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Need to weed out counterfeits, facilitate robust growth of crop protection industry

In the last five decades, the Indian crop protection industry has undergone several phases of transformation in terms of product innovations, industry structure and usage patterns. From import-based structure to outperforming on exports, the industry has changed significantly in terms of composition. It exports close to \$2 billion against imports of less than \$300 million.

The crop coverage and share of states has changed with rice, sugarcane and vegetables emerging rapidly. Future markets such as Uttar Pradesh, MP, Bihar, West Bengal, Rajasthan etc., are challenging traditional top consumers such as Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Punjab etc. The industry has also maintained a robust growth of CAGR of more than 4% over the last few years.

Chemical pesticides still account for 90% plus, but the bio-products portfolio is growing rapidly. Almost all major companies are getting into this segment. With higher demand for organic food and environmental concerns, bio products are likely to maintain their double digit growth.

About 20% crop production is lost due to insects, weeds and diseases, but Indian crop protection chemicals usage is among the lowest and also erratic in the global scenario. In order to increase yields and ensure food security, extensive crop protection measures are essential. Many technical products are cheaper to import from China than manufacture in India. Hence many Indian companies choose to import from China.

There is also huge issue of substandard and counterfeit products. Pesticide registration process has been streamlined but quality enforcement continues to be a big question mark. Even in the national capital, underground manufacturing units making counterfeit products of top brands are flourishing, reportedly with political patronage. Recently the police raided some such units, but the racket largely continues unchecked.

There is need for large scale crackdown on the nexus between fly-by-night operators, politicians and enforcement authorities to check the racket. Equally important is to enforce quality in pesticides – including bio-pesticides – so that farmers are not duped. There is need for the industry to work more closely with state authorities and farmers.

Product development and registration system needs to be streamlined, including regulating the imports, to support the government's call for Make in India. Indian companies should be more aggressive in R&D to develop cost effective commercial manufacturing processes and novel molecules. Government agencies, universities and industry should come together to educate farmers regarding the usage and effectiveness of crop protection products, and dispel misinformation spread regarding them among the public.

