

Indian agriculture minister calls for quality seeds

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New Delhi: The Indian seeds industry needs the right push as poor monsoons this year have once again highlighted the need for hybrids that will increase farm productivity and profitability. Farmers' suicides in the past few years have also brought this need to the fore.

Commenting on this need, while applauding the Indian seed industry for achieving self-sufficiency in quality seed production, Minister of State for Agriculture, Government of India, Mr Harish Rawat recently said there is a need for production and distribution of hybrids as these have the potential to increase farm productivity and profitability.

He added that focus is needed on fodder crops, green manure and minor millets. According to the minister, these areas have not drawn adequate attention so far.

Mr Rawat made this comment at a function to inaugurate the golden jubilee year of the National Seeds Corporation (NSC) on August 16, 2012.

Highlighting the role played by the corporation in bringing the green revolution, the minister said, "In the last fifty years, NSC has emerged as the link between plant research and farmers. In the year 1966-67, NSC played a pivotal role in bringing Green Revolution in the country by undertaking large-scale production of paddy seeds Taichung native-1 and handling the import of 18,000 tonnes of dwarf Mexican wheat seed and monitoring the performance of these seeds with states for success and bringing food security in the nation."

The minister said with the liberalization of seed policy, big companies have also established their facilities in India. Mr Rawat was also of the view that they are mostly concentrating on specialized crops and varieties that are their own research product and selling them as proprietary item. "As such, volume of seeds remain either with the public sector or in the hand of small companies with limited resources," he said.

On the role of PSUs, minister said, "The public sector units need to realign themselves to become more farmer-friendly and their products must be as per the market demand. Recognizing the contribution of seed companies in the public sector in the past, the goodwill they have established in the market and the level of infrastructure and reach they possess, I feel these companies, including the NSC, should work with clear vision about what the country needs in the light of a growing population, limited arable land, constraints in expanding irrigation facilities and adverse impact of climate, chemicals and fertilizers and growing demand of type and kind of seeds."

Dr R S Paroda, chairman, Farmers' Commission of Haryana, also highlighted the achievements of the seed industry in India and areas needing particular attention. He called for a national mission on seeds and said the new seed bill, under consideration of Parliament, will lead to reforms in the seed sector.