Separate Ministries for animal husbandry, dairies and fisheries

What is the issue?

- The creation of a separate ministerial portfolio for animal husbandry, dairying and fisheries has aroused interest amongst enthusiasts in the agricultural policy space.
- This subtle governance move has been hailed by stakeholders.

What was the earlier model?

- The former Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries (DAHDF) was responsible for overseeing matters related to animal husbandry, dairy development and fisheries.
- It advised state governments and Union Territories on formulation of policies and programmes related these matters.
- Formed in February 1991, the department came under the purview of the ministry of agriculture and farmers' welfare.
- Earlier this year, a new department called the Department of Fisheries was created out of the erstwhile DAHDF.

What are the contributions of the allied sector?

- The 'allied' sectors of 'agriculture and allied' have largely been neglected for a long time despite their growing significance in agricultural economy and food and nutritional security of India.
- Livestock, fishing and aquaculture account for nearly 32% of the overall agricultural GDP and 5% of national GDP.
- Livestock and fish products together contribute over Rs 7 lakh crore to total value of the agricultural output.
- The average annual growth rate of Livestock and fisheries sector together is 6 times more than that in the crop sector between 2012-13 and 2016-17.
- The share of crops in the value of agricultural output has been declining, but that of livestock and fish products is on a steadily upward trend.

What are some skewed policies and incentive structures?

- Agricultural policies were bent towards food grain cultivation to overcome

the food shortage crisis in the mid-1960s.
- However, long after attaining self-sufficiency, agricultural policies have remained undesirably crop-centric.
- Packages of benefits targeted at the welfare of the farming community have remained confined to those cultivating crops.
- The Kisan Credit Card (KCC) scheme's facility was extended to livestock and fish farmers only in 2018—after a long gap of 20 years (i.e. KCC introduced in 1998).
- Even the most recent PM Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) scheme for providing income support targeted only the crop cultivating farmers.

What could be done?

- The new ministry could work to extend the above benefits even to those engaged exclusively in the allied sectors.
- The definition of the 'farmer' has to be relooked and the ministry can play a pivotal role in mainstreaming these allied sub-sectors.
- With the creation of the new ministry, both the departments under it will have significantly higher budget allocations.

What are the challenges to deal with?

- Creation of separate ministry has chances of further dissociating them from an integrally linked and rather mainstreamed activity of crop cultivation.
- The already subpar coordination between departments is under threat of getting worse as there will be no single-window system.
- The fisheries department might ask for a separate ministry of its own, especially with the growing emphasis on Blue Revolution.
- The way to align and coordinate the activities of research organisations, think tanks, etc., with other government and quasi-government organisations will have to be figured out.
- The research ecosystem should not be equated with the governance structure of implementing departments.
- If the policymakers can shift their focus from crop cultivation to these emerging sectors, it will have well-served its purpose.

What is the concern?

- Institutions once created tend to persist.
- It is hoped that the objective behind the creation of this new ministry has been well-thought-through.
- Otherwise, it will just become another curious case of maximum government and minimum governance!

Source: Financial Express

