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- Its research, which is primarily oriented towards agriculture productivity without an alignment to farmer prosperity is no longer sustainable.
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- Yields for irrigated crops like rice and wheat are comparable with the best in the world, but research on rain-fed farms, pulses, oilseeds, fruits and vegetables lag considerably.
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- Evolving consumer preferences, changing the narrative from farm to food, environmental impact, climate resilient agriculture require a reorientation of priorities and mindsets.
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- The capacities for market intelligence and forecasting models have not been cultivated.
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How is the scenario in the other avenues of agriculture education?

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- Boyed by the success of green revolution, complacency set in and public extension collapsed.
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- The abdication by the state public extension system has allowed the private to take up the role of farm advisories to disastrous consequences for farmers, human health and the ecology.
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- The rapid mushrooming of private institutes offering agri-degrees is a sham.
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- Many of these are without even proper labs, infrastructure or farm land.
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- These institutions thrive because agriculture is a state subject & except Punjab the other states haven't enacted a regulatory framework.
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- State Agriculture Universities are starved for funds with the state governments barely managing to support them.
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- Convergence between ICAR and state agriculture agencies has failed due mismatch in priorities between the states & the center.
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What are some institutional reforms to be done?

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- Manipulations in recruitment and nepotism need to be removed.
- The salary structures & promotions are currently time-bound and do not recognise research output and talent which needs to change.
- Women need to be recruited in proportional numbers to remove gender bias.
- Improvement in inter-departmental co-ordination is necessary.
- Action needs to be taken to plug the routine theft of research work of ICAR by private companies & the IPR filings needs to be taken up as a priority.

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What could be some of the structural reforms taken up?

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- ICAR could be transformed into a truly autonomous body, reporting directly to the prime minister like the Atomic Energy Commission.
- Its functions could be restricted to farm research, education and oversight of non-ICAR agriculture institutes.
- Farm extension services should be completely delegated to the state governments.
- If the PMO accepted the responsibility of agriculture research and education, SAU salaries would fall into the Central government basket.
- This would free up resources & KVKs could be transferred to the states to better focus on farm extension.
- Budget allocations for agriculture R&D must be pegged as 2 per cent of the GDP from the less than 1 per cent at present.
- But, most importantly, a metric to audit outcomes and establish

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accountability is needed to resolve the crisis.

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Source: The Indian Express

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