Syllabus subtopic: Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; issues of buffer stocks and food security; Technology missions; economics of animal-rearing.

News: Proper precaution and timely management by the state agriculture department and awareness among farmers have succeeded in thwarting an attack by the Fall Armyworm (FAW) on maize crop in Odisha.

Prelims and Mains focus: FAW- causes, effects, concerns and measures needed.

• Odisha produces over 7 lakh tonnes maize every year. The coverage of maize has increased to 2.40 lakh hectares in 2019-20 from 2.28 lakh ha a year ago.

About Fall Armyworm

• It is a native of the tropical and sub-tropical regions of the Americas.
• First detected in the African continent in 2016. Since then, it has spread to other countries such as China, Thailand, Malaysia and Sri Lanka.
• The pest can attack at least 80 types of crops including bajra, jawar, ragi, paddy, wheat and vegetables.

In India: It was reported in India for the first-time in Karnataka. Within a span of only six months, almost 50 per cent of the country, including Mizoram, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and West Bengal, has reported FAW infestations.

What makes FAW dangerous?

1. It is the polyphagous (ability to feed on different kinds of food) nature of the caterpillar and the ability of the adult moth to fly more than 100 km per night.
2. Given its ability to feed on multiple crops — nearly 80 different crops ranging from maize to sugarcane — FAW can attack multiple crops.
3. Similarly, it can spread across large tracts of land as it can fly over large distances. This explains the quick spread of the pest across India.

How FAW affects output?

1. Till date, India has reported FAW infestation on maize, sorghum (jowar) and sugarcane crops. Maize has been the worst affected as most maize-growing states in southern India have been affected by the pest.
2. FAW infestation and drought has led to a shortfall of nearly 5 lakh tonnes in output, prompting the central government to allow import of maize under concessional duty. Maize is the third most important cereal crop grown in the country and the infestation, if not checked in time, can wreck havoc.