

## **Some grassroots-level suggestions on Agriculture-budget**



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It is one of the best initiatives taken by the Tamil Nadu government to present an exclusive budget for agriculture. The third agricultural budget is set to be presented soon. The impact of climate change, as pointed out with a sense of grave concern in the 2022-23 budget, was felt markedly this year.

Crops were cultivated on 53,50,000 acres in 2021-22, which was 4,86,000 acres more than in the preceding year. However, the cultivated land shrank by 10,600 ha in the current year. Unseasonal rains and natural disasters were the villains of the piece.

Agriculture in Tamil Nadu, though, has by and large developed immensely, thanks to not the mercy of Karnataka in releasing water but that of the bountiful skies showing no discrimination. In its 89-year-long history, the Mettur dam reached its full capacity for 136 days consecutively in this irrigation year only (June,

2022-January, 2023). For 361 days the storage remained above 100 feet. It was only in this irrigation year that excess water measuring 472.6 TMC was discharged for the first time after 1961. On the other hand, in the past four years (except in 2018) 259 TMC water goes waste into the sea, according to the report from the T. S. Vijayaraghavan committee.

The other side of the Cauvery delta witnesses thousands of acres of land remaining parched. Several lakes are able to quench only 50 per cent of thirst.

Against this background, some suggestions are put out concerning the forthcoming budget.

### **Tour and harvesting machineries**

On the lines of educational, spiritual and nature tours, an agricultural tour department can be created. Revenue resources such as agricultural and horticultural harvests, bullock cart rides, fishing etc. can be tapped. This method of revenue generation introduced in Italy is in vogue attracting tourists in Maharashtra. Harvesting machines can be manufactured and rented out.

In the previous budget, agricultural implements were mentioned under the topic of agricultural growth. The farmers' main need is harvesting machines. In the past, the government rented out Burma set and sprayers. Similarly, the government itself can manufacture and rent them out, thereby augmenting its revenue. It is noteworthy that farming machineries are procured from other places and brought to the Cauvery delta because of insufficient availability of the machineries.

Following are the features that had better figure in the budget:

1. The rice variety that sells most in the Tamil Nadu food markets is Ponni from Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. The days when other states were fascinated with our rice variety are gone.

In this situation, 'Agriculture in Search of Fields' (Vayal Thedi Vivasaayam) must be put in place on the lines of the 'Illam Thedi Kalvi' (education in search of houses). Agricultural education is a must to facilitate production of high-quality rice. Agricultural clinics too are needed to conduct researches on cultivation of crops suited to the quality of soil.

2. The current times are those of disasters. As a result, agriculture has suffered a great setback. There was no crop insurance in the past two 'Kuruva' seasons. Tamil Nadu must emulate the example of Maharashtra which is implementing its own crop insurance scheme without relying on the union government.

3. Agricultural growth does not mean augmentation of production alone but also augmenting the farmers' revenue. Way back in 2006 itself, the M. S. Swaminathan Committee recommended procurement prices. The DMK, for its part, in its election manifesto, assured to pay Rs.2,500 per quintal of paddy and Rs.4,000 per ton of sugarcane. As the production cost has risen up, the DMK-led government must keep its promise.

4. A grassroots-level campaign must be launched to promote organic farming.

5. The government must directly regulate the production and distribution of chemical fertilizers.

6. The terms 'Khariff' and 'Rabi' are not tillers' lingo. Just as the Madras Presidency was changed into Tamil Nadu, these two terms must be replaced with Tamil names, Kuruva and Sambha, respectively. And the name change must officially be announced.

7. Owing to unseasonal rains, it has become a permanent phenomenon that the procured paddy has more moisture content. The union government must announce relaxation of rules on the procured paddy moisture content, after assessing the paddy accurately through satellites. The government must raise the number of drying yards and paddy warehouses and also set up

mobile procurement centers. It is mainly the farmers who are affected the worst by the corruption in payment system. So, stringent measures need to be taken to stem the rot.

8. The riverbeds have been undermined following seamless sand mining. A board must be set up to stall the theft of sand that is also a mineral.

9. The government itself must market the cereals such as groundnut, oilseeds and alternative crops.

10. Desilting of water-bodies must begin in February itself.

11. Several railway tracks were laid in 1877, the year of the Thathu Varuda Pancham, to mitigate ill-effects of famine. Similarly it can be planned to guarantee jobs to farm labourers under the 100-day job scheme.

12. When Annadurai was Chief Minister, he was worried over the damage done to crops by the bird known as siravi. Similarly, the present government must take measures to avert crop damage done by wild boars.

13. It was announced in the last budget that the Tiruchi-Nagapattinam agricultural technology park and the farmers' estate on behalf of the TANSIDCO (Tamil Nadu Small Industries Development Corporation) would be set up. The announcement must be implemented expeditiously.

**Translated by V. Mariappan**