Soil Health Crisis

What is the issue?

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- Indian farmers apply around **66 million tonnes of fertilisers every year.**
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- They account for a significant share of India’s imports and subsidies.
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- It also rapidly declines the soil health.
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What is a Soil Health Card?

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- The government has launched a nation-wide **Soil Health Card** (SHC) scheme in early 2015 to rejuvenate India’s exhausted soil.
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- It uses a grid-wise approach, to test the nutrient contents of representative soil samples from the fields.
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- Accordingly, macro and micro nutrients needed by the soil are identified.
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- Using this the specific, measured quantities of fertilisers is calculated and this information is printed on the SHC and made available to the farmers in that grid through the state agricultural departments.
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- But farmers still buy large amount of fertiliser, disregarding SHC recommendations.
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Why farmers disregard SHCs?

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- Maximising yield and fear of loss are the major concerns.
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- Farmers are convinced that there is a perfect correlation between high fertiliser usage and more output.
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- They also believe that their farmlands have good soil health if they yield the desired output.
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- So they are not sure that the advice based on the SHC can be relied upon, because of this perception.
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- Also, SHCs are not easy to use.
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- They give general recommendations regarding the quantity of fertilisers required over the entire crop season.
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- In reality, fertilisers should be used in varying amounts over the different stages of the crop growth.
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What should be done?

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- The farmers need SHC recommendations **tailored according to crop growth stages.**
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- Vigorous campaign must be done to disregard the more fertilisers-better yields myth.
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- A behavioural approach based on understanding farmers' realities needs to be used.
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- Soil health must be positioned as crucial to the long-term productivity of land, which will be irredeemably lost if the focus is only on present income flows.
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Source: Business Line

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