NATIONAL MISSION ON NATURAL FARMING: GEOGRAPHY/SCHEMES

NEWS: National Mission on Natural Farming (NMNF) is a standalone Centrally Sponsored Scheme launched in November 2024 to promote chemical-free, ecosystem-based natural farming rooted in traditional knowledge.

India has launched the National Mission on Natural Farming (NMNF), a Centrally Sponsored Scheme to promote chemical-free agriculture with financial incentives and institutional support. While it has enrolled over 10 lakh farmers, the mission faces challenges like farmer resistance and creating market linkages for natural produce.

Institutionalising Chemical-Free Sustainable Agriculture

The National Mission on Natural Farming (NMNF), launched as a standalone Centrally Sponsored Scheme, represents a significant policy shift towards promoting a chemical-free and ecosystem-based agricultural system in India. In its initial phase, it has already enrolled over 10 lakh farmers and established 2,045 Bio-input Resource Centres.

Approval and Launch

The mission was approved by the Union Cabinet on 25 November 2024.

Restructuring

It has restructured and subsumed the earlier Bharatiya Prakritik Krishi Paddhati (BPKP), which was a sub-scheme under the Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY).

Financial Outlay

The total financial outlay for the mission is ₹2,481 crore, with the Centre's share being ₹1,584 crore and the States' contribution being ₹897 crore.

Objectives of the NMNF

The mission is guided by a set of clear objectives aimed at creating a sustainable and profitable agricultural model:

1. To reduce farmers' dependence on purchased chemical inputs (fertilizers and pesticides) and thereby enhance soil fertility and health.
2. To improve farmer income by significantly reducing the cost of cultivation.
3. To strengthen the resilience of Indian agriculture against climate shocks like droughts and floods.
4. To enhance biodiversity, restore ecosystem services, and improve the safety and quality of food.
5. To promote a community-driven adoption model through the active involvement of trained Krishi Sakhis and Self-Help Groups (SHGs).

Features of the NMNF

The mission is designed with several key components to ensure effective implementation and outreach:

Coverage

The mission aims to cover 5 lakh hectares of farmland across 15,000 clusters nationwide.

Bio-input Resource Centres (BRCs)

A network of 10,000 BRCs will be established to ensure a steady and accessible supply of essential bio-inputs like microbial formulations and botanical extracts.

Financial Incentive

A direct financial incentive of ₹4,000 per acre per year will be provided to farmers for a period of two years (for a maximum of 1 acre) to support their transition to natural farming.

Human Resource Development

A cadre of 70,000 trained Krishi Sakhis will be developed to provide last-mile delivery of extension services, training, and support to farmers.

Monitoring

The mission will utilize an online portal for real-time monitoring, including the geo-tagging of enrolled farmlands.

Certification

Produce will be certified through the Participatory Guarantee System (PGS-India), which is managed by the National Centre for Organic & Natural Farming (NCONF).

State-Level Initiatives Serving as Models

The NMNF draws inspiration from several successful state-level natural farming programs:

1. Andhra Pradesh: Community Managed Natural Farming (APCNF).
2. Himachal Pradesh: Prakritik Kheti Khushhal Kissan Yojana.
3. Gujarat: SPKK & Pagala for Natural Farming.
4. Rajasthan: The pilot scheme titled "Kheti Mein Jaan Toh Sashakt Kisan."

Institutional Support Mechanism

A robust ecosystem of institutional support has been established to back the mission:

Training

A vast network of 806 institutions, including Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs), state agricultural universities, and specialized natural farming institutes, will provide training.

Research

The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) network is tasked with developing scientifically validated Packages of Practices (PoPs) for natural farming across different cropping systems.

Outreach

The National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE) will serve as the central knowledge partner, while KVKs will conduct 8,500 demonstrations per year to showcase the benefits of natural farming.

Extension Model

The mission's extension approach uniquely blends traditional farmer knowledge with modern scientific validation to create credible and locally adaptable practices.

Key Challenges

Behavioural Resistance

Convincing farmers to shift from the familiar, high-yield chemical-based farming system to natural farming practices is a significant challenge.

Market Access

There are considerable gaps in certification, branding, and dedicated market linkages for natural farming produce, which can affect price realization for farmers.

Productivity Concerns

Farmers often worry about potential yield drops during the initial transition period before the soil health fully recovers.

Scaling Issue

The success of the cluster-based model depends heavily on its effective convergence with various state government schemes to achieve scale.

Way Forward

Market Linkages

Strengthen market access by connecting natural farming clusters to APMCs, dedicated farmer markets, the e-NAM platform, and creating a strong national brand.

Risk Mitigation

Introduce a transition insurance scheme or provide other forms of risk support to protect farmers during the initial years of potentially lower yields.

Entrepreneurship

Promote bio-input entrepreneurship by encouraging SHGs and Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) to manage and operate Bio-input Resource Centres.

Digital Integration

Enhance the digital monitoring portal to track not just area coverage but also improvements in crop health and soil parameters using technology.

Research and Development

Encourage agricultural universities and ICAR to develop more research-backed Packages of Practices (PoPs) tailored to India's diverse agro-climatic zones.

Global Learning

Foster international collaboration to exchange knowledge and best practices on climate-resilient natural farming techniques.

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