

# THE INCREDIBLE JOURNEY OF 25 YEARS OF AGRICULTURE TODAY

India has been predominantly an agrarian economy. Agriculture in India has been powerful engine for economic growth and rural transformation. From the Harappan civilization until few decades back, this primary sector has served as main source of livelihood for majority of population. Even now in two third of the under developed and developing countries of the world, agriculture is the mainstay of economy and providing livelihood to the majority of population. While India has grown leaps and bound in technology and services sectors in recent times, and its overall economic growth has been incredible, rising from 10th position to 5th in the last 10 years. It is racing to be the 4th largest economy by 2030, from its current level of \$4 billion. While, growth in industrial and more importantly the services sector, the contribution of agriculture to the GDP has come down to about 12% from 50% plus 50 years back, but the population dependent on the primary sector continues to be close to 50%. As such, agriculture continues to be critically important for the nation.

## Transformation of Agriculture

Agriculture has been identified largely with the farming, which is central component of agriculture. However, the role of policy making, research and technology, extension system, marketing, inputs production and delivery, logistics and post-harvest management, and non-crop segments, such as animal husbandry and fisheries etc., and trade and agribusinesses, farm services, credit and insurance, and programs, entrepreneurship and administration etc. is equally important. All these stakeholders play important role in making farming productive and profitable. Looking at the phases of development to Indian agriculture, it can safely be described as traditional way of farming until the advent of the era of green revolution in late sixties, when the use of high yielding varie-



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ties of seeds and chemical fertilizers led to quantum jump in production. Immediately, started the large-scale adoption of crop protection chemicals and farm machinery, soon followed by development of irrigation projects. With this started the journey of modern agriculture.

With farmers started getting quality seeds and inputs, and extension services and farming technologies, soon agriculture transformed from being merely a source of subsistence to profitable enterprise. It also brought prestige to India from being

ship to mouth situation during the first two decades after independence to soon the warehouses started overflowing with food grains. Today, India's agro exports at \$55 billion far outweigh imports at \$23 billion. In this journey of transformation, each segment from policy makers to research and academic to extension agencies and banks to marketing institutions and industries to public administration, all played important roles.

## Launch of Agriculture Today

The sector continued to face absence of a convergence platform and a knowledge product, to provide timely and adequate information to creating awareness and opinions and to bringing the stakeholders to common understanding of issues and challenges, and influencing the decisions. While universities and ICAR system started technical journals and also news bulletin for farmers by DD and AIR, however, the need of a comprehensive publication, reporting from field to policy makers, and from industries to markets, and from technology institutions to trade and global developments, remained unaddressed, till Agriculture Today was launched as India's first news magazine on agriculture in 1998.

Launching the magazine, the then Agriculture Minister, Sh. Sompal said that the magazine should not only provide the





credible information, but, also play role in creating awareness and opinions, and in bridging the gap among the stakeholders. Within a year of its launch, Agriculture Today hosted the first ever Round Table on Farmers Issues and Agriculture Policies, participated by 25 plus Members of Parliament, and chaired by Sh. Sompalji himself, now as Member, Planning Commission. Dr. KL Chadha, DDG Horticulture and Sh. Pratap Narayan, then then DG Fertilizer Association of India, both of whom, who were part of the magazine's launch program, were also present in that RTC. How fortunate we are that all three of them are part of the silver jubilee celebrations today in New Delhi.

### State Special Issue

While, we brought out few special issues on horticulture, seeds, farm mechanization, dairy etc., but, our immediate goal was to reach out to the states, as agriculture is the state subject in India. Soon we landed in Hyderabad in July, 1999 to bring out the special issue on AP Agriculture. The first meeting with then Chief Minister, Sh. N Chandrababu Naidu, transformed into a personal bond and relationships that we cherished till date. The Minister of Agriculture, Sh. VS Rao, who had attended our



Policy RTC in Delhi in April 1999, played important role in facilitating the special issue. This was followed up by another special issue, this time on Uttar Pradesh, and another Policy RTC in the year 2000 in New Delhi, again participated by over 2 dozen MPs and a number of ministers, including the environment minister, Sh. Suresh Prabhu. The relationship with Sh. Prabhu became

### AGRI NEWS SERVICE

Realizing the importance of digital platforms in providing quick information in easy format, Agriculture Today started in 2005 the Agri News Service, a compilation of news from public sources, and sharing by email to the large database, and in the year 2017, the Agri news Network, a video and text format news coverage, disseminated through social media platforms. The network of reporters from across the country forms the primary source of information for ANN.

intensely close, and we continue to cherish it till date.

