Coping with Indian agriculture in pandemic

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.22271/chemi.2020.v8.i3aj.9594

Abstract
The impact on the Indian economy due to novel coronavirus pandemic in 2019-20 has been highly troublesome and disruptive. In spite of all the precautionary measures and numerous restrictions (i.e. ongoing lockdown) taken by the government of India, negative implications have been visualized on the farm economy especially the rabi season crops which are at harvestable stages. It makes the supply of different perishable produce including fruits, vegetables, dairy products, fish etc difficult. It also disturbed the labour availability, market and storage, agri-input system, export-import of agricultural commodities and the complex network of demand-supply chaininto a majestic level. Although the entire country facing these challenges, but has double hit the poorest of the poor section of the society. Hence, the priority of the government has to be to protect the lives of every citizen of the country instead of dealing with the economic growth of various departments or fields.

Keywords: Agriculture, corona virus, COVID 19, lockdown, labour

Introduction
Presently, the entire world is witnessing sever epidemics in 215 countries with 5,939,234 confirm cases and 367,255 death of people worldwide [1]. Currently, humanitarian crisis is also unfolding in India, with 89995 active cases and 5164 deaths due to global Covid-19 [2]. Increasing death trolls are alarming globally. In this situation of novel corona virus pandemic, world is battling with the most daunting challenges faced by the human civilization. Contagious nature of this disease had led to imposition of policy actions such as social distancing, self-isolation at home, closure of institutions, restrictions on mobility and public facilities and lockdown of an entire country. This pandemic had imposed to major shock-health shock and economic shock. As the global economy is slipping into a sharp recession, it will also impact the Indian economy. The International Monetary Fund in March stated that it is expected to have a global recession that would be similar to 2007-08 global financial crisis which could be recovered in 2021 [3]. Not a single sector is going to be remain untouched or unaltered by the novel COVID19 pandemic. Similarly this catastrophe has also led to concern on agriculture and food security. Its impact on agriculture is too complex and varied among different regions, producers and wage labourers as it is a highly heterogeneous and seasonal activity based. Thus “one size fits all” approach will not be sufficient to retain the wheel of agriculture in active mode. More than half of India’s work force is engages in farming, while being the backbone of any country’s growth, agriculture contributes about 16 per cent to India’s GDP [4]. India is one among the world’s largest producer of crop like wheat, rice, sugarcane, cotton, vegetable and milk. So there is no concern of stopping farm activity as it will not only hurt farmers and labourers but also affect food security.

Presently, agricultural sector contributes 16.5 percent of GVA and 43 per cent of Indian employment (2019-20). Market size of Food and Retail Market is 828.92 billion USD (2020) and Food Processing is 543 billion USD (2020). Major processed food segment are dairy (29 per cent), edible oil (32 per cent), cereals (10 per cent). Whereas, FDI equity inflow in food processing sector is 2.14 per centof total FDI for the period of December 2019 to April 2000. Global presence of India holds 1st position in dairy, spices and cashew and while second position in food grains, fruits and vegetables [5]. However, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) warned for “food crisis” if vulnerable people are not protected from hunger and malnourishment. In such case were farmers are in incarceration to their work, where they are unable to work on their land, earn prices and access to market certain question arises like- do...
we have enough food to feed the people? Is food available at affordable price? And how are farmers coping up with this lockdown?

Bringing the economy back on track, both health as well as economic-well-being must be kept in mind so that systematic, careful and safe direction must be opted.In such case, decree to permit the “essential” and curtail the “non-essential” items’ movement became the excuse for the police and regulatory authorities to restrain on all transport in the country. Instead of specifying that all food and medical products should be allowed to move freely, the vague terminology of “essential supplies” is used which effectively stopped transport of all goods. Many such factors have been in present scenario resulting impact on agriculture.

**Impact on Agriculture**

**1. Labour Availability:** At this point of time, there is a shortage of labour in the rural areas to undertake harvesting of rabi crops and sowing for kharif by next month. Thus, farmers are unable to harvest and market rabi crop, fruit and vegetables. States like Punjab and Haryana are suffering the most due to shortage of labours as they are vital assets for packing, processing, transporting and selling the produce. One of the solution to overcome this situation is likely to change the cropping pattern. Farmers could move from labour intensive cropping pattern like paddy to cotton or maize. The second solution to this could be raise of pay to lure the workers. And the third supplement could be by volunteers from factory workers, unemployed local section and students. A faster shift to mechanisation of farming could be medium term consequence of pandemic.

