



Increased production and efficient distribution of food grains can move our country forward

Addresses the 49th Convocation of Acharya N.G. Ranga Agricultural University

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The Vice President of India, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu has said that increased production and efficient distribution of food grains can move our country forward to achieve the goal of zero hunger and adequate nutrition for all. He was delivering the 49th Convocational Address at the Acharya N.G. Ranga Agricultural University (ANGRAU), in Nellore, Andhra Pradesh today. The Governor of Andhra Pradesh and the Chancellor of ANGRAU, Shri E.S.L. Narasimhan, the Agriculture Minister of Andhra Pradesh, Shri Somireddy Chandra Mohan Reddy and other dignitaries were present on the occasion.

The Vice President said that India is the world's largest producer of milk, pulses and jute, and ranks as the second largest producer of rice, wheat, sugarcane, groundnut, vegetables, fruit and cotton. He further said that the growing needs of our country's increasing population require us to evolve our own home grown food security strategy.

The Vice President suggested that first we have to provide an end-to-end (E2E) ecosystem comprising of "4-I s" namely 'Irrigation', 'Infrastructure', 'Investment credit' and 'Insurance'. The second is Lab-to-Land (L2L) transfer of technology, he added.

The Vice President said that infrastructural improvements in rural roads, dependable quality power, godowns, cold storage facilities, refrigerated vans and market yards are an essential prerequisite for improving the efficiency of the agricultural sector. Timely credit facilities at reasonable interest rates and farmer-friendly insurance policies are important building blocks of a robust ecosystem for Agriculture, he added.

The Vice President congratulated all the students, gold medalists and awardees who are receiving their degrees on this occasion.

Following is the text of Vice President's Address:

"The Hon'ble Governor of Andhra Pradesh and the Chancellor of Acharya N.G. Ranga Agricultural University (ANGRAU), Shri E.S.L. Narasimhan garu; Vice-Chancellor, ANGRAU, Dr. V. Damodara Naidu, Members of the Board of Management, Members of the Academic Council, Faculty, Officials and Staff of the University, distinguished guests, dear students, respected parents, representatives of press and media, ladies and gentlemen :

I consider it a proud privilege to deliver the 49th Convocation address of this prestigious university. I heartily congratulate all the students, gold medallists and awardees who are receiving their degrees on this occasion. It is a moment of celebration of your achievements and also a moment of inspiration. It is a moment that launches you on your chosen vocation and helps you to realize your aspiration.

You have chosen to be agricultural scientists, a field that has tremendous relevance in a country with a vast agro-ecological diversity and where 64 percent of the total workforce in the rural areas is engaged in agriculture and contributes 39 percent of total rural net domestic product. Agriculture plays a vital role in India's economy. Agriculture, along with fisheries and forestry, is one of the largest contributors to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). As per the 2nd advised estimates by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), the share of agriculture and allied sectors (including agriculture, livestock, forestry and fishery) is expected to be 17.3 per cent of the Gross Value Added (GVA) during 2016-17 at 2011-12 prices.

The last seventy years after independence have been years of significant growth. The country's food grain production increased by 8.7 per cent and reached a record high of 273.83 million tonnes in 2016-17.

As the Food and Agriculture Organization acknowledged:

“India is the world's largest producer of milk, pulses and jute, and ranks as the second largest producer of rice, wheat, sugarcane, groundnut, vegetables, fruit and cotton. From 50 million tons in 1950, India's food grain production rose more than five times, to over 257 million tons in 2014-15. India is the world's largest milk producer, producing over 130 million tons annually. The dairy sector is also one of the largest employers of rural people, especially women. With an annual production of over 10 million tons, India ranks second in global fish production and aquaculture, next only to China.”

Yet, we have formidable challenges confronting us.

Except wheat, productivity of other crops in the country is below world average mainly because of poor access to irrigation and improved technology.

Workforce in agriculture sector is declining at the rate of approximately 2 percent every year. According to one estimate, “to double farmers’ income by 2022, the progress in various sources of growth has to be accelerated by 33 percent”.

Clearly, a concerted, coordinated focused action is required on a number of issues that impact the growth of agriculture sector and the quality of life of people who depend primarily on this sector. We cannot be complacent about the food security situation as it exists today. The growing needs of our country’s increasing population require us to evolve our own home grown food security strategy. Increased production and efficient distribution of food grains can move our country forward to achieve the goal of zero hunger and adequate nutrition for all.

Our Honourable Prime Minister has called for doubling the income of Indian farmers by 2022. Both the Central and State Governments are taking up several initiatives in this regard. In my view, we have to adopt a two pronged approach. The first is to provide an end-to-end **(E2E)** ecosystem comprising of what I call “4-I s” namely ‘Irrigation’, ‘Infrastructure’, ‘Investment credit’ and ‘Insurance’. The second is Lab-to-land **(L2L)** transfer of technology.

Let me take the first strand of work. Successive governments have been taking up a number of reform measures to strengthen the ecosystem but I think more time-bound, systematic and systemic efforts are called for. Irrigation is of course the most crucial factor. In addition to rain water harvesting and construction of check dams, the government is considering linking of rivers as a possibility to enhance the area under irrigation. More than 40 proposals of intra-state links have been received from 9 States viz. Maharashtra, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Orissa, Bihar, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Chhattisgarh. Linking Narmada to other rivers in Gujarat, Ken- Batwa link in Madhya Pradesh and linking Krishna and Godavari in Andhra Pradesh are a few examples of what could be the most promising way forward.

In addition to irrigation, the government is rightly focusing on **infrastructure** like rural roads, dependable quality power, godowns, cold storage facilities, refrigerated vans and market yards. These infrastructural improvements are an essential prerequisite for improving the efficiency of the agricultural sector.

Two other important building blocks of a robust ecosystem are timely **credit** facilities at reasonable **interest** rates and farmer-friendly **insurance** policies. These allow for farmers to invest in better, income-generating crops and agricultural practices and increase their incomes. The insurance cover shields the farmers against unforeseen climatic and natural disasters. The kisan credit cards and the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) are steps in the right direction and need to be universalized.

The government have to ensure the end-to-end services. Right from the purchase of seeds to the post-harvest operations, the farmer’s needs have to be addressed through a network of efficient farmer-friendly institutions. There is certainly a need to step up public investment in and for agriculture which currently stands at 2.7 percent of GDP.

Marketing of agricultural produce and getting a fair return is a big challenge for most farmers. The farmers still rely on local markets and have to resort, very often, to distress sale. A new initiative called E-NAM seeks to remedy this situation by adopting an e-trading platform for agricultural commodities. The Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) Act is also being proposed to be amended by introducing single-point levy of market fee across a State and a united single trading licence.

The **E2E** initiatives of the government have to be supplemented by the private sector's efforts as well. In addition, there is a very important second strand I mentioned at the beginning- strengthen the Lab-to-land (**L2L**) approaches. All of you have a huge challenge before you. How do you transfer the knowledge and skills you have acquired during your stay in this University to the farmers in order to transform the agricultural landscape of the country? How do you positively impact the lives of the farmers in rural India?

You can do many things and use your innovative abilities to improve the efficiency of the system. Let me suggest a few areas that merit focused attention of agricultural universities and other institutions of higher learning as well as research institutions.

First is **intensification** of farming by enhancing productivity through use of high yielding varieties of seeds and efficient use of land and water. High yielding varieties cover only 69 percent of the total area under cereal crops. This coverage should be expanded. While irrigation facilities are being expanded by the government, there is a need to educate the farmers on using the water efficiently. "It is seen that even districts at same level of irrigation show large difference in aggregate productivity". Every drop of this scarce resource must be made use of optimally. Equally important is that more crops must be grown on the same land.

Second is **diversification**. Farmers must be encouraged to diversify and take up high value crops like fruits, vegetables, fibre, condiments, pulses, spices and sugarcane. It has been established that the average productivity of high value crops is around Rs. 1.4 lakh per hectare as compared to Rs. 41,169 per hectare from staple crops like cereals and oil seeds. There is also a tremendous potential to diversify towards other allied occupations as well like dairy and forestry. The productivity of livestock is still quite low with an average milk yield of 4.90 kg per in-milk buffalo and 3.1 kg per in-milk cow. Similarly, we need to encourage farmers to take up agro-forestry and forestry, especially in view of the fact that India currently meets 40 percent of its non-fuel timber requirement from the import of wood and wood products.

These two sets of actions can be implemented and accelerated depending on how effectively the transformative technologies can be transferred to the farmers and how innovatively we can harness the power of information technology to provide information, knowledge and skills. We have to bring in a major shift in Indian agriculture moving it from a low-productivity stage to a high productive level and at the same time ensure that it is sustainable and equitable. Using a multi-disciplinary approach, you must take up problem-oriented research. You must strengthen the vital connection between your lab and the farmer's land. Forecasting the seasonal conditions in advance, testing the soil and water availability you must work with the government's extension machinery like Krishi Vignana Kendras to advise the farmers on the cropping patterns and post-harvest processes and food processing technologies. You will have to provide your expert advice on different ways to increase productivity of crops and livestock. You must learn from indigenous and global technologies. You must bring in the state of the art in the field to make different agricultural processes more efficient but always keeping the farmer invariably at the centre of your work. I am glad that the students in this University maintain the essential link with the ground realities and farmers' lives through the six month long rural agricultural work experience programme. I am sure this gives an opportunity for the students to share their knowledge with the farmers and at the same time gain new insights from the farmers' experiences and practices. It is, in my view, a valuable two-way learning process.

Dear friends, you are a part of the large knowledge network devoted to the same cause. We have a very large system with 63 State agricultural universities, 4 deemed Agricultural Universities, 1 Central Agricultural University, 106 ICAR research institutes, and 680 Krishi Vignana Kendras. I do hope all of you in this University would be able to continuously add to the body of scientific knowledge and use it creatively for the benefit of our 'Anna Daata' s. I hope you would take the fountain of knowledge to the farmers' fields and become 'Aananda Daataa's as you see the tangible happy transformation on the face of modern India.

JAI HIND!