We started our third major program of organizing National Convention of Farmers, and the first one was organized in the year 2001 at IARI in New Delhi. Same year we brought special issue on Gujarat agriculture. The then Secretary of Agriculture, Gujarat, Dr. PK Mishra, who was the key person in the success of this endeavor, became the Secretary of Agriculture, Government of India in 2008. Today, as the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, he is the only Cabinet Minister rank officer in the country, and playing central role in

shaping the future of the country.

### Country Special Issue

After institutionalizing the annual events of policy round tables and the farmers' conventions at New Delhi, and special issues on different themes and on different states, it was time to focus on global agriculture. And soon in the year 2002, we headed to Israel for a special issue on that country, to report on its advances in irrigation management, agtech and precision agriculture. The success of this initiative was so much that we decided to bring out special issues on other agriculturally important countries. And thus we initiated engagement with other countries and so far, we have brought out special issues on US, Denmark, France, Italy, Spain, Germany, Netherland, Belgium, Poland, China, Japan, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, Chile among others.

### Events Coverage

Agriculture Today has also been part as Media Partner to various national and international events, and as exclusive coverage partner to different programs and as invitee to different policy consultation meetings. Agriculture Today team has also been extensively moving in the field to bring the news and stories from the farmers fields, from the market places and from the offices of the officials and important institutions. Agriculture Today's engagement with the industry has been very extensive and deep, working so closely with almost every company from seed to fertilizers to crop protection to farm machinery, irrigation to food processing and logistics. The magazine also cultivated close relationship with research and academic institutions to banks and developmental bodies, and from bi-lateral to multilateral institutions.

### Leadership Awards

In the year 2008, Agriculture Today Group took another major decision of starting leadership awards in agriculture to recognize the important stakeholders for their outstanding roles. Series of long consultation meetings took place with none other than the farther of India's green revolution, and beloved to all of us, Prof. MS Swaminathan. Together



we conceptualized, Agriculture Leadership Summit, and Leadership Awards, as part of the program. The Summit OC was chaired by Prof. Swaminathan himself, while Awards Committee was chaired by the Governor of Haryana, Dr. AR Kidwai.

In the 1st Leadership Summit, we had who's who of Indian agriculture. While the inaugural function was graced by the Governor, Haryana, Dr. Kidwai and the Governor of MP, Sh. Balram Jakhar, the Awards were presented by the then Speaker Lok Sabha, Sh. Somnath Chatterjee. Among the recipients were Father of Green Revolution, Prof. MS Swaminathan; the Farther of White Revolution, Dr. V Kurien; Father of Horticulture Revolution, Dr. KL Chadha and Father of Pusa Basmati, Dr. EA Siddiq; former DGs of ICAR, Prof. VL Chopra and Dr. RS Paroda; the pioneer of seed industry in India Padmashri Dr. BR Barwale, Chairman, Mahyco and pioneer of precision agriculture in India; Padmashri, Bhanwar Lal Jain, Chairman, Jain Irrigation, NABARD as an institution; and the Minister of Agriculture, Sh. Raghuvendra Reddy, who received the Award on behalf of the State of Andhra Pradesh. We also launched the 1st Year Book on Indian Agriculture, which was compilation of the important articles, authored by eminent personalities, and analysis of trends and data to coverage of the important developments in agriculture during the year.

The journey of bringing special issues,

and covering important news and interviews, bringing out Agriculture Year Books, organizing annual policy round tables and farmers conventions, and holding the Agriculture Leadership Summit, renamed as Conclave in 2019, is still continuing. And today, we are part of 14th Agriculture Leadership Conclave, and also the 25th anniversary of Agriculture Today. The memories of the launch function in April 1998 at India International Centre, are still so fresh in my mind, as if this event happened only few years back. I am happy to see Sh. Somplaji, Sh. Pratap Narayan ji, Dr. KL Chadha, who were part of the launch function and the first RTC the very next year and also the first Summit, are also part of the silver jubilee. I am fortunate to have got whole hearted support of large number of people from all walks of life in the 25 years journey of Agriculture Today. Many of them are present on this occasion, and we are happy to felicitate some of them today, as we celebrate silver jubilee of the magazine. I am also thankful to all those who worked with agriculture today in the last 25 years and those being part of the current team. But, there is notable loss of Dr. Balram Jakhar, who remained solidly with Agriculture Today from the very beginning till his last. And our beloved Prof. Swaminathan. He is not with us today. But, his love and affection, his vision and guidance, his support and encouragement, continues to inspire and guide us.