

# Agriculture – Presenting a paradise of job opportunities

V S Sunilkumar  
(Minister for Agriculture,  
Govt. of Kerala)

Once upon a time, unemployment was rampant in the state. Educated people themselves were bereft of job opportunities. But after the left front came into power two years ago, different avenues of job opportunities in different sectors came into being. The reason being that the government was able to create new opportunities. In certain sectors there are lot difficulties to be surmounted. In a state like ours where there are a lot of qualified and educated public, there is no equivalent number of job opportunities. Be it private or government sector, the status is the same everywhere. But in the field of agriculture and allied sectors, there is vast scope for entrepreneurs and self-made businesses, and planning has been made accordingly. Agri-business has made a significant contribution to the GDP. Agriculture is predicted to show a positive growth in the coming years. Agri-businesses is not known to have a negative growth. The government's main aim is to promote sustainable development in the agriculture sector. That is why anyone can walk in and take up a job in agriculture and allied sectors.

The government and agriculture department is aiming to create a wide variety of job opportunities in agriculture in the near future. This is expected to mainly benefit the farmers, labourers, the youth and housewives. It can be brought about by giving importance to Karmasena (Labour Bank). The inadequate availability of expert labourers in this field is a major hindrance to agriculture's growth. In order to solve this problem the first step is to form Karmasenas in every panchayat who will make available services of technicians in their panchayats. It has been decided to form 200 new karmasenas this year. Each karmasena will train 15-25 technicians. The services of these 'labour banks' can be made use of by the farmers and public alike. So also, agro-service centres will be set up. A mechanisation mission itself has been formulated for this. The services of agro-service centres will be at block level. Each karmasena in the block will be under the control of the respective agro-service centre. Starting of 20 new agro-services centres is envisaged this year.

Another field of vast opportunity in agriculture is processing and value addition. Increase in farmer's income and creation of small scale entrepreneurs is the primary aim of this venture.

Our products are all of world class quality. Many of our products reach the market as raw produce, devoid of any processing. Not even 10 % of our pro-



duce undergoes processing. The produce which changes hands several times increases in cost at least 10 times more before reaching the consumer. So the government plans to help in the processing and value addition of produce, whereby increasing the income of farmers. Many multi-brand businesses procure the quality pro-



duce from the farmers at a low price and market them as their own brand. This is what is happening with many produces like coconut, honey and spices. The products readily available in the markets are made from the resources getting from farmers. But the farmers do not receive any of the profit from this. The market intervention scheme of the government aims to divert at least 30-40 percent of the produce into processed and value added products and make sure that the farmers get a due share of the profits. We have GI (Geographical Indication) tagged crops and produces and also many region-specific crops. They are the property of the farmers producing them. The government aims to brand and market them in the international markets. The government and agriculture department of the state is planning to make the farmers themselves the entrepreneurs, keeping aside the monopoly of the middlemen. This way the profit will reach the real farmer. Farmer groups and farmer producer companies will be roped in to help in the collection, processing and marketing of produces.

Even the region specific paddy can be processed and turned into rice at the site itself and reach markets. Technology has been developed for this. To prevent fleeing by large rice mills, the govern-

ment has made available mini-rice mills and paddy-boiling and rice convertor processing units last year itself. Many farmer groups have come forward to adopt this and are successfully running the units. Branded products will leave the farm gate. Our aim is to make sure of an income for the farmer as well as create job opportunities in the region.

Government is aiming a sustainable agriculture development in the state. The mission mode of activities started 2 year back focusing on production, value addition and marketing gained momentum. We could increase the rice area from 1.98 lakh Ha to 2.20 lakh Ha. Out of 90000 Ha of fallow land, 20000 Ha were converted to greenery. Government is planning to increase the area to 3 lakh Ha and production to 10 lakh metric tonne with in 3 year time period. Vegetable production sector has also witnessed an equal progress. Our domestic demand being 20 lakh metric

tonne per year the production was only 6 lakh metric tonne two year back, where as we could increase the production to 10.5 lakh metric tonne within this time period. We are focusing on Good Agriculture Practices (GAP) for safe to eat production. A recent survey by Kerala Agriculture University to analyse the pesticide residue in local markets, revealed that 96% of the samples were safe. But in the case of product coming from outside the state, 48% sample were found to contain toxic substances.

We are focusing not only on production, but processing and marketing are equally viewed seriously. Problem faced by farmers during surplus production can be redeemed by diverting a portion for value addition and processing. Last two year, we conducted International workshop and exhibition named 'VAIGA' on value addition and processing in agriculture, and third edition of it is scheduled on this December. 66 Technologies were transferred to farmers and young entrepreneurs during last VAIGA. Many youth have come forward to the new area for exploring this avenues. Production of quality products and doing processing and, marketing of the bye products without any help of intermediaries will ensure a safe income for our farmers as well as entrepreneurship avenues for our youth.