On the other hand, this sector (labour) is unable to earn due to movement restrictions and lack of adequate income source. This outbreak has jeopardised all economic activity and disproportionately affected employment and daily wage earner in both rural and urban sector. After lifting lockdown, arrivals of large scale of labours are very likely to be seen in the entire nation. This may lead to sudden slowdown of wholesale prices because of excess supply, which may adversely affect the farming community again. Although now with limited intra state movement those with Covid symptom free are allowed to migrate, resulting in removal of shortage of manpower. Such period could also witness sudden increase in labour supply due to easing of mobility pushing down wage rates.

**2. Market and Storage:** Indian agriculture is currently in piquant situation as the peak farm activity happens between April to June. This is when winter crops are harvested and sold and sowing of summer rainfed crop starts. But in states like Maharashtra which are worstly affected by COVID19 has already shut down a few large mandis. This mandis are confined spaces for thousands of farmers, traders and buyers, labourers and transporters, officials and others together and facilitate auctions daily, loading and unloading, packing, quality checking, etc. are performed. Agriculture markets are the very antithesis of social distancing. It is thus natural to foresee significant disruption in the supply chain if these markets are required to be shut for longer period of time. Lockdown has hit both the season. A majority of farmers have limited or no storage capacity to hold produce after harvesting. Further, they are unable to use cold storages of others on payment basis as most of the cold storages of entire nation remain closed due to short supply of ammonia during this lockdown period. Therefore, crops wasting on the field, local distress sales and lower food prices soared in the aftermath of pandemic. However, farmers have hasty needs for liquidity to repay loans and sustain personal expenses, repair equipments and buy input for the next season. Thus it is not affordable to pause or delay the rabi marketing cycle, which typically starts in the middle of march and extends until the end of June.

Few approach can be adopted to address this challenge. First and most important step could be to suspend all provisions of APMC law for periods of at least six months. Lawful monopoly of APMC compels farmers to bring their produce to mandi and sell to a small number of licensed traders within mandi. As mandis may be shut, their so called monopoly would be worthless. So the law giving exclusive rights on agriculture produce marketing to mandis will be formally suspended which will naturally suspending APMC provision.

It will ultimately wiped off themandis fees, thus lowering transaction cost. Second step could be to allow companies, individuals, corporate, FPOs, SHGs, coops, etc., to buy directly from farmers at negotiated price at any location. This will provide farmers a platform to offload their produce and receive payments. Third step could be to withdraw Essential Commodities Act (ETC) from the staples category for the next year. This will encourage these entities to buy from farmer in the next three months so that supply chain keeps running. It is the golden opportunity to dynamize the moribund e-NAM platform. A decentralised system of trading on e-NAM can supplement the mandis and direct farmgate buying. Finally none of the above mentioned step will work without a mechanism for financing the supply chain.

**3. Final Produce:** As this Covid-19 had overlapped with harvesting period of rabi crop and golden period of most of the tropical and subtropical produce, perishable products need immediate transport and quick consumption. Within perishables there are three main sub-categories.

i) **Fruits and vegetables:** Fruits and vegetables are relatively less impacted, as harvesting, transportation, wholesale aggregation and retailing have largely remained in place. There has been no spew in retail prices to encourage any major disruption. Movement of mangoes this year will require a special focus, as production and consumption centres being far apart, and exports have been retrenched. Although railway rakes supported by adequate labour could address this.

ii) **Dairy sector:** This sector which converts milk into khoya, sweets and other dairy products, has been affected badly under lockdown. No weddings and public functions, have shrunken the demand for paneer and there are several reports of milk prices dropping at the village level. Appreciatively, the organised sector and the cooperatives continued to buy milk and maintain supplies for urban consumption centres. Government should help in and financially assist the cooperative sector to lift larger quantities and convert it into milk powder. This will help in stabilising prices.

iii) **Poultry sector:** This sector where the impact is drastic, leading to extensive distress. Covid-19 has created baseless fears among consumers, resulting in a sharp drop in consumption of both meat and eggs. Slaughterhouses are shut down at many places. Poultry farmers invests huge sums in raising birds, and with limited storage options. Farmers mostly are forced to cull, or dispose them at throwaway prices. The government must intercede actively. Poultry as being one of the most
organised part of agriculture with large aggregators. Direct support through cash transfers duly verified by banks and state governments is urgently needed.

Foodgrains and oilseeds are among more stable commodities, and the risks against them are of different nature. The lockdown commenced when crops in many parts of the country were just harvested or about to be harvested. Insufficient storage or a delayed harvest could result poor quality and higher prices.

