

## General Studies – 2; Topic: mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections

### Farmer Suicides in India

#### 1) Introduction

- Over three lakh farmers have committed suicide in India since 1995.
- Several socio-economic factors have enabled an environment vulnerable to distress in the agricultural belts of the nation.
- Unable to cope with mounting debt and the inability to take care of their families, many choose to end their lives.

#### 2) Current Status

- According to the NCRB data, “bankruptcy and indebtedness” witnessed the sharpest spike in 2015, registering an almost three-fold increase (3,097) as compared to 2014 (1,163).
- Maharashtra (3,030), Telangana (1,358), Karnataka (1,197), Chhattisgarh (854) and Madhya Pradesh (516) led the table.
- Karnataka saw a more than three-fold rise in farmer suicides in 2015, as compared to 2014
- Maharashtra recorded the highest number of suicides
- More than 72% of farmers who commit suicide have less than two hectares of land, latest data on farmer suicides compiled by NCRB

#### 3) Reasons

- 80 per cent of farmers killed themselves in 2015 because of bankruptcy or debts after taking loans from banks and registered microfinance institutions.
- Moneylenders were more flexible compared to banks and microfinance institutions. “The organised sector is less flexible because rules don’t permit them flexibility.
- Suicides were recorded due to crop-failure and other farm-related issues like drought, price crashes etc.
- Family problems, illness and ‘Drug Abuse/Alcoholic Addiction’ were other top reasons for suicides among farmers
- Many of the farmer loans are for marriages. It is a social obligation to spend well on weddings, which sometimes even includes dowry.
- The dependence of farmers in Marathwada on water-guzzling cash crops such as sugarcane has been cited as one of the reasons for the distress
- Increased compensation to the next of kin of farmers who commit suicide has been cited as reason for the spike in suicide rate
- APMC and local traders exploiting farmers
- lack of skills to opt for alternate employment when farming seems non profitable
- High input costs and worsened quality of soil due to excessive use of fertilisers
- Small Farmers grow cash crops such as cotton on small land which is highly susceptible to global price fluctuations.

#### 4) How agrarian policies heightened farmers’ economic vulnerability?

- Post liberalisation, cutbacks in agricultural subsidies combined with the necessity to meet the international standards of quality increased the costs of input.
- Government encouraged shift from food grain to cash crop cultivation.

- However, due to an excess of such products in the market, prices fell making cash crops uneconomical.
- Production costs have steadily risen in the years since but market prices have not seen a corresponding increase.
- They do not even have many job options to fall back on when cultivation fails.
- Private companies and state-run Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) reject many applicants due to the lack of collateral or land titles.
- The impact of the new Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) on protecting them in case of crop failure is yet to be seen.
- MNREGA Act hasn't done much to ensure jobs to the rural population. Many migrate to cities in search of labour work.

### Unviable Farming

**Low profitability:** Input cost of seeds, fertilisers, pesticides and diesel have shot up, but procurement price for farm produce did not kept pace

**Soil quality:** Alternating between wheat and paddy has affected soil quality, forcing farmers to use more fertilisers which makes the ground less permeable

**Exposure to toxins:** The Malwa region is known for its high cancer cases due to increased use of pesticides

**Falling water table:** With water table falling steadily, farmers forced to spend lakhs on deeper borewells

**Education and health:** Hospitals and schools inadequate for rural people

#### 5) Way Forward

- Proper irrigation system, weather forecast information, competent crop insurance and buffer stocks in cold storage facilities to distribute to the families in their time of need.
- A concrete reorientation of policy is crucial to stopping this depressing trend.
- Need for a nationwide farmer movement. A revolution saved agriculture once, it can save farmers again.
- proper counselling of farmers by giving them emotional support at the time of crisis
- Increasing number of crops under MSP
- Effective irrigation facilities should be provided. Drip and sprinkle irrigation should be popularized. Canals should be build to reach deep into villages.
- Using Information technologies and electronic media (like DD Kisaan channel) to spread awareness about government schemes and monsoon predictions.
- Skill Development of farmers, so that they can develop alternative sources of income. Government should initiate alternative employment generation programmes.
- Land pooling, where lands of small farmers can be pooled into a larger piece, and benefits can be maximized.
- Effective implementation of various government schemes like pradhan mantri krishi sinchai yojana, pradhan mantri fasal bima yojana and Soil Health Card scheme