

INAUGURAL SPEECH BY SHRI SHARAD PAWAR, UNION MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD & PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION AT THE CONFERENCE OF VICE CHANCELLORS OF AGRICULTURAL UNIVERSITIES FEBRUARY 16-17, 2009, AT NASC COMPLEX, PUSA, NEW DELHI

Shri Kanti Lal Bhuria Ji, Dr. Mangala Rai, Secretaries of other departments of the Ministry of Agriculture and ICAR, Vice Chancellors of Agricultural Universities and DDGs of the ICAR, Distinguished Guests, Personnel from Media, Ladies & Gentlemen,

2. I am delighted to be here in this Annual Vice-Chancellor's Conference which represents assembly conceived with the position of higher agricultural education and related academic management. A cohesive network of Indian agricultural universities (AUs) working in a partnership mode, both among themselves and with related agencies, is our strength. I am confident that the Conference would further strengthen this partnership and enhance the benefits emanating from it to the country.

3. At the outset, I congratulate all the scientists and other contributors involved in 'Basmati' rice improvement who have been conferred with awards for the excellent work they have done with regard to 'Basmati' rice improvement.

4. The quality of education can be judged by the performance of students. On this count, I congratulate the Kerala Agricultural University, Thrissur; Mahatma Phule Krishi Vidyapeeth, Rahuri, University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharwad, and Dr Punjabrao Deshmukh Krishi Viswa Vidyalyaya, Akola for having received the Performance Prizes. The Vice-Chancellors and the members of faculty of the Agricultural Universities deserve appreciation for the quality of education they impart and the human values they inculcate in the minds of their students.

5. The overall growth of the Indian economy depends on agriculture as it affects the growth in other sectors. Further, agricultural growth *per se* tends to bring about equity as about 52% of our population directly depends on agriculture. There is a continuing need to develop quality human resource that propels this growth. Realizing this, the Govt. of India has, through successive Plans, supported the development of higher agricultural education in the country. The human resource thus developed has contributed towards the increase in food grain, milk, oilseed, vegetables and fish production.

6. Agriculture in India, through research and technology development, has enabled the country to increase the production of foodgrains by 4 times, horticultural crops by 6 times, fish by 9 times (marine 5 times and inland 17 times), milk 6 times and eggs 27 times since 1950-51, thus making a visible impact on the nation's food and nutritional security.

7. The achievements in Indian agriculture have been unprecedented and admired the world over. The year gone by has been exceptionally good for the country with a record production of total food grains (230.67 million tonnes), rice (96.43 million tonnes), wheat (78.40 million tonnes), maize (19.31 million tonnes), cotton (25.81 million bales), and coarse grain (40.73 million tonnes). This is an outstanding achievement, for which the agricultural scientists and farmers of our country deserve appreciation.

8. While continuing with the recently established new and successful models of experiential learning units and areas of excellence, the Council has launched several new initiatives in higher agricultural education during this year. The development grant to AUs has been increased. Provisions have been made for century-old historical agricultural colleges that needed support, particularly for developing infrastructure and undertaking major refurbishing works. The number of girl students is increasing rapidly and upto 2 girls'

hostels are being provided in the XI Plan to each AU along with other related amenities.

9. A major exercise involving over 1000 academicians was undertaken and post-graduate course curricula and syllabi in 95 disciplines revised for implementation. Revised PG course curricula and syllabi are in final shape and form the main theme of the discussion during this VC's Conference. I congratulate the ICAR and Agricultural Universities for this accomplishment and for bringing this issue up-front for deliberations. I am told that the Under Graduate course curricula has already been revised as recommended by the IV Deans' Committee constituted by the ICAR and adopted by all the agricultural universities across the country. The revised PG Course Curricula on adoption would greatly help in further making higher agricultural education more utilitarian and relevant in tune with the scientific and technological advancements and the demands of the country's growing economy.

10. Farms constitute the basic skeleton in the AUs established on Land Grant pattern. The Council has fulfilled the promise made in the Vice Chancellors' Conference held in Pantnagar, in the year 2006, by launching a mega initiative on "Modernization of Agricultural Universities' Farms" with an outlay of Rs 422 crores. I have been told that consequent to the expeditious clearance of the CCEA, this project has been operationalized from this year itself. The project envisages enhancing the breadth, relevance and quality of education, training and research through modernization of AU farms. It will lead to enhancing practical and experiential exposure in students and entrepreneurship development, augmenting supply of seed/planting material, providing a common space for interface of public-private partnerships, facilitating technology-incubation and up-scaling of technologies towards commercialisation and resource generation.

11. The Council has, for the first time, made a provision for Overseas Fellowships. The Fellowships have a dual objective of serving two objectives (i) facilitating education of Indian nationals in one of the best Universities abroad, and (ii) facilitating admission of foreign students in Indian AUs to help demonstrate the strengths of the Indian agricultural system.

12. Agricultural Universities should take up the noble mission of generating human resource that serves as job creators, rather than job seekers. There should be increased time allocation for practical and hands on training in fields, commercial plants and internships in business houses. The intent of this change is to impart skill development for producing self-confident and self-competing individuals who create their own jobs in areas such as agro-services, consultancy, agri-business management, international trade, patent writing, post-harvest technology and processing etc. The ICAR has already made a headway in this direction by establishing over 200 Experiential Learning Units for hands on practical training.

13. Improving the livelihood of farmers of India is an important issue. Integrated Farming Systems approach involving appropriate combinations of crop husbandry, livestock, horticulture, vegetable, goatry, piggery, fishery, apiculture, mushroom, sericulture etc was a felt need since long. I am happy to note that an Integrated Farming System Project is being launched by the ICAR at 31 locations in the country and there is a specific agenda on the subject for deliberation in this conference. The implementation of location specific practical recommendations coming out from this project will help improve the livelihood of the farmers.

14. Integrated Farming System needs a good fertilizer policy for its support. The Government has recently taken a historical decision by moving to nutrient-based pricing and subsidy, and allowing additional cost of fortification and coating of fertilizers to manufactures. The new policy would broaden the basket

of fertilizers and enable fertilizer use as per soil and crop requirements. The other policy decisions taken by the Government are on paying freight subsidy for all fertilizers on actual basis instead of uniform basis and allowing higher rate of concession to single super phosphate (SSP) fertilizer. The freight subsidy on actual basis would ensure wider spread of fertilizers and their availability in distant areas from the manufacturing sites/ports. The upward revision of rate of concession on SSP would revive SSP industry; suffering sickness for long, due to *ad hoc* and low rate of concession. Needless to say, the SSP containing 11% sulphur would correct widespread sulphur deficiency in Indian soils as well, besides serving as a P source.

15. Of late, the availability of breeder as well as quality seed has been increased significantly. Nevertheless, the demand for good seed still remains to be fully met. The Council continues to provide good quality seed through a strong network of its institutes and State Agricultural Universities under the project, “Seed Production in Agricultural Crops and Fisheries”, launched two years back. Through this project, the ICAR-AU system has been able to greatly increase the availability of quality seed and planting material of agricultural crops and fish in the country along with realizing substantial resource generation. I exhort you to continue with this trend albeit with enhanced velocity.

16. As the Indian subcontinent is the richest reservoir of biodiversity, commercialization of discoveries emerging from such efforts may help in technological empowerment of the country. Protection of Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) plays an important role in giving boost to the inventive and innovative activity in any society. The research results that have not been protected under any law may lead to unacknowledged use or exploitation for commercial gains by others both within the country and outside. Also, protection of IP creates incentive for more knowledge and technology

generation as innovators are recognized and rewarded. We have to create IPR awareness and expertise in scientists and students through appropriate training. The Council, in fulfilling this felt need, has taken a major HRD initiative to train researchers of ICAR-AU system in cutting edge technologies including IP management.

17. The future world will be a knowledge society and a global village where the focus will shift from geographical to knowledge-resource domination. It will be a world where there are new complex equations. There will be competing demands for agriculture and industry; conflicts between creation of wealth and justice and equity, a pattern of conspicuous consumption that will make sustainability difficult to achieve. It will no longer be a question of balancing total global production in the context of fast dwindling earth resources. We are also worried that climate change and global warming may have a harmful impact on land productivity unless we undertake appropriate mitigation and adaptation strategies and action plan. Bio-safety, bio-security and bio-prospecting are the upcoming areas that demand greater attention now. We need creative and imaginative solutions for these emerging issues.

18. When the economy grows and incomes increase, the proportion of processed food in the consumption basket increases. Universities may have full-fledged food processing departments and educational programmes. There should be a match between the market demand and the responsiveness of the agricultural universities. Likewise, programmes in Information Communication Technology (ICT) applications in agriculture need to be increasingly offered at agricultural universities.

19. The present era of partnership calls for enhanced collaboration between the AUs and ICAR institutes. The AUs, ICAR Institutes and other related agencies should converge on issues like priority setting in research, preparation of agricultural development plans such as DAP and C-TAP etc., meeting

research-emanated input needs such as seed / mother culture of bio-agent, staking the claims of national sovereignty on bio-resource, IP-Management, agro technology commercialization etc. ICAR Institutes, AUs and KVKs can converge to develop need-based projects with plurality and breadth to tap funding from the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana, Global Environment Facility, National Agricultural Innovation Project and other such agencies. Convergence is also needed on areas that do not recognize any geographical boundaries such as bio-safety and bio-security.

20. I am happy to note that collaboration and partnership will be further strengthened by the concept of extended faculty nationally and globally that is being promoted by the Council by providing a catalytic support for facilitating guest lectures, guest faculty, and adjunct faculty and also for faculty exchange. The scientists of the ICAR Institutes may be taken as guide/co-guide for PG thesis work. The experts abroad who are visiting India for several international meetings/seminars/conferences/symposia etc. may be beforehand requested for the purpose so that with very judicious expenditure, the cause may be served. The exchange of faculty on the basis of mutual benefit between the AUs may also be undertaken.

21. I have drawn your attention to some of the major new initiatives for deliberation and subsequent action, which in my opinion would help bring structural and strategic transformation in the Higher Agricultural Education System. I sincerely hope that this conference will come forward with new ideas towards creating positive impact through quality human resource in bringing about food and nutritional security along with farm prosperity in the country. I wish your deliberations all the success and look forward to the focused recommendations. I am happy to inaugurate the conference.

Thank You.