4. Agri-input Ecosystem: As agriculture cannot operate in vacuum, inputs are required to nurture plants and animals. Similarly the output are to be processed, manufactured and made available for consumption. India needs about 250 lakh quintal of seeds for kharif season. Inputs for kharif plantings are required from the month of May onwards and should be made available to the remotest villages. Preparation of such seeds occurs between March to June. It begins from the farmers field where pollination etc. are being monitored by specific teams. After harvest, drying and selection of seeds are done and sent to processing plants. From there they are sent to laboratories for testing and finally are packed and supplied to farmers. While, agrochemical companies are required to produce crop care products, and bulk fertilisers which are to be transported in railway rakes and trucks. Packaging material will be needed. The raw material for these in turn are to be manufactured or imported. Likewise, delivery of fertilizer via international market is problematic as almost all the factories in every country had been shut down. The backward supply chain is long and fragmented. Input producers must immediately identify the linkages and inform both central and state governments with the list of items whose movement should be allowed without hindrance. As agriculture has collapsed now so government should allow all sub trades and manufacturing unit associated with agri input to function.

Once necessary government instructions are issued, industry should facilitate its communication down the line, including checkposts, ports, and trans-shipment points.

5. Export and import: The Indian export and import will be facing greater challenges during this pandemic due to low consumer demand and port hurdles since the major countries such as the USA, Europe, China etc will grapple with COVID-19 for the next six months exhibiting negative growth rate. Apart from iron ore, which has registered a growth of 58.43%, all other commodities displayed a negative growth. This decline in exports and imports has been observed mainly due to the ongoing lockdown and global slowdown which may be aggravated due to the current crisis of COVID-19. Moreover, the prices for export oriented commodities like seafood, mango, grapes and other products are crashing which will be highly affecting the future crop availability.

Majority of agricultural commodity has been recorded with negative growth during March 2020 vis-a-vis March 2019 including Oil meals (-69.85%), Meat, dairy & poultry products (-45.48%), Leather & leather products (-36.78%), Tea (-33.74%), other cereals (-33.42%), Organic & inorganic chemicals (-32.88%), Cotton yarn/fabs./made-ups, Handloom products etc. (-32.16%), Rice (-28.28%) etc.

Cumulative value of exports for the period April-March 2019-20 was USD 314.31 billion as against USD 330.08 billion during the period April-March 2018-19, registering a negative growth of (-) 4.78 per cent in Dollar terms (Table 1).

Major agricultural commodity groups which have recorded during March 2020 vis-a-vis March 2019 are cotton raw waste (-28.65%), Vegetable oil(-24.81%), Pulses (-29.24%), Fertilizers, Crude & Manufacture(-57.25%), wood and wood products (-34.17%), etc. Complete data is given in Table 2. Cumulative value of import for the period April-March 2019-20 was USD 370.79 billion as against USD 3359.46 billion during the period April-March 2018-19, registering a negative growth of (-) 7.98 per cent in Dollar terms (Table 2).

Table 1: Quick estimates for selected major commodities for march 2020 for export trade

