Soil Health Card Scheme

**Syllabus subtopic:** Welfare Schemes for Vulnerable Sections of the population by the Centre and States and the Performance of these Schemes

**Prelims and Mains focus:** about the scheme and its benefits; progress made so far; about National Productivity Council

**Context:** The Soil Health Card scheme launched by the NDA Government during the financial year 2014-15 with a view to address the decline of soil nutrients, has started reaping fruit.

**About the Scheme**

- Soil Health Card (SHC) is a Government of India’s scheme promoted by the Department of Agriculture & Co-operation under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare. It is being implemented through the Department of Agriculture of all the State and Union Territory Governments.

- A Soil Health Card is used to **assess the current status of soil health** and, when used over time, to **determine changes in soil health** that are **affected by land management**. A Soil Health Card **displays soil health indicators and associated descriptive terms**. The indicators are typically based on farmers' practical experience and knowledge of local natural resources. The **card lists soil health indicators** that can be **assessed without the aid of technical or laboratory equipment**.

- Soil Health Card Scheme is a very beneficial scheme for farmers. There are many farmers in India and they do not know which types of crops they should grow to get maximum yield. Basically, they do not know the quality and the type of their soil. They might know by experience what
crops grow and what crops fail. But they don't know what they can do to improve the condition of the soil.

**What is a Soil Health Card?**

SHC is a **printed report** that a farmer will be handed over for each of his holdings. It will **contain the status of his soil with respect to 12 parameters**, namely N,P,K (Macro-nutrients); S (Secondary- nutrient); Zn, Fe, Cu, Mn, Bo (Micro - nutrients); and pH, EC, OC (Physical parameters). Based on this, the SHC will also indicate fertilizer recommendations and soil amendment required for the farm.

**How can a farmer use a SHC?**

The card will contain an advisory based on the soil nutrient status of a farmer's holding. It will show recommendations on dosage of different nutrients needed. Further, it will advise the farmer on the fertilizers and their quantities he should apply, and also the soil amendments that he should undertake, so as to realize optimal yields.

**Benefits of the scheme**

- The scheme will monitor the soil of the farmers well and will give them a formatted report. So, they can decide well which crops they should cultivate and which ones they should skip.

- The authorities will monitor the soil on a regular basis. One in every 3 years, they will provide a report to farmers. So, farmers need not worry if the nature of the soil changes due to certain factors. Also, they will always have updated data about their soil.

- The work of the government does not stop at listing down measures required to improve the quality of the soil. In fact, they will also employ experts to help farmers in carrying out the corrective measures.
• Farmers will get a proper soil health record, thanks to the Soil Health Card Scheme. Also, they can study the soil management practices. Accordingly, they can plan the future of their crops and land.

• Generally, in government schemes, the person carrying out the study for a particular farmer gets changed. But in the Soil Health Card Scheme, the government is paying attention that the same person carries out soil analysis for a farmer. This will further enhance the effectiveness of the scheme.

• The soil card will give the farmers a proper idea of which nutrients their soil is lacking. And hence, which crops they should invest in. they will also tell which fertilizers they need. So, ultimately, the crop yield will see a rise.

• The main aim behind the scheme was to find out the type of particular soil. And then provide ways in which we can improve it. Even if a soil has some limitations, we can do something to get the most out of it. And that is what the government is trying to do with the help of this scheme.

**Progress made so far under the scheme**

• Under the Scheme Phase-I (Years 2015 to 2017) 10.74 crore cards were distributed, while under the Phase-II 11.69 crore cards have been give away during the period 2017-19.

• In the second phase of the scheme 11.69 crore Soil Health Cards have been distributed to farmers in the last two years.

• This has enabled the farmers to understand the soil health parameters and improve its productivity by judicious application of soil nutrients.
A study conducted by the National Productivity Council (NPC) says the application of Soil Health Card recommendations has led to a decline of 8-10% in use of chemical fertilizers and also raised productivity by 5-6%.

In the current financial year a pilot project “Development of Model Villages” is being implemented under which the sampling and testing of cultivable soil is being encouraged in partnership with the farmers. Under the project a Model Village has been selected for aggregation of soil samples and analysis of each agricultural holding. As part of the scheme 13.53 lakh Soil Health Cards have been distributed during the year 2019-20.

For the setting up of Soil Health Laboratories under the scheme the states have been sanctioned 429 static labs, 102 new mobile labs, 8,752 mini labs, 1,562 village-level laboratories and strengthening of 800 existing labs.

The scheme provides for the analysis of soil composition by the State Governments once in every two years so that remedial steps can be taken to improve soil nutrients. Farmers can track their soil samples and also obtain their Soil Health Card report.

While the Soil Health Management Scheme has turned out to be a blessing for the farmers, it is also creating jobs for the agrarian youth. Under the scheme village youth and farmers up to 40 years of age are eligible to set up Soil Health Laboratories and undertake testing. A laboratory costs up to Rupees Five Lakhs, 75% of which can be funded by the Central and State Governments. The same provisions apply to Self Help Groups, Farmers’ Cooperative Societies, Farmers Groups and Agricultural Producing Organisations.

About National Productivity Council (NPC)
• NPC is a national level organization to promote productivity culture in India. It works as an autonomous organisation under Department of Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

• Established by the Ministry of Industry, Government of India in 1958, it is an autonomous, multipartite, non-profit organization and has been registered as a Society under the Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860.

• NPC is a constituent of the Tokyo-based Asian Productivity Organisation (APO), an Inter Governmental Body, of which the Government of India is a founder member.