

1. Discuss the reasons behind farmer suicides in some of the agriculturally most productive regions of India like Punjab. (250 words)

Answer:

Background:-

- The changed pattern of land holdings, changed cropping pattern due to shift from light to cash crops, liberalisation policies which pushed Indian agriculture into the global markets without a level playing field, growing cost of cultivation, uncertainty of crop output, lack of profitable prices, indebtedness, neglect of agriculture by the government and its agencies, decline of public investment, individualisation of agricultural operations, so on and so forth. This constitutes the vicious cycle a farmer is trapped in.

Punjab farmer crisis:-

- Due to unseasonal rains and hailstorms since mid-February last year Rabi crops like wheat, cereals, mustard, vegetables (potato) have been damaged greatly. Consequently, many Farmers in the state have ended their lives
- Magnitude and seriousness of the farm crisis can be gauged from the fact that 6,926 farmers and agricultural labourers committed suicide in the state during 2000–10 as per the census-based study. Among the victim farmers, about 79% were small farmers cultivating up to two hectares of land.

Reasons behind farmer suicides in India in agriculturally productive regions :-

- The high debt burden was the primary reason behind 75% of farmer suicides.
- Large chunk of persons were underemployed or disguisedly unemployed during 2016–17 in Punjab.
- In Punjab, the annual income of farmers from crop farming is found to be insufficient to meet their expenditure and debt servicing.
 - The mismatch between farm inputs and output prices, crop failures, and unfavourable terms of trade between prices paid and received by the farmers have contributed fairly to declining farm incomes.
- **Cost of cultivation:-**
 - The MSP of wheat and paddy increased at the rate of 2% per annum while the cost of cultivation increased at the rate of 7.9% during the last one and a half decades.
- With a growth rate of around 1.6% (during 2012–17) and the stress on natural resources, the farm sector is trapped in a vicious circle of crisis. Expectedly, small farmers are the worst sufferers.
- Due to the declining water table, the cost of irrigation structures has increased as the farmers have to replace centrifugal pumps by costly submersible pumps.
- The farmers are being exploited by traders and dealers providing them spurious seeds and agrochemicals.

- Plummeting incomes, mounting debt, and high interest rates (particularly of non-institutional sources) have pushed the peasantry towards deprivation
- Agriculture in Punjab suffers from mono-crop culture of mainly wheat and paddy. With this cropping pattern, farming itself is becoming an unviable occupation, due to rising fixed and variable input costs, and low remuneration leading to falling profit margins.
- **Cost of inputs:-**
 - Variable costs increase due to rising prices of inputs like fertilisers, pesticides, weedicides, diesel etc.
 - Fixed costs like installation and deepening of submersible pumps due to the dipping water table increase the financial woes of farmers.
 - For a small and marginal farmer, it is economically unviable to make such investments, especially by borrowing from informal sources at high rates of interest

Way forward:-

- The “Scheme for Debt Swapping of Borrowers” should be made more effective for converting the non-institutional debt into institutional debt.
- Also, the MSP as per the Swaminathan report (cost plus 50%) needs to be honoured and implemented
- The AMSCs should be set up at every village to provide custom-hiring services to small farmers on a priority basis.
- Quality farm inputs like seed, fertilisers, and pesticides must be supplied to the farmers at subsidised prices.
- Rationalisation of subsidies, especially in favour of small farmers may control appreciating farm costs and making small farming viable.
- For alternative employment, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme should be effectively implemented by ensuring stipulated annual employment of 100 days, rather than the existing 30 days, to each family in the state.
- Identifying and developing crop niches that will encourage allied activities in appropriate agro-climatic zones of the state, and developing cooperative primary processing and marketing units for crops and activities in these zones can help improve the economic well-being of the farmers.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Answer the following Questions

1. The ordinance making power of the legislature should be used sparingly and with due respect to the constitution. Discuss. (250 words)
2. Discuss how India can use its market power to create rules that will produce home-grown, locally-owned internet economy giants. (250 words)