| S. No. | Commodity                  | Values in Million USD | % Change |
|-------|---------------------------|-----------------------|----------|
|       |                           | Mar’19 | Apr’18-March’19 | Mar’20 | Apr’19-March’20 | Mar’20 | Apr’19-March’20 |
| 1     | Tea                       | 74.49  | 830.93         | 49.36  | 826.32         | -33.74 | -0.55          |
| 2     | Coffee                    | 106.00 | 822.34         | 79.02  | 738.90         | -25.45 | -10.15         |
| 3     | Rice                      | 928.66 | 7750.61        | 666.03 | 6382.84        | -28.28 | -17.65         |
| 4     | Other cereals             | 27.59  | 348.97         | 18.37  | 202.21         | -33.42 | -42.05         |
| 5     | Tobacco                   | 94.82  | 981.33         | 74.00  | 904.87         | -21.96 | -7.79          |
| 6     | Spices                    | 389.11 | 3322.45        | 281.54 | 3658.11        | -27.64 | 10.10          |
| 7     | Cashew                    | 56.98  | 654.43         | 41.25  | 566.76         | -27.60 | -13.40         |
| 8     | Oil Meals                 | 194.19 | 1508.65        | 58.54  | 813.23         | -69.85 | -46.10         |
| 9     | Oil seeds                 | 116.65 | 1156.77        | 115.02 | 1316.80        | -1.39  | 13.83          |
| 10    | Fruits & Vegetables       | 313.99 | 2540.90        | 301.24 | 2367.38        | -4.06  | -6.83          |
| 11    | Cereal preparations & miscellaneous processed items | 149.49 | 1555.45        | 114.28 | 1529.14        | -23.55 | -1.69          |
| 12    | Marine Products           | 528.06 | 6802.56        | 393.61 | 6721.80        | -25.46 | -1.19          |
| 13    | Meat, dairy & poultry products | 413.73 | 4363.72        | 225.57 | 3713.71        | -45.48 | -14.90         |
| 14    | Iron Ore                  | 154.24 | 1317.29        | 244.36 | 2633.19        | 58.43  | 99.89          |
| 15    | Mica, Coal & Other Ores, Minerals including processed minerals | 465.03 | 4254.71        | 306.63 | 3928.46        | -34.06 | -7.67          |
| 16    | Leather & leather products | 412.53 | 5140.85        | 260.78 | 4645.24        | -36.78 | -9.64          |
| 17    | Ceramic products & glassware | 247.72 | 2649.16        | 209.98 | 2861.06        | -15.23 | 8.00           |
| 18    | Gems & Jewellery          | 3424.32 | 40251.03      | 2018.60 | 35806.10      | -41.05 | -11.04         |
| 19    | Drugs & Pharmaceuticals   | 2002.00 | 19146.55       | 1545.58 | 20701.65      | -22.80 | 8.12           |
| 20    | Organic & Inorganic Chemicals | 2327.13 | 22379.30      | 1561.96 | 23923.94      | -32.88 | 0.06           |
| 21    | Engineering Goods         | 9422.52 | 83621.65       | 5435.04 | 78710.56      | -42.32 | -5.87          |
| 22    | Electronic Goods          | 930.09  | 8829.43        | 730.00 | 11766.28      | -21.51 | 33.26          |
| 23    | Cotton Yarn/Fabs./made-ups, Handloom Products etc. | 1045.79 | 11215.15      | 709.47 | 10018.99      | -32.16 | -10.67         |
| 24    | Man-made Yarn/Fabs./made- ups etc. | 465.78  | 4980.51        | 350.17 | 4811.27        | -24.82 | -3.40          |
RMG of all Textiles  1717.58  16138.29  1118.05  15488.70 -39.41 -4.03
26  Jute Mfg. including Floor Covering  23.37  324.93  21.67  341.40 -7.26 5.07
27  Carpet  127.00  1481.85  82.91  1376.43 -34.72 -7.11
28  Handicrafts excl. handmade carpet  171.13  1838.08  123.38  1794.71 -27.90 -2.36
29  Petroleum Products  3616.93  46535.58  2491.27  12782.44 -31.12 -8.10
30  Plastic & Linoleum  763.50  8607.48  491.16  7558.78 -35.67 -12.18
Sub-Total  30710.41  311368.93  20118.93  297560.57 -34.49 -4.50
Grand Total  32717.74  330078.09  21406.39  314314.22 -34.57 -4.78

Note: Exports include Re-Exports; the figures for MAR’20 are provisional while Grand total is inclusive of component ‘Other’. 
Source: https://commerce.gov.in/InnerContent.aspx?Type=TradeStatisticsmenu&Id=254

Table 2: Quick estimates for selected major commodities for march 2020 for import trade

