

Opening remarks by Mr. Kailash Choudhary, Hon'ble Minister of State for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare on “COVID-19 and its Impacts on Global Food Security and Nutrition” during the Virtual High Level meeting of Committee on Food Security to be held on 14th October,2020.

His Excellency Mr. Thanawat Tiensin, Chairperson Committee on Food Security; His Excellency Mr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director General World Health Organisation, His Excellency Mr. Martin Cole, Chairperson HLPE Steering Committee; H.E. Luis Eugenio Basterra, Minister for Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, Argentina; His Excellency Angeles Moreno Bau, Secretary of State for International Cooperation, Spain; Mr. Guy Ryder, Director General, International Labour Organisation; Heads of various international organisations and distinguished ladies and gentlemen

2. At the outset, I take this opportunity to congratulate World Food Programme, Executive Director David Beasley and his team across the globe for being bestowed the Nobel Peace Prize for 2020. I would also like to congratulate the Food and Agriculture Organisation in advance for completing 75 years on 16th Oct 2020 with commendable outcomes in the Mission for global food security and nutrition. I would also like to inform you all that we would be celebrating 75 years of FAO-India partnership in a befitting high-level programme on 16th October, 2020.

3. It is indeed a pleasure and privilege to participate in this CFS High Level special event on strengthening global governance on food security and nutrition. Agriculture sector is high priority for India, as is for the world. Considering that COVID 19 pandemic may have long term implications on food security and supply chain, there is need for closer interaction and sharing of knowledge among countries to keep the normal functioning of the food supply chains to safeguard food and nutritional security as well as livelihood of the farmer producers. India with her tremendous growth trajectory of an imports dependant country at the time of Independence in 1947 to a country self sufficient in food grains, a country with surpluses and a major agri produce exporting country. We are and will continue to share best practices and build capacities of other developing countries, both bilaterally and on multilateral fora and in collaboration with organisations like FAO, WFP and IFAD to name a few, so as to enable them to also become self sufficient and food secure.

4. Government of India took swift action to continue works as per the farming calendar, by exempting all agriculture operations from the restrictions imposed during the lock downs since March 2020. However, detailed SOPs were issued to the States to adhere to the health protocols and social distancing norms prescribed. This enabled continuity in the supply chain across the country in view of the immediate harvesting requirements and inputs supply for ensuing sowing season. As a result of the proactive steps taken, as per the Fourth Advance Estimates 2019-20, the foodgrains production in the country was at a record 296.65 million tonnes, higher by 11.44 million tonnes than the production of foodgrains during the previous year. Sowing of summer crops was achieved in 6.8 million hectares which was 1.7 million hectares more than the previous year. Special parcel trains were introduced by Indian Railways to supply essential commodities including perishable horticulture produce, seeds,

milk and dairy produce across the length and breadth of our vast country. As a result of various measures, the supply chain of agricultural produce and input supplies continued throughout the country uninterrupted. This benefitted all stakeholders, including farmers and consumers. Policy and legislative decisions taken during this period to liberalise agri marketing are transforming Indian agriculture for the benefit of farmers, traders, processors and consumers. For the first time, the farmer in India is now truly free to sell his produce to any market at the farmgate. Marketing reforms have enabled India being united into One Nation One market

5. As part of the Economic Response to COVID -19, under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package, the Government of India made additional allocation of foodgrains to all the 36 States/UTs under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) free of cost to approximately 8.1 million beneficiaries. A scheme on “Integrated Management of Public Distribution System (IM—PDS)” has started the implementation of nation-wide portability of all ration card holders/beneficiaries covered under National Food Security Act through the ambitious ‘One Nation One Ration Card’ plan. E-NAM, India’s electronic National Agriculture Market portal is playing a pivotal role in decongesting these markets in COVID times. The Farmer Producer Organisations are uploading their produce, bidding and receiving payments from their Collection Centres itself without bringing it to the markets.

6. Under the dynamic leadership of our Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, India is at the forefront in assisting other countries in every possible manner and the agriculture sector is also committed so. Interactions were held with exporters in early April, 2020 to understand and address issues being faced by them. Several common and sector specific issues were raised by the exporters which have been addressed through appropriate interventions. Instructions were also issued for continuous/regular issuance of phyto-sanitary certificates and acceptance of online certificates. The issues pertaining to port, ocean freight services were taken up for early resolution.

7. Nutrition security is of prime importance for India. Our traditional foods including millets (renamed as nutri cereals by India in 2017), pulses, local fruits and vegetables, fish, dairy and organic produce are being re-emphasized for inclusion in the diets of our people. Our production in all these commodities has been phenomenal in recent years and hence India is poised to be a major destination for the health and organic foods, especially relevant during the COVID period when the demand for safe and nutritious food is on the rise. India acknowledges the support of FAO in endorsing the Indian proposal for the International Year of Pulses which was celebrated in 2016 and the International Year of Millets which is to be celebrated in 2023.

8. I take this opportunity to reaffirm our resolve to continue to work together to build food systems and sustainable agri value chains that would meet the food security and nutrition challenges, especially in times of such unprecedented pandemics. I pray and wish for all your families to stay safe and healthy

Thank you all.

Jai Hind

.....