

Press report – Plenary session
4th International Agronomy Congress

1st Plenary lecture

Title of the Lecture: “Dietary Diversification and Nutrition in India: Implications for Agri R&D”.

Speaker: Prof. Ramesh Chand, Neeti Ayog

The production and consumption pattern of food is divergent in many cases, which contradicts common perception. The per capita food production may have increased over last decades but per capita food consumption per day has a negative trend for cereals despite availability and wide ranging subsidies. In case of oil seeds, the stagnated per capita production has no effect on the big increase in intake. Despite impressive growth in income and reduction in poverty, undernourishment is stubbornly high. Cereals are the preferred source of calorie and other nutrients in Indian households. Reduced cereal intake may be the reason behind decline in nutrient intake despite dietary diversification towards high value food. The traditional food habit excludes the exotic inclusion of food types, as pulse is more preferred over soy products for protein and therefore availability and production must correspond to consumers’ choice to improve nutrition. For long our policy approach towards food security remained narrow and is stuck on cereals. He suggested increased production of preferred food, bio-fortification along with shift in policy focus and spreading nutrition awareness and education to break free from social habits, prejudices and to widen preference range as remedial measures to stem the decline in calorie and protein nutrition. He reminded the great role agronomists could play in future farming in keeping our food basket ever filled, in improving nutrition and enhancing farmers’ income through precision farming and other contemporary innovations of farming and by bringing vast seasonal fallows under cropping command.

2ndPlenary lecture

Title of the Lecture: “Nexus among poverty, hunger, water and energy in India”.

Speaker: Dr. J.S. Samra, Former Chief Executive Officer, National Rainfed Area Authority, Govt. of India

In his lecture Dr. Samra presented the intricacies of the complicated inter-relations among poverty, hunger, water, energy, other technological inputs and social sector investments in the process of reducing poverty and hunger for realizing Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in the rural sector. India has low rank in global hunger and poverty indices. Despite appreciable growth in economy with improved GDP and reduction in poverty and hunger, 21.9 per cent of the country's population is poor in the post-liberalization era. Our rural areas have a predominant agrarian economy and poverty has greater share there. Though spread of irrigation network, ground water irrigation, rural usage of electricity reduced poverty and hunger, simplistic relationships of poverty and hunger with agriculture development indices of water and energy are weak as many factors like pro-poor government policies offset any straight calculation. However, effectiveness or outcome of these investments itself depends on food productivity, production and agronomy has the responsibilities to address these critical agenda. The decline in quantity and quality of resources are critical issues which should be addressed pragmatically with sound technological innovations. Our per capita land and water availability is declining with time. Time has come to revamp the wasteful and unsustainable ground water irrigation practices in rain-scarce regions, as experts are already warning about coming decades of acute water shortage. Solar and wind power and precision irrigation network utilizing gri-voltaic systems have immense R & D potential. Such innovative technologies with better efficiency per unit input and output will reduce power and water wastage of contemporary irrigation systems, and would sustain balanced cropping pattern due to less dependence on subsidized power as happens in some states. Wider network of agro-voltaic power based micro-irrigation, diversified cropping and multiple use of water will reduce cost and uncertainty of input availability and increase farmers' income. These are the stepping stones lying ahead in the course of attaining zero hunger in India.