Webinar on Connecting Agroforestry Farmers to Industry Held

Multiple uses of Agroforestry Ranging from Additional Income to Farmers to Carbon Sequestration for Combating Climate Change Highlighted

A webinar was organized to discuss ways and means to connect agroforestry farmers to industry and sensitise implementing States to assist farmers in making the correct choice of species.

The webinar dwelt on the various reforms brought in the agriculture sector to ensure optimum remuneration to farmers to ensure their welfare, including Rs 1.63 lakh crore outlay and the Farming Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance 2020 to establish a truly national market and give farmers the option to choose the market where they want to sell their produce by removing inter-state trade barriers and providing e-trading of agriculture produce.

Importance

He highlighted the multiple uses of agroforestry ranging from additional income to farmers, nurseries as a means of livelihoods especially for women SHGs, green fodder, reduction in requirement of fertilisers by planting leguminous species, carbon sequestration for combating climate change, etc.

Prime Minister’s call for Vocal for our Local is of great relevance to agroforestry too. Agroforestry could contribute to stepping up supply of raw material to industry to reduce import dependency in some crucial commodities.

Imp Points

- The earlier notion of agroforestry meaning only timber species needs to have a relook from farmers and industry point of view.
- Timber trees have long maturity period and hence delays returns to the farmers.
- Whereas there are number of rising sectors which would ensure quick returns to farmers as well as fulfill industry requirements, including medicinal and aromatic plants, silk, lac, paper and pulp, tree borne oil seeds for production of bio-fuels, etc.

- Promotion of medicinal plants is a major component of AtmaNirbhar Bharat and there is tremendous scope for convergence for tree based and organic medicinal produce.
- Issues relating to constraints in supply of raw material to paper industry, which is being made up by imports, were discussed.
- Quality planting material is the basis for improving productivity and hence returns to farmers. The presentation flagged the importance of clonal planting material of the
Central Silk Board assured to assist farmers who plant the range of silk host species, which on an average would start giving returns in 3-4 years and hence were ideal for agroforestry systems.

In conclusion States were advised to encourage contract farming on similar lines as crops right from pre planting, planting and harvest. Industry, both existing and potential, should be taken as the hub and activities planned around that. This would enable fulfillment of the vision of an ‘AatmaNirbhar Bharat’.

India became the first country in the world to formulate a National Agroforestry Policy in 2014. As a follow up, the Sub Mission for Agroforestry was launched in 2015 to assist the States in encouraging farmers to adopt tree planting along with crops. Agro climatic zone wise agroforestry models have been developed by research institutions, including ICAR and ICFRE. The scheme is currently being implemented in 21 States of the country.

National agroforestry policy

Agroforestry is defined as a land use system which integrates trees and shrubs on farmlands and rural landscapes to enhance productivity, profitability, diversity and ecosystem sustainability. It is a dynamic, ecologically based, natural resource management system that, through integration of woody perennials on farms and in the agricultural landscape, diversifies and sustains production and builds social institutions.


However, agroforestry has not gained the desired importance as a resource development tool due to various factors.

A policy which deals with problems faced by agroforestry sector, including adverse policies, weak markets and a dearth of institutional finance was approved by the Cabinet in February 2014. India became the world’s first country to adopt a comprehensive agroforestry policy.

Basic objectives

Encourage and expand tree plantation in complementarity and integrated manner with crops and livestock to improve productivity, employment, income and livelihoods of rural households, especially the small holder farmers.

Protect and stabilize ecosystems, and promote resilient cropping and farming systems to minimize the risk during extreme climatic events.

Meet the raw material requirements of wood based industries and reduce import of wood and wood products to save foreign exchange.

Supplement the availability of agroforestry products (AFPs), such as the fuel-wood, fodder, non-timber forest produce and small timber of the rural and tribal populations, thereby reducing the pressure on existing forests.

Complement achieving the target of increasing forest/tree cover to promote ecological
stability, especially in the vulnerable regions.

- Develop capacity and strengthen research in agroforestry and create a massive people's movement for achieving these objectives and to minimize pressure on existing forests.

Strategy

1. **Establishment of Institutional Setup at National level to promote Agroforestry**
   - An institutional mechanism, such as a Mission or Board is to be established for implementing the agroforestry policy. It will provide the platform for the multi-stakeholders to jointly plan and identify the priorities and strategies, for inter-ministerial coordination, programmatic convergence, financial resources mobilization and leveraging, capacity building facilitation, and technical and management support.
   - The Ministry of Agriculture has the mandate for agroforestry. Agroforestry Mission / Board will be located in the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation (DAC) in the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA).
   - The actual implementation may involve convergence and dovetailing with a number of programmes.
   - Agroforestry research and development (R&D), including capacity development and pilot studies / testing and action research should be the responsibility of the ICAR
   - In the proposed institutional arrangement the current stakes of the key ministries are to be respected and utilized.

2. **Simple regulatory mechanism** - There is a need to create simple mechanisms / procedures to regulate the harvesting and transit of agroforestry produce within the State, as well as in various States forming an ecological region. There is also the need to simplify procedures, with permissions extended on automatic route as well as approval mode through a transparent system within a given time schedule. There are regulations imposed by multiple agencies of State governments (viz. Department of Forest, land revenue, other local bodies) on harvesting and transit which have negative implications on the growth of agroforestry. All these restricting regulations need to be identified and aligned with the proposed simplified mechanism.

3. Development of a sound database & information system
4. Investing in research, extension and capacity building and related services
5. Improving farmers’ access to quality planting material
6. Providing institutional credit and insurance cover for agroforestry
7. Facilitating increased participation of industries dealing with agroforestry produce
8. Strengthening farmer access to markets for tree products.
9. Incentives to farmers for adopting agroforestry
10. Promoting sustainable agroforestry for renewable biomass based energy