



Volume 1 | Issue 2 | May, 2021

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An International Multidisciplinary e-Magazine

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COVID-19 AND ITS IMPACT ON AGRICULTURE

[Article ID: SIMM0024]

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ABSTRACT:

The start of the corona virus pandemic has coincided with the peak harvesting season. As the markets are locked down, there is a threat to the crop in over 100 lakh hectares in the country. Even among the different segments, the impact varies widely among different regions and among producers and agricultural wage labourers. This impact will reverberate across the larger economy and will linger longer than a few months. covid-19 is disrupting some activities in agriculture and supply chains. There are disruptions in supply chains because of transportation problems and other issues. Prices had declined for wheat, vegetables, and other crop, yet consumers are often paying more. The lockdown has choked off almost all economic activity. The shutdown will cause untold misery for informal workers and the poor, who lead precarious lives facing hunger and malnutrition.

ISSUES SURFACED AFTER COVID PANDEMIC

In spite of all the measures and in view of continuing restrictions on movements of people and vehicular traffic, concerns have been raised regarding negative implications of COVID19 pandemic on the farm economy.

The immediate problems in agriculture at the moment are primarily categorized under two heads:

A. IMPACT ON GLOBAL AGRICULTURE

1) Crop production and availability of seeds

- For crop production, the largest part of the seeding process will be almost unaffected between now and the summer.
- So there would be no impact as such on seeds availability for now.
- But if the same scenario continues till year end, then surely seed availability can be an issue.

2) Fertilizers shortage

- Due to global trade disturbance, farmers are facing the shortage of agricultural inputs like fertilizer and pesticides.
- In a shorter span, there is little shortage to be expected.
- In the longer term, the delivery of fertilizer via international markets may become a problem.

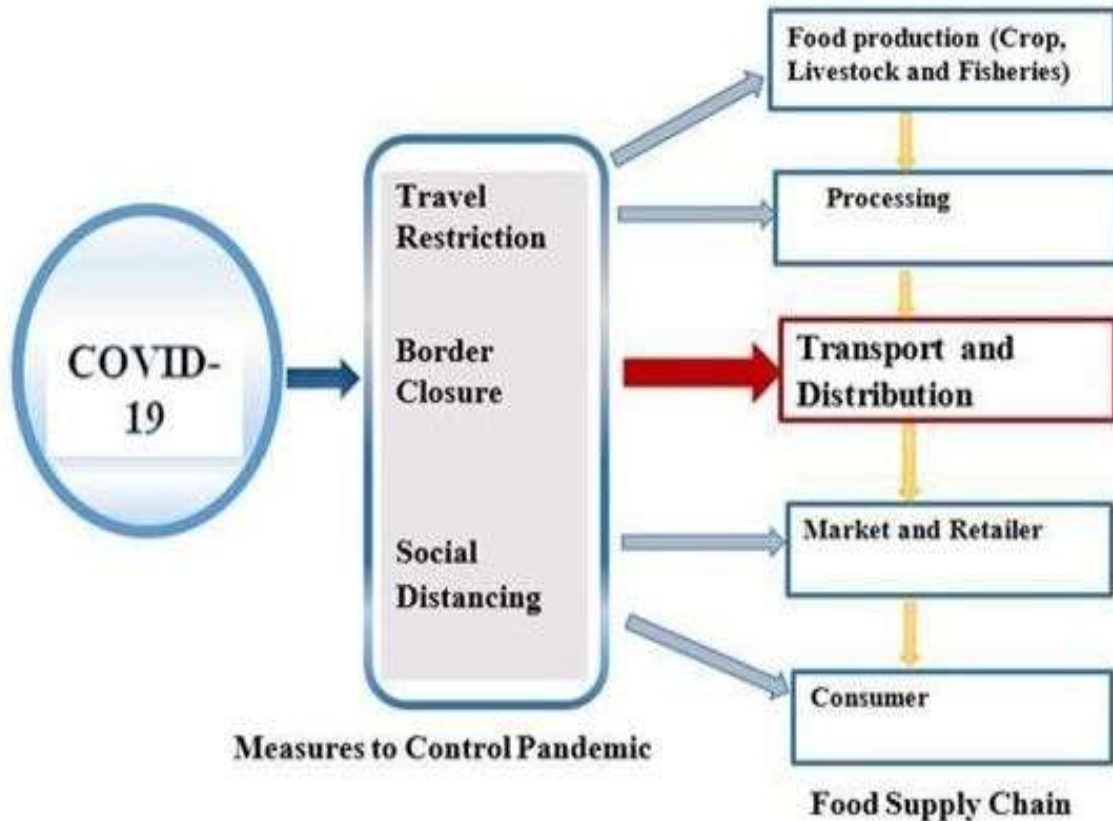
3) On food production and distribution

- Most of the countries have taken measures such as home confinement, travel bans and business closure to control the rate of infection.

- Agriculture produce is mostly perishable in nature, so farmers are compelled to hold their unsold produce for a longer period of time.
- This has led to a reduction in food quality as well as an increase in the cost of production.

services and social protection and due to little saving or no saving.