| S. N. | Commodities                          | Values in Million USD | % Change |
|-------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------|
|       |                                      | Mar’19                | Apr-18    | Mar’20    | Apr-19’|
| 1     | Cotton Raw & Waste                   | 58.15                 | 38.77     | 1327.84   |        |
| 2     | Vegetable Oil                        | 964.50                | 2143.87   | 2224.27   | -10.71 |
| 3     | Pulses                               | 135.73                | 89.75     | 1439.03   | -33.88 |
| 4     | Fruits & vegetables                  | 169.65                | 151.48    | 2224.27   | -7.35  |
| 5     | Pulp and Waste paper                 | 117.89                | 68.84     | 1143.00   | -41.61 |
| 6     | Textile yarn Fabric, made-up articles | 136.56                | 86.65     | 1923.92   | -36.55 |
| 7     | Fertilisers, Crude & manufactured    | 541.40                | 216.28    | 7469.11   | -60.05 |
| 8     | Sulphur & Unroasted Iron Pyrites     | 13.80                 | 4.93      | 117.83    | -64.27 |
| 9     | Metaliferrous ores & other minerals  | 491.26                | 268.26    | 1923.92   | -36.55 |
| 10    | Coal, Coke & Briquettes, etc.        | 2104.65               | 1609.28   | 2245.80   | -23.54 |
| 11    | Petroleum, Crude & products          | 11781.69              | 10014.97  | 129430.73 | -15.00 |
| 12    | Wood & Wood products                 | 502.13                | 308.89    | 5611.59   | -38.48 |
| 13    | Leather & leather products           | 80.54                 | 1057.69   | 1031.09   | -35.51 |
| 14    | Organic & Inorganic Chemicals        | 1911.56               | 1356.18   | 20664.94  | -9.28  |
| 15    | Dyeing/tanning/colouring materials   | 271.56                | 185.55    | 2095.91   | -31.67 |
| 16    | Artificial resins, plastic materials, etc. | 1329.84               | 943.22    | 14631.09  | -29.07 |
| 17    | Chemical material & products         | 625.76                | 499.89    | 7655.35   | -20.11 |
| 18    | Newsprint                            | 71.04                 | 35.56     | 700.54    | -49.94 |
| 19    | Pearls, precious & Semi- precious stones | 3010.39               | 1401.14   | 22377.85  | -53.46 |
| 20    | Iron & Steel                         | 1578.31               | 855.24    | 15368.11  | -45.81 |
| 21    | Non-ferrous metals                   | 1109.56               | 817.28    | 11319.41  | -26.34 |
| 22    | Machine tools                         | 423.61                | 246.28    | 4191.01   | -41.86 |
| 23    | Machinery, electrical & non- electrical | 3212.58               | 2267.37   | 18435.64  | -11.94 |
| 24    | Transport equipment                   | 2021.89               | 1287.61   | 18435.64  | -25.59 |
| 25    | Project goods                         | 345.09                | 98.04     | 1983.49   | -71.59 |
| 26    | Professional instrument, Optical goods, etc. | 507.96          | 343.91    | 5010.83   | -32.30 |
| 27    | Electronic goods                      | 4671.55               | 3312.42   | 54504.76  | -29.09 |
| 28    | Medicinal & Pharmaceutical products   | 548.19                | 412.48    | 6656.23   | -24.76 |
| 29    | Gold                                 | 3286.21               | 1227.88   | 28228.30  | -62.64 |
| 30    | Silver                               | 109.32                | 97.20     | 2728.05   | -11.09 |
| Sub-Total |                                      | 42132.35             | 29867.73  | 445754.93 | -29.11 |
| GRAND TOTAL |                                  | 43719.04             | 31407.42  | 465197.03 | -28.72 |

Note: Imports include Re-Imports; the figures for MAR’20 are provisional while Grand total is inclusive of component ‘Other’. 
Source: https://commerce.gov.in/InnerContent.aspx?Type=TradeStatisticsmenu&Id=254

5. Supply chain - a complex network: The food supply chain is a complex network. One of the main services of the agricultural sector is food production, providing raw materials for other sector, employment, income generation and expanding non-oil exports. The agricultural sector is one of the most important and influential sector in the country’s food security, a permanent economy, a shock absorber and a neutralizer of economy. The food supply chain includes various phases of production, processing of goods (factories) and transportation and storage (warehousing), retail and goods services.

On 3rd March 2020, Food Corporation of India reported around 77.6 million tonnes (over three and half times the minimum operational buffer-cum-strategic stock of 21.4 mt) required to be maintained for April 1, 2000 [7]. The National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (NAFED) was holding 2.25 mt of pulse stock on March 2019 [8]. As bumper new wheat crops arrived along with fresh arrival of rabi pulse crop such as chickpea, red lentils and field pea reflects no real issue of production. As most of rabi crop are close to harvest so, only marketing of produce and reaching to consumer is being impacted the most. There will not be supply but a supply chain problem arising from restriction on movements. But for the rice, wheat and pulses, FCI and NAFED should not be in concern as the grains are not be supply but a supply chain problem arising from arrival of rabi pulse crop such as chickpea, red lentils and field pea.
Federation RS Sodhi, claims about the daily sales of Amul Milk which is currently about 37 lakh litres in Delhi-NCR and 22 lakh litres in Maharashtra, as against the normal levels of 31-32 lakh litres and 18-19 lakh litres respectively. On the other hand, sale of skinned milk powder to icecream companies and cheese to pizza maker have crashed due to low demand.

7. Double hit: There was a huge financial loss predicted owing to untimely rain and hailstorms in the month of January, February and even March, added lockdown due to the pandemic had proved a double whammy to the farmers. The future was apparently uncertain not only for those whose rabi crop was standing ready in the fields for harvesting but also lakhs of cane-growers in western UP, prepared with fields for sowing. Leaving everyone clueless about reaching