

## **Advisory for farmers and farming sector during lockdown period due to COVID-19**

The Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India has issued detailed guidelines for states, Union Territories and general public to follow during the extended lockdown till May 3, 2020 (Order No. 40-3/2020-DM-I (A) dated 15 April 2020). During this extended lockdown period, following agricultural and horticultural activities will remain fully functional:

1. Farming operations by farmers and farm workers in the field.
2. Agencies engaged in procurement of agriculture products, including MSP operations.
3. 'Mandis' operated by the Agriculture Produce Market Committee (APMC) or as notified by the State/ UT Government (e.g., satellite *mandis*).
4. Direct marketing operations by the State/ UT Government or by industry, directly from farmers/group of farmers, FPOs' co-operatives etc. States/ UTs may promote decentralised marketing and procurement at village-level.
5. Shops of agriculture machinery, its spare parts (including its supply-chain) and repairs to remain open.
6. 'Custom Hiring Centres (CHC)' related to farm machinery.
7. Manufacturing, distribution and retail of fertilizers, pesticides and seeds.
8. Movement (inter and intra state) of harvesting and sowing-related machines like combined harvester and other agriculture/horticulture implements.

### **9. Activities related to Fisheries**

- Operations of the fishing (marine and inland)/ aquaculture industry, including feeding & maintenance, harvesting, processing, packaging, cold chain, sale and marketing.
- Hatcheries, feed plants, commercial aquaria.
- Movement of fish/ shrimp and fish products, fish seed/ feed and workers for all these activities.

### **10. Activities related to Plantations**

- Operations of tea, coffee and rubber plantations, with a maximum of 50% workers.
- Processing, packaging, sale and marketing of tea, coffee, rubber and cashew, with a maximum of 50% workers.

### **11. Activities related to Animal husbandry**

- Collection, processing, distribution and sale of milk and milk products by milk processing plants, including transport and supply chain.
- Operation of animal husbandry farms including poultry farms & hatcheries and livestock farming activity.
- Animal feed manufacturing and feed plants, including the supply of raw material, such as maize and soya.
- Operation of animal shelter homes, including *Gaushalas*.

During this extended lockdown period all agricultural and horticultural activities will remain fully functional, therefore following agro-advisory for farmers is being released.

### **1. Harvesting & threshing of crops**

*Amidst the threat of COVID-19 spread, the rabi crops (especially wheat, mustard, sugarcane, lentil, maize, chillies) are approaching maturity/have already matured.*

Harvesting and handling of the produce including its movement to the market are inevitable as the agricultural operations are time bound.

- Farmers have to follow all precautions and safety measures to be taken to prevent the disease spread which include social distancing, maintaining personal hygiene by washing of hands with soap, wearing of face mask, protective clothing and cleaning of implements and machinery. Workers to follow safety measures and social distancing at each and every step in the entire process of field operations.
- Harvesting of crops should be done through mechanized harvesters as far as possible to involve less farm workers in the field. If harvesting is to be done by hand operated equipments like sickles etc., sanitize these with soap water at least three times a day. All transport vehicles, gunny bags or other packaging material should also be sanitized
- During harvesting, social distancing has to be compulsorily maintained. A person to person distance of at least 1-2 meters must be maintained while harvesting the crop, eating meals or otherwise. Each worker should have separate utensils for eating and clean these with soap after use.
- Every farm worker has to bring his separate bottles/utensils for drinking water and these should not be shared with others.
- Farmers must ensure availability of soap and clean water in ample quantity at farm. During the harvesting operations, workers should wash hands intermittently and avoid touching nose, mouth and eyes without washing.
- Wearing of mask during farm operations is mandatory. In the absence of mask, use chunnis, gamchas, towels or other fine clothes and cover nose and mouth with three folds of these. The traditional practice of covering nose and mouth with suitable clothes during farm operations will be useful here also.
- All the clothes used for a day, should not be worn next day. These clothes should be washed with soap and sun dried before use next time.
- In case of manual field operations of harvesting/ picking, accomplish the operation in 4-5 feet spaced strips assigning one strip to one person. This will ensure adequate spacing between the engaged labours.
- Stagger the field operations wherever possible and avoid engaging more number of persons on the same day.
- Engage only familiar persons to the extent possible and after reasonable enquiry as to avoid the entry of any suspect or likely carrier during field activity.
- If a person is having cough, running nose, fever and headache, he needs to be isolated and send to the doctor/dispensary for medical checkup. He/She should not be involved in the operation and kept separately.
- The collection of the produce may be done in small heaps spaced at 3-4 feet and field level processing should be assigned to 1-2 persons/heap to avoid crowding.

- Ensure that farm produce does not come in contact with land/soil. No one should spit on the surface near threshing.
- Transport and agricultural machinery like tractor, mini-tractor, trolley, combine harvester, thresher, other small equipments, container, plastic sheet/tripal, gunny bags etc. should be properly sanitized before use.
- Proper sanitation and cleanliness of threshers for harvested maize and groundnut is to be maintained especially when machines are shared and used by farmer groups. Copious washing of machine parts frequently touched with soap is advised.

