

Initiatives for Vidarbha farmers

What is the issue?

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- Cotton and soybean farmers of Vidarbha and Marathwada region are in a debt trap.

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- Diversifying options like the dairy sector makes way for the farmers to get out of their problems.

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What is the situation of the farmers in these regions?

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- The two regions Vidarbha and marathwada have more than half of cotton area of the state, which itself accounts for a third of the country's share.

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- But only 2.7% of Maharashtra's cotton is irrigated compared to nearly 60% of Gujarat's.

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- There is a wide gap in average per hectare cotton yield between the states.

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- The farmers of these regions used to grow jowar and bajra but with changing

food habits, their cultivation has declined.

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- A greater portion of these regions' agriculture will have to be climate resilient as both are rain deficient.

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- Farmers in the regions are going for long-duration hybrids, for better quality cotton.

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- To meet the operation costs farmers are getting into debt traps which in many cases are leading to self-engineered deaths.

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What measures have been taken by the government?

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- **Dairy initiatives** - In October 2016, the National Dairy Development Board commenced operations.

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- The National dairy development board helps setting up the farmer producer companies.

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- But the board does not intend to stay for the long-haul.

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- Once farmer producer companies gain the capacity to take over the operations and marketing, the board will exit.

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- Milk collection averages 1.25 lakh litres per day which is processed at a refurbished dairy in Nagpur, given by the state government.

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- Money is credited to the seller bank accounts; this is a steady source of income which takes care of their daily needs.

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- **Bamboo Initiatives** - The Maharashtra Bamboo Development Board was set up last year to promote cultivated bamboo, using tissue cultured seedlings.

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- It helps the farmers also supplement their income as bamboo is a versatile crop that has varied utility including for the paper and timber industry.

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What are the issues with dairy initiative?

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- **Use of technology** -With the help of an Android-based app, farmers can know whether they are giving their animals the right diet, overdosing them with some nutrients or under-providing others.
- For this, they have to tag their animals and feed data regarding weight, lactation stage and current milk yield.
- The usage of modern technologies for monitoring animals has not been widely understood by the farmers.

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- **Ideological clashes** -The growth of the dairy industry is tied to the meat industry.
- Unless non and post-lactating animals are culled, farmers will not be able to give proper care to the productive ones. This is where ideology clashes with economics.

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Source: Financial Express

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