- Many informal workers in agriculture are obligate to work for their sustenance despite the self-isolation protocol during COVID-19 pandemic.



4) On livestock

- Different agricultural sector such as livestock and fishery have been hit hard by the pandemic.
- In India, COVID-19 has caused a higher impact on livestock farming due to limited access to animal feed and a shortage of labour.

5) On workers

- Agricultural workers in low and middle-income countries lack proper health

6) Impact on food demand and food security

- The demand for food has affected due to reduction in income and purchasing capacity.
- Panicked Consumers are stock piling the foods which in turn has affected the food availability and price.
- Due to the decline in international trade, disturbance in food supply chain and food production, food insecurity may arise.

B. IMPACT ON INDIA

Agriculture contributes about 17 per cent to Indian GDP. Agriculture, with its allied sectors, is the largest source of livelihoods in India. 70 percent of rural households still depend primarily on agriculture for their livelihood.

1) Peak harvest with no procurement

- This is the peak of Rabi season in India and crops like wheat, gram, lentil, mustard, etc. (including paddy in irrigated tracts) were at a harvestable stage or almost reaching maturity.
- This is also the time when the farm harvests reach the mandis for assured procurement operations by designated government agencies.

2) Labour unavailability due to reverse migration

- The non-availability of labour has hurt operations in many parts.
- Consequently, the shortage of migrant labour has resulted in a sharp increase in daily wages for harvesting crops.
- Some parts of agriculture that have the luxury of deploying technology for harvestings, like Paddy and Wheat, are relatively more insulated since they often do not have to depend on large numbers of manual labour.

3) Fall in prices

- Agricultural prices have collapsed due to lack of market access including the stoppage of transportation and closure of borders.
- The rise in labour costs and lack of access means that farmers are staring at huge losses and hence allowing crops to rot in the fields, a better 'stop-loss' mechanism.

4) Scarcity of public goods

- Making the food grains, fruits and vegetables and other essential items available to consumers, both in rural and urban areas, is the most critical challenge.
- Transportation of public distribution system (PDS) items to last-mile delivery agents, by both rail and road, has been severely impacted in the beginning.

5) Restrictions on Sale

- There were self-imposed restrictions on the inter- and intra-State movements of farmers/labourers, as well as harvesting and related farm machines.

6) Disruptions in supply-chain

- The absence of transport facilities clubbed with vigilant blocking roads has a limiting effect on the movement of migratory harvest labour and agri-machinery.
- Also, trucks and tractors are not inclusive of 'farm machinery' by definition.

INDIAN RESPONSE TO COVID: AGRICULTURE VERSION

The Center and State Governments have worked in harmony to redress the grievances of farmers. Both have introduced a series of measures every day such as subsidies, including crop insurance to farmers, free flow of agricultural credit, unemployment allowance to rural landless/migrant workers under MANREGA, etc.

The govt. is using every arrow in its quiver to ensure the health of farmers by continuously sensitizing the farmers about working in fields with covered faces while maintaining social distancing. In order to reinforce a zero hurdle harvest season, the govt has exempted the movement of farm machinery from lockdown.



1) Reforms in e-NAM

- The new features of National Agriculture Market platform were introduced as a welcoming move to decongest mandis.
- They aim to strengthen agriculture marketing by reducing the need for farmers to physically access the wholesale mandis for selling their harvested produce.

2) Technological support

- Kisan Sabha App developed by CSIR to connect farmers to supply chain and freight transportation management system was recently launched to support farmers during the lockdown.
- The app aims to provide the most economical and timely logistics support to the farmers and increase their profit margins by minimizing the interference of middlemen and directly connecting with the institutional buyers.
- Kisan Rath app was also launched to facilitate farmers & traders in searching for transport vehicles for movement of Agriculture & Horticulture produce.

3) Boost to Contract farming

- Various states have promoted innovative model allowing investors and farmers to enter into an agreement for contract farming in view of the continuing uncertainties due to the pandemic.
- For example, the Consumer-Farmer Compact in Telangana has been ensuring food availability and access in COVID-19 times.
- In this system, the consumers support farmers with their agricultural needs; in return, farmers ensure consumers are able to access food in a hassle-free manner.

4) Allocations for direct transfers

- Increasing the allocations for DBT to farmers through PM KISAN and including everyone who is actively undertaken during the lockdown.
- This has helped most farming families to be partially compensated for the losses seen in months of March and April.

- It has provided them with some cushion against the deflationary effect seen on farm-prices due to the prolonged lockdown.

CONCLUSION

Structural reforms such as land leasing, contract farming and private agricultural markets, etc. have long been advocated to bring enhanced investments into the agriculture sector and to push its growth. However, there has not been the uniform implementation of these legislations by State Governments and so the full potential of the sector is unrealized. The end of the lockdown will not end the problems. On the contrary, they are likely to be compounded at the onset of the new agricultural sowing season. There is a greater need for government support in the form of support for other agricultural inputs. Lack of any relief will only make the agricultural crisis worse. The need of the hour is to maximise possibilities of agriculture, which has demonstrated its utility and resilience in trying times.

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