## **2. Post-harvest, storage and Marketing of farm produce**

- While performing drying, threshing, winnowing, cleaning, grading, sorting and packaging operations at the farm level, wearing of protective face mask may help against aerosols and dust particles to prevent respiratory difficulties.
- Ensure proper drying prior to storage of harvested grains, millets, pulses at farm/home and do not use reuse previous seasons jute bags to prevent pest infestation. Use treated and dried gunnies after soaking in 5% neem solution.
- Adequate pre-cautions to be taken for storage of produce at the farm in jute bags that are made available in sufficient numbers to farmers or in nearby cold storages/ godowns / warehouses, if needed for better price realization
- Proper sanitization of containers (crates, papers, bags, ropes) for packaging of fruit and vegetables has to be compulsory carried out. Fruits and vegetables need to be washed properly with clean water before packing.
- Cut and damaged fruits/vegetables should be kept separately and should not be packed.
- Farm produce should be kept outside for 48 hours preferably in sunshine before storage in home.
- Adequate personal safety measures to be taken for loading and transporting of farm produce and while participating in sale at market yards/ auction platforms
- Seed producer farmers are permitted to transport to seed companies with supporting documents and to follow precautions while receiving payments
- Seed processing/packaging plants and transportation of seed from seed producing states to growing states (South to north) is essential to make available seed for ensuing kharif crops eg. SSG seed for green fodder for sowing in April in north comes from southern states
- Precautions to be followed for direct marketing/ supply of vegetables such as tomato, cauliflower, green leafy vegetables, cucumbers and other cucurbits from farms

### **Standing field crops**

- The temperature in most of the wheat growing areas is still below long-term average and likely to delay wheat harvesting by at least 10-15 days beyond April 10, therefore, farmers can delay wheat harvesting till April 20 without incurring any significant loss, which gives enough time to manage logistics for procurement and announcement of dates
- Rabi Paddy in grain filling stage in southern states is widely affected due to neck blast incidence, adequate pre-cautions to be taken while spraying of recommended fungicide by contract sprayers/ farmers
- In case of any unseasonal rain at harvesting stage in paddy, spray 5% salt solution to prevent seed germination

- In horticultural crops at fruiting stage such as mango, while carrying out field operations related to nutrient sprays and crop protection adequate precautions in handling of inputs, mixing, delivery and washing of equipment is to be undertaken
- In summer pulses in rice fallows, whitefly management with proper safety measures may be taken up to prevent yellow mosaic virus incidence

### **What more can be done to ensure smooth agricultural operations during Lockdown period**

In view of the lockdown and emergent crisis, some of the important measures may be taken up;

1. The list of custom hire centres and available machineries should be shared and accessibility should be facilitated. Farm machineries of institutions and state departments could be pooled and made available through KVKs on roster basis. The Department of Agriculture, Cooperation & Farmers Welfare, Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, Government of India has launched the 'Kisan Rath App' to on-board logistics service providers who can extend transportation facility for movement of agricultural and horticultural produce from farm gate to regulated markets, Farmer Producer Organization (FPO) Centres, village haats/ GrAMS, warehouses, railway stations, airports, processing units, wholesale and retail markets etc. The 'Kisan Rath App' will lead to on boarding of over 500,000 trucks through transport aggregators as well as 20,000 tractors from farmer group run Custom Hiring Centers (CHCs). It will be a stepping stone towards provision of timely transportation service at competitive rates to farmers and traders besides achieving reduction in food wastage. This will also strengthen agricultural supply chain management during the COVID-19 pandemic. Developed and supported by National Informatics Center (NIC) the 'Kisan Rath App' can be accessed and downloaded from the google play store. This app should be given wider publicity. Alongside, repairing shops of Agro machines and equipment as well as shops for spare parts may be permitted to run to meet out the exigencies.
2. Processing needs to be done for value addition, enhancing keeping quality and shelf life to avoid post-harvest losses. Promotion of small scale processing and buy back arrangements could save loss and also ensure food availability at cheaper rate in the local areas.
3. States and Centre should classify essential food items with zero hurdle supply chain mechanism for food retail and food industries to help consumers, food industry and farmers. There should be strict regulations against fake news propaganda impacting farmers and food processors. e.g.,: poultry. Food packaging industry should be allowed as essential category.
4. Dedicated food transport corridors to be announced pan India with no stoppage at borders. Aadhaar based approvals, passes to be issued for smooth supply chain of food.
5. E-commerce based apps should be encouraged to help rapid deployment of delivery personnel to avoid panic buying and restrict movement in the streets.
6. Import dependent agro chemicals, and fertiliser sector may see some volatility in the long term. States may supply agri inputs free of cost for the upcoming Kharif season to ensure stable food production.
7. Procurement and marketing of Rabi season commodities will decide future prices for consumers and industries. Procurement of Rabi crops on MSP is being planned in the

states. State Government should work in consultation with the central Government for developing a robust strategy for the same.

8. Frontline extension system including ICAR Institutes and State Agricultural Universities through network of 13500 Mera Gaon Mera Gaurav (MGMG) villages, ATICs, ICT based applications, Krishi Vigyan Kendras should communicate to the farmers for following advisories issued by ICAR for following precautions and safety measures including social distancing, maintaining personal hygiene by washing of hands with soap, wearing of face mask, protective clothing and cleaning of implements and machinery to be taken care of to prevent the disease spread.
9. Since sowing of summer season crops (pulses, vegetables, rice) are to take place, availability of inputs like seeds etc., needs to be ensured. Seeds can be provided to the farmers through a network of NSC/State Seed Agencies, 1.39 lakh rural branch post offices and KVKs.
10. In wake of large masses of labour class reverse migrating from cities to their respective villages, vegetable enterprises along with other micro-enterprises requiring less or no land, may be promoted so that they have avenue for earning and livelihood security in short time period.
11. In case of such farmers who are in vegetable or dairy production, under essential services, the administration may permit them supply and transportation of their produce in nearby households, colonies, societies or even small makeshift markets with full care and safety measures.