

'Rainfed farmers are the most neglected'

More R&D efforts, policy perspective needed: Ashok Dalwai

OUR BUREAU

New Delhi, February 14

Even though rainfed agriculture contributes to 60 per cent of the value of agriculture GDP of India, there is a clear-cut bias towards irrigated areas when it comes to public investment in agriculture in the country.

This neglect, together with unsuitable programme design, has ensured that potential of rain-fed areas remains unrealised, a conference was told here on Thursday.

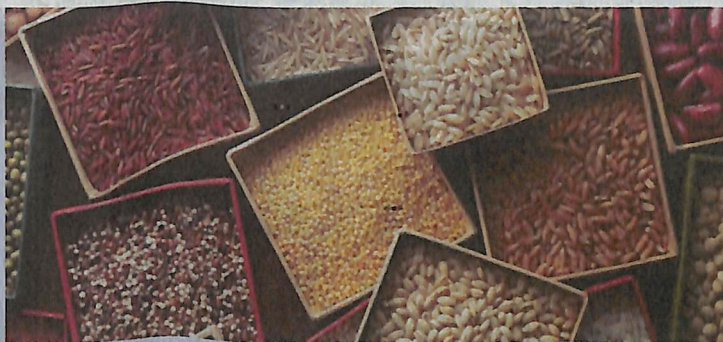
Difference in income

And this is reflected in the income of farmers too. "While farmers in irrigated areas earn 60 per cent of their income from agriculture, their counterparts in rainfed areas earn only 20-30 per cent from farm-related activities," said Ashok Dalwai, CEO of the National Rainfed Area Authority (NRAA), while addressing a national convention on revitalising rainfed agricul-

Snapshot of the acreage

(in million hectares)

Crop	Irrigated	Rainfed
Millets	2.2	17.6
Pulses	2.6	19.5
Oilseeds	7.6	17.2
Cotton	2.99	8.07
Rice	29.5	20.1
Wheat	26.6	4.2
Total	87.7	105.9



Rainfed areas contribute to

89%

Millets

88%

Pulses

73%

Cotton

69%

Oilseeds

40%

Rice

They also support

64%

Cattle

74%

Sheep

78%

Goat

Source: Agri Census, 2010-11

ture. "If we need to make agriculture a viable proposition in the country, there is a need to do more research and development in rain-fed agriculture and also to bring in more policy and marketing perspective," Dalwai said.

Contribution

"While the average yield in rainfed areas is about 1.1 tonnes per hectare, that in irrigated areas is about 2.8 tonnes per hectare,"

said the NRAA chief. Despite all these, rainfed areas contributed significantly to the country's food production. They account for 89 per cent of millets production, 88 per cent of pulses, 73 per cent of cotton, 69 per cent of oilseeds and 40 per cent rice production in the country.

Besides, rainfed areas support 64 per cent of cattle, 74 per cent of sheep and 78 per cent of goat population in the country.

About 61 per cent of India's

farmers rely on rainfed agriculture and 55 per cent of the gross cropped area is under rainfed farming.

The convention also saw the release of the first-ever rainfed atlas of the country, which captured the rich agri bio-diversity and socio-economic conditions of farmers living in these regions.

"India ranks first in rainfed agriculture, both in area and value of produce. Over the years,

farmers in rainfed areas have been facing several adversities such as climate variability, crop failure, non-remunerative prices, etc. Rainfed agriculture has historically been at the receiving end of imbalances in terms of policy and public investments," Sabyasachi Das, National Coordinator of RRA Network, one of the organisers of the convention, said.

Policy bias

As an example, Das cited the case of government spending on procurement. While the government spent ₹5,40,000 crore on procuring rice and wheat at MSP (Minimum Support Price) between 2003-04 and 2012-13, its expenditure on procurement of major rainfed crops such as coarse cereals, millets and pulses during the same period was merely ₹3,200 crore, he said.

Dalwai admitted that there was a policy bias against farmers working in rainfed systems, the latest move of giving income support to farmers, however little it may be, is a progressive step.