

There is a future in farming



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engaged in agriculture was high, fruits and vegetables production was 118 kg per capita in India during 2003-05 against 390 for China, 217 for the Philippines, 178 for Thailand, 162 for Vietnam, and 516 for Turkey.

SOCIAL LEARNING

One possible way to hasten crop diversification and increase the crop yield is to promote "social learning". India seems to have overlooked this crucial aspect while charting a revival path for the agricultural sector. 'Social learning' is the process of learning from the experiences of successful farmers in social networks. Individual farmers may be influenced by and learn about the successful farm practices from their neighbours' experiences.

Evidence across the world, including India, suggests that social learning may be important for the diffusion of new agricultural technology. In India, social learning played a crucial role in the widespread adoption of high-yielding varieties (HYV) of wheat and rice during Green Revolution. What we require today is more such farm information dissemination initiatives. Instead, the public discourse on agriculture has been dominated by scary stories of farm distress and suicides. In a way, this approach may be responsible for our negative attitude towards agriculture. The popular impression today is that all is not well in the Indian agriculture, due to which many do not want to continue in agriculture or take it up as a profession.

How far is this impression true? Don't we have sufficient farm suc-



Dissemination of success stories can help enhance skills.

cess stories in the Indian context which, by way of adequate publicity, can be used to induce farmers to stay in agriculture and change their farm practices, and also to attract fresh talent in the farm sector? If you expect an affirmative answer to this question, you are mistaken.

SUCCESS STORIES

There are many enterprising people who have been charting their own growth trajectories in the farm sector by combining their entrepreneurial skills, labour, vision, hands-on approach with their core competence in technology, marketing and scientific inputs. Significantly, they include both individual entrepreneurs and small and marginal farm-

ers. For instance, Malvinder Singh Bhinder, who owns Agro-Dutch Industries Limited (www.agro-dutch.com), is the world's largest mushroom producer. Jagjit Singh Kapoor is the owner of Kashmir Apiaries (www.kashmirhoney.com), which is India's biggest honey producer-exporter.

The world's largest producer and exporter of cut roses Karuturi Global Ltd (www.karuturi.com) is owned by Ramakrishna Karuturi. Suguna Poultry Farm (www.sugunapoultry.com), India's leading integrator of poultry products is established by Soundarajan. Jang Bahadur owns Sangha Group (www.sangha-seeds.com), which is the largest producer of seed and table potatoes in Asia.

Similarly, there are many other success stories among small and marginal farmers. An excellent official source of information about such farmers is the coffee-table book titled *Harvest of Hope* brought out early this year by the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation (DAC), Government of India. This publication documents the achievements of 101 enterprising small and marginal farmers from all parts of India, who by sheer hard work and enterprise have transformed their lives.

TALENT RECOGNITION

One important factor behind these successes was diversification towards high value agriculture goods and the ability to unite and bring the best out of individual farmers. Most of these farmers or entrepreneurs struggled against the common difficulties facing the farm sector. Yet,

when it comes to turning agriculture into a viable livelihood option or business opportunity, only the initiatives by big corporates hog the limelight in this country.

Contributions by individual farmers are not given their due. A majority of Indian farmers would be able to relate to their successes and draw lessons on how to enhance their farming skills.

The need of the hour is to disseminate these individual-driven successes in the farming community alongside the corporate-led ones, thereby spearheading agrarian revival by emulation. In this process, successful farmers shall play the role of 'change agents'.

As a positive development, early this year, DAC organised a farmers' congregation in Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi, to felicitate 101 small and marginal farmers who fought against odds to make a difference and to mark the release of *Harvest of Hope*. What better way to boost the morale of the farming community than this? In a country where talent from all walks of life except the farming community gets recognised, this is a welcome move.

Speaking at a farmers' congregation, the Agriculture Minister, Mr Sharad Pawar, is reported to have described the successful farmers as "the unsung heroes (and heroines) of Indian agriculture". Let us strive for more such heroes and heroines by emulation.

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