

The prospects for Indian agriculture are good : Dr. Yoginder K. Alagh

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“The prospects for Indian agriculture are good. Demand will grow fast and if we create the correct incentive and organization systems the Indian farmer will not fail us as he has responded well in the past when our policies were supportive” said Dr. Yoginder K. Alagh, Chancellor, Central University of Gujarat at his lecture on The Future of Indian Agriculture, recently held at International Centre Goa, Dona Paula. This programme was part of ICG Lecture Series by Eminent Persons initiated by The International Centre Goa. The lecture was chaired by Dr. N P Singh Director, Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) Old Goa.

Former Union Minister of Power, Planning Science and Technology; Dr. Alagh explained further “the puzzle of very high investment in agriculture and very low rates of growth; in terms of productivity and declining returns, needs to be understood”. We need a perspective in the context of population, income growth and distribution; demand and diversification. At a 4% growth rate Indian agriculture is stagnating; and at such poor growth rates; we need to worry and we need to find out what we need to do. Indian agriculture must meet the requirements of food security and rapidly diversify itself. It should function in a rural urban continuum, with rapid developments of markets and shifting of working populations from villages to linked small towns and also from crop production to value added activities. Employment growth will be high in these activities chasing a high rate of economic growth; technology and organizational support and the necessary economic support in terms of pricing and infrastructure.

Dr. Alagh explained “if the shift does not take place on account of poor agricultural productivity increase, with an employment elasticity of minus 0.1, and a growth rate of three per cent annual, the shift will be 4% and an insignificant increase in real wages of the agricultural sector. The need for programme like NREGA will be intense with the present trends of casualisation of the labour force increasing. This will be a very vicious process of economic transformation. The only other factor which will affect outcomes in this logical framework is the augmentation of the land base of Indian agriculture. This aspect is discussed in the context of the land and water. If land augmentation emerges again with success of the interrelated issues of land and water management, cropping intensity can rise by 0.5% annual and in the decade 2010 /2020, real wages would rise by 7% additional or 27% in the total and rural-urban inequality would go down.

Dr. Alagh concluded “research and support systems will have to concentrate on a much larger cafeteria of crops and support to non crop agriculture, including animal husbandry, fish and forests. This will need newer organizational systems and financing and price and tariff support systems. The real dangers apart from anti agricultural policies are in running into real resource constraints. Again here the strategies for land and water management are known and agricultural research can fill in the gaps”.

The programme was very well attended by government official from various departments including Directorate of Agriculture and Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR); progressive farmers and agriculturists, students of Ramanata Crisna Pai Raikar School Of Agriculture, Savoi Verem, Ponda and professors and students of Department of Botany and Economics, Goa University.

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