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Report on launch of India's apex think tank and trade facilitation body-ICFA



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REPORT ON LAUNCH OF INDIA'S APEX THINK TANK AND TRADE FACILITATION BODY-ICFA

Agriculture in India continues to be a powerful engine for rural prosperity, economic growth and social transformation with over 60% population directly dependent for its livelihood and sustenance. Indian agriculture is however, presently undergoing a rapid transformation since the onset of economic reforms during early nineties and the emergence of post WTO regime, governing the global trade in food and agriculture.

A paradigm shift is required in our approach to agriculture; from production to marketing, from quantity to quality and domestic to international consumers. Agriculture has to be done on scientific lines with the use of best of technologies for it to compete globally in cost and quality. The up and downstream business needs to be promoted in agriculture for enhance value addition, profitability and employment generation. The importance of internal reforms and direction to the sector is enhanced on account of the centrality of food and agriculture in the global trade, post WTO.

Within agri industry also there are different bodies for specific interest areas. Every major input and produce output industry has its own interest groups and representative body, but there is no coordination, while the major sector related to farm sector concerns them all and their target group i.e. farmer and end consumer are common to all of them. This underlines the need for such a body, which encompasses the compartmentalized approaches by creating proper understanding on major issues that concern our food and agriculture, farmers, consumers and agribusiness industry.

In this context there is a long felt need of having an apex body which could act as a think tank, research centre, information bank, facilitation point, advocacy body, development catalyst and monitoring centre for food and agriculture at national level. This should act parallel to trade bodies like CII, ASSOCHAM and FICCI, but be different from them in scope and objectives to represent the interests of other stakeholders such as farmers, academic and research bodies, financial and development institutions, entrepreneurs, cooperative and rural bodies, FPOs etc in agriculture sector, besides trade and industry.

Keeping these broad objectives in mind, new national body, Indian Council of Food and Agriculture was unveiled during the Eight Agricultural Leadership Summit by Sh.Rajnath Singh, Union Home Minister. This would give voice at global platform on trade, multilateral negotiations and AOA etc as also analyze the developments in major countries of the world and monitor their impacts on Indian agriculture and food trade on one hand and influence policy decisions, reform progress and direction to food and agriculture, promote technologies investment and market on the other hand. The council would forge linkages with various bodies and organizations in food and, farm sectors hold meetings with them and dialogues with the Governments, facilitate visits of delegations with various countries and take up research and advocacy work towards furthering the cause of farmers, Indian agriculture and agribusiness. ICFA management committee is proposed to be comprised of about fifty eminent persons in the country from policy making, public, farming community, research and academia, Agri-industries, experts, finance and developmental institutions etc.

Launching the Council by releasing ICFA brochure and its website www.icf.org.in Union Minister Rajnath Singh said that occasion marks the fulfillment of a long felt need of having an apex body which could effectively represent the interests of all stakeholders in India's food and agriculture sector at the national and international level particularly articulating the view point of farmers who do not have their advocate either at State or National level. He gave a call to ICFA to the district level by enrolling farmers and rural institutions to make it broad based, while exuding the confidence that the Council will do Justice to the cause and address the concerns of the farmer and agriculture community.

Chairman's Note

Dear Friends

Indian Council of Food and Agriculture is launched as an apex body to act as think tank, policy research, trade facilitation, development catalyst and monitoring centre for food and agriculture sector and to serve as global platform for partnerships. With the increasing globalization, there are newer challenges emerging which need to be proactively responded for Indian agriculture to grow, engage and compete globally and contribute towards global food security.

ICFA through its proactive policy and trade agenda and global partnerships is creating opportunities for growth, value addition and trade to help improve the income of farmers. The Council through its Working Groups and country specific Joint Business Councils seeks to represent the interests of all the stakeholders at the national level on one hand and positions India's food and agriculture sector globally on the other hand. Besides the trade and industry, ICFA focuses equally on farmers and agri-entrepreneurs towards helping them connect with the market opportunities, while addressing their policy, technology, trade, marketing, financing and partnership related issues.

One of the major issues facing Indian food and agriculture and its trade is the issue of food safety, traceability and certification of GAP and quality standards of food in India, impacting Indian exports and trade. ICFA has taken up agriculture stewardship program and national certification program for food products and GAP, especially the agriculture produce meant for nutrition and health sector, industrial use or for exports. ICFA is also promoting investments and technologies in farm sector by forging global partnerships with right institutions and by taking up projects, training and entrepreneurship development to accelerate growth in productivity, agribusinesses and exports.

With rapidly expanding opportunities in Indian food and agriculture sector and its growth story in the last one decade or so, there is increased interest among the major countries about engaging with India and exploring opportunities for trade and cooperation. There has been strong felt need for a dedicated body to facilitate such engagements through Joint Business Councils with various countries while promoting agribusinesses and agri-produce from Indian States. India also needs institutional mechanism at the States and district levels, wherein various stake-holders could meet and deliberate upon issues and agenda to unleash the potential of agriculture which is promised to be provided through state and district chapters.



Dr. MJ Khan

The highlights of the meet are as follows:

Mr. Rajnath Singh, Hon'ble Home Minister, Government of India

He said that he was happy to launch Indian Council of Food and Agriculture. India needed for long a body like this and he was sure that ICFA will effectively represent the interests of various stake-holders to help Indian agriculture. Farmers need voice and ICFA would work towards empowering farmers.

H.E. Prof. Kaptan Singh Solanki, Hon'ble Governor of Haryana and Punjab

Quoting the call of our first Prime Minister Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, Jai Jawan and Jai Kisan (long live soldiers and long live farmers) he said that the time has come to care for farmers. Prime Minister, Mr. Modi has announced renaming the agriculture ministry as the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare and therefore he hopes that ICFA will be able to work with the Government on the agenda of farmers' welfare.

H.E. Mr. PB Acharya, Hon'ble Governor of Assam

Focusing on the problems of Indian agriculture he propounded that ICFA with its mandate can facilitate connecting farmers with the markets to improve their farm profitability.

Mr. M Venkaiah Naidu, Hon'ble Minister of Urban Development and Poverty Alleviation, Government of India

Indicating the need of policy support in Indian agriculture he informed that our Government is fully committed to strengthen agriculture to help improve social and economic condition of farmers and ICFA can play a great role in creating understanding and consensus on major issues concerning farmers and Indian agriculture.

Prof. MS Swaminathan, Pioneer of India's Green Revolution

He told that Indian agriculture has come a long way from the days of "ship to mouth" in fifties and early sixties to now a situation of surplus production in major

grains, post Green Revolution. The time has come for Indian food and agriculture to go global. Indian Council of Food and Agriculture is uniquely placed to facilitate trade, partnerships and global cooperation in food and agriculture.

Mr. Suresh Prabhu, Hon'ble Minister of Railways, Government of India

He said that the need for creating an apex body in food and agriculture was realized to work on trade and policy issues and represent the interests of various stake-holders at the national and global level and thus he is sure that ICFA will deliver for Indian farmers and for global food trade and agriculture.

Mr. N. Chandrababu Naidu, Hon'ble Chief Minister, Government of Andhra Pradesh

Indian agriculture has got tremendous potential but it needs transition to become more market oriented for farmers to get best returns therefore he could see great role for ICFA in connecting farmers with the markets nationally and globally by promoting trade and agribusinesses.

Sh. Radha Mohan Singh, Hon'ble Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Government of India

He told that our Ministry has declared 2015 as the Year of FPOs, aiming at organizing and empowering farmers and connecting them with the market thus ICFA can facilitate the process by mobilizing support of all the stake-holders especially the private sector in FPO formation and in creating jobs and entrepreneurships in farm sector.

Dr. Raman Singh, Hon'ble Chief Minister, Government of Chhattisgarh

He propounded that the State of Chhattisgarh is primarily agrarian and Government has given major policy boost to paddy and horticulture production. The State also launched the nationally acclaimed food security program but also faces the newer challenges to the farm sector need innovative solutions in which ICFA can play a critical role by partnering with the State to support in the area of marketing, value addition and farm profitability.

Mr. P. Lalthanhawla, Hon'ble Chief Minister, Government of Mizoram

Horticulture is the main stay of the State's economy. But farmers are not getting proper price of their produce due to weak links of marketing and value addition. ICFA with its Industry Working Groups and international partnerships can help the farmers through investments, technologies and agro-entrepreneurship development in the State.

Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan, Hon'ble Minister of Food and Consumer Affairs, Government of India

He indicated that there was need of a body like ICFA to help the Ministry with research papers and creating awareness among the stake-holders for policy formulations on the issues of food grains management and consumer affairs.

Mrs. Harsimrat Badal Kaur, Hon'ble Minister of Food Processing Industries, Government of India

She said that ICFA can play a critical role in connecting the farmers with the market and accelerate the growth of agribusinesses.

Mr. Prakash Javadekar, Hon'ble Minister of State for Environment, Forests and Climate Change, Government of India

The issue of climate change and its impact on agriculture are a major concern to food security globally. In India the issues of GMO, bio-diversity and environmental sustainability need thorough debating and a consensus need to evolve thus there is important role for ICFA in creating awareness and facilitating consensus on important issues concerning India and the world.

Dr. Shenggan Fan, Director General, International Food Policy Research Institute, Washington DC

The new body, Indian Council of Food and Agriculture is a wonderful concept, which can work on food policy issues, agribusiness growth, and creation of value chain especially in developing countries. ICFA can also work on developmental programs by forging national and global partnerships and thus play its role in global

food and nutrition security and in creating opportunities for resource poor rural population.

Mr. Ajay Shriram, Chairman, DCM Shriram Group and former President, Confederation of Indian Industry

The new think tank for Indian agriculture, ICFA can exhort agriculture Industry to look ahead of the curve, unleashing the potential of India's food and agriculture sector, ICFA can also focus on farmers and agri-entrepreneurs towards helping them connect with the market opportunities, while addressing their policy, technology, trade, marketing, financing and partnership related issues.

Ravi Prakash Verma, Member of Parliament

Indian Council of Food and Agriculture, as an apex institution would be a powerful tool for policy intervention in India's agriculture scenario. ICFA can also function as a farming mobilizing agency in the face of emerging food security scenario in India. The organization can work towards securing India's food security.

Dr. S. Ayyappan, President, National Academy of Agriculture Sciences

He said that India has got a very diverse and enormous size of agriculture production system. During the last four decades or so the country has got self reliance in major items of agriculture production. The National Food Security Mission has added new production levels. However, marketing, value addition and farm profitability are the major challenges, which need to be addressed. ICFA has a unique role to play by bringing all the stake-holders on one platform and synergizing the efforts towards the achieving the desired goals.

Mr. Martien Van Nieuwkoop, Head - South Asia, The World Bank, Washington DC

ICFA should work towards highlighting the challenges faced by rural communities in an environment which is becoming increasingly risk-prone and unpredictable. The Council should focus on policy issues related to environmentally, socially and economically sustainable ways of building resilience and empowering resource-poor farmers and producers. ICFA must seek solutions along multiple segments of the entire value chain - from "farm to plate".

Amb. Islam Siddiqui, Senior Advisor, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Washington DC

He was of the opinion that ICFA should work towards highlighting the challenges faced by trade and agribusinesses in an environment which is becoming increasingly risk-prone and unpredictable. The Council should focus on policy issues related to environmentally, socially and economically sustainable ways of building resilience and empowering resource-poor farmers and producers on one hand and facilitating global trade and marketing of agriculture by promoting entire value chain - from farm to plate.

Dr. Maharaj Muthoo, President, Roman Forum and Global Chair, INBAR

One of the challenges Indian agriculture facing is about the quality and standards of its farm production and the global market access therefore he pointed out that there is need to fix it with a sense of urgency. Working with the Government and the national and international agencies for setting standards and processes and executing an elaborate national certification program for production of organic, industrial and exportable farm produce and processed food items is what ICFA can do best with its unique mandate, structure and strengths.

H.E. Mr. Alphonsus Stoelinga, Ambassador of Netherlands to India

India and Netherlands have got strong scope for cooperation and partnerships in food, agriculture and dairy sectors, while Netherlands have cutting edge technologies and moderns farm management systems, resulting into much higher levels of yields per unit of land and animal, India has got enormous size of diverse production system. ICFA can play critical role in bringing agro food industry and entrepreneurs closer and facilitate greater cooperation.

H.E. Mr. Freddy S Ambassador Denmark

He appreciated the entrepreneurial zeal in Young India and its achievements in ICT and other areas. He said that Indian agriculture has also come a long way from the deficit days to surplus situation. However the qualitative improvement in production and food safety and standards can help the country greatly access the

global market potential and thus help farmers substantially improve their income levels in which ICFA can play an important role.

Mr. OP Dhankad, Hon'ble Agriculture Minister, Government of Haryana

He said that India has got everything that a robust agriculture needs, from favorable climate to a rich genetic resource and from good quality surface water to enterprising farmers, but we are still lagging much behind the global average in yields and in exports therefore we need to have best of global technologies, need investments in agriculture and above all we need to position Indian food and agriculture globally. He said that he expects Indian Council of Food and Agriculture to play that role and facilitate the Government of Haryana in finding solutions to the problems which are faced by the government.

Siraj A Chaudhry, Chairman, Cargill India Limited

He told that the food processing sector is of enormous significance for India's development as it provides an important link between agriculture and manufacturing. The food processing sector will help ensure better remuneration and market access for farmers and also reduce high level of wastages. ICFA will help develop food processing industry which will ensure value addition and generate additional employment opportunities thus leading to better socio economic condition of our society.

Dr. K.L. Chadha Pioneer of India's Horticulture Revolution

He said that diversification of agriculture to horticulture crops has been identified as a key to agricultural economy of the country. Initiatives taken so far have shown the role of horticulture crops in providing livelihood security to small farmers besides food, nutritional and environmental security. While production of horticulture crops at 285.4 MT has surpassed the food crop production, thus ICFA will lay major emphasis on issues concerning reduction in post-harvest losses through infrastructure and technological developments.

Dr. PK Joshi, South Asia Director, International Food Policy Research Institute

He said that ICFA fulfils the need for having national-level body for working on issues and policies to create understanding and drive consensus on major issues that concerns all the stake-holders such as government, policy makers, industry, NGOs, financial bodies, developmental institutions and farmers groups.

Alok Sinha, Director General – ICFA

He pointed out the need to connect Indian farmers with the global markets for them to best drive value for their farm produce. According to him, agriculture is very diverse subject and larger good is foreseen if the body like ICFA becomes think tank with holistic approach. ICFA would serve as an advocacy body at all levels and a think-tank, preparing position papers on various relevant issues rationalizing and justifying advocacy thrusts. Having Members from institutions at apex level to individual stake-holders, he said that ICFA can organize show-casing "events and each Working Group can prepare Annual National Plan, all of which would then contribute to Annual Country Plan for presentation to both Government and public stake-holders.

Dr. Anis Ansari, Chairman, Centre for Agriculture and Rural Development for former Additional Chief Secretary, Government of Uttar Pradesh

He said that our country does not have an apex organization capable of effectively representing the issues of farmers before the Government and the community at large. ICFA should help filling up this vacuum by analyzing and articulating the twin problems of employment and productivity rage in agriculture sector along with other issues of agrarian stress such as indebtedness and investment in agriculture. Its role can be made more effective by expanding its presence at the district level.

Mr. Atul Chaturvedi, CEO and Director – Agribusiness, Adani Group

He said that edible Oil Imports have reached alarming levels in India. At this point, ICFA could work towards reducing our country's dependence on Oil Imports. Another area where ICFA can direct its efforts are on modernizing India's Agri Infrastructure.

Mr. MJ Saxena, Managing Director, Ayurvet Limited

He said that knowledge, Science and Technology hold the power and potential to provide much needed security for Food, Feed, Fodder, Fuel and Fertilisers in a manner that effects of Global Warming and Climate change can be minimised. So long as Poverty prevail dream of Healthy nation is going to be distant but with hand holding of all stake holders in ICFA, the seeds of change is sowed and in the next 10 years lot can be done.

Mr. Pawanexh Kohli, CEO, National Centre for Cold Chain Development, Government of India

He focused that agri-logistics must not be seen as mere infrastructure development but about efficient post-harvest management, all the way from farm-to-consumers. As an agenda, agricultural Productivity needs to be interpreted as food delivered and through this committee we hope to further this cause. Connectivity alone can make agriculture sustain as the backbone of India's development.

Dr. Rita Sharma, Board Member – ICRAF and former Secretary – Rural Development, Government of India

She pointed out that ICFA can work towards highlighting the challenges faced by rural communities in an environment which is becoming increasingly risk-prone and unpredictable. The Council can focus on policy issues related to environmentally, socially and economically sustainable ways of building resilience and empowering resource-poor farmers and producers.

Prof. Kadambot Siddique, Director, Institute of Agriculture, University of Western Australia

He said that the coming generation of Indian farmers needs to be innovative and competitive in the domestic and global markets therefore there is need to ensure that they have the tools, technologies and innovative farming systems that enable them to be so therefore ICFA will provide the vision and leadership for Indian agriculture in partnership with various stakeholders (both domestic and international) in advancing Indian Agriculture and Food system future.

Dr. Rajaram Tripathi, Chairman, Confederation of Herbal Medicinal & Aromatic Plants

In modern panorama, agriculture has become a great challenge to the farmers in India therefore Dr Tripathi said that ICFA with members from varied sections of agro sector can do a constructive work together. ICFA with its team will be committed to provide full attention and benefit of infrastructure to the farmers so that agriculture can become a profitable profession for farmers.

Dr. H S Gupta, Director General, Borlaug Institute for South Asia

In his opinion, ICFA's working group on Technology can make India technology hub which can make Indian agriculture sustainable. The post-harvest management scenario can also gain much from this. ICFA can also work towards promoting development of technology for nutritious food production thereby securing India's food security.

Rajvir Rathi, Vice President – Public & Government Affairs, Bayer CropScience Limited

He highlighted the fact that ICFA is a timely initiative to create a common platform for all key and relevant stakeholders to arrive at a harmony in promoting the agriculture sector in order to make it more profitable in a sustainable manner. The deliberations and recommendations emerging from this platform will also help in harnessing the untapped potential of Indian Agriculture for improving the future of farming community.

Anil Kakkar, Vice President, Excel Crop Care Limited, Mumbai

Food and thus Agriculture is a fundamental requirement of mankind. There is need to produce safe and healthy food using environmentally sound and sustainable production methods; and also certifying the food and processes for greater market access for farmers therefore he said that ICFA would help farmers adopt these principles at micro level and work with Govt. to create policies conducive for **adoption at Macro level.**

Mr. SR Ramakrishnan, Director, Southern Petrochemical Industries Corporation Limited, Chennai

He said that two of the most critical issues confronting any developing economy are “Food security” and “Energy security”. Both are in a way interconnected. Food security depends entirely on a healthy agricultural sector. And agricultural sector’s health depends on technology, modern practices, cost of inputs, the price of the final agricultural products and above all pragmatic policies. ICFA, thus, could play a vital role in integrating the efforts of all these sub-sectors and contribute to a great extent to the accelerated socio-economic growth and development of our nation.

Core Objectives:

The various objectives to be fulfilled by the Council are:

- To be the apex body at National level, acting as a policy, research, trade, information, development, advisory, advocacy, facilitation and monitoring centre for food and agriculture sector and creating pro-agriculture environment and to give voice to various stakeholders viz farmers, agribusiness professionals, trade, research and development bodies.
- To act as a watch dog about the national and international developments in food and agriculture sector, positively influence national policies, multinational trade negotiations towards protecting country’s national interest and also to project India’s strengths and opportunities for business and investments in this sector.
- To promote understanding, trade, technology transfers, business and investments in agriculture sector and to organize meets, seminars, conferences, and take up research, success stories of farm entrepreneurs, agribusiness models that can be adopted in India.
- To create opportunities, understanding, attraction for youth in agriculture and mainstreaming agriculture in order to incorporate more investments, technology, business and innovation in agriculture.
- To institute National and State level Agriculture Awards to be given to distinguished persons in policy making, agri-business, research, development, media, extension, academia, farming etc.
- And organize various professional groups nationally and internationally towards furthering the objectives of the sector.

- To conduct studies and organize conferences, summits, trade fairs, farm conventions, meetings, events at State, National and International level, publish newsletters, magazines etc in print and electronic form for disseminating information among stakeholders and general public.
- To undertake research, consultancy, execution of agricultural projects at national and international levels and forge linkages with regional, national and international bodies, trade and development organizations and promote global scale professional groups, producer groups, commodity groups and bodies in Indian agriculture.
- To provide crop and product stewardship programs and certification services for professionals as well as agri products, seeds, feed, forest, food products including horticulture, livestock, poultry, marine and other farm products for domestic as well as international markets.

Thus, ICFA with its proactive farmer centric policies creates opportunities for trade, technology and investments in farming and food value chain, facilitating the growth of agribusinesses, sets up growth agenda and implements programs of food safety, sustainable production system and certification for creation of greater marketing and agribusiness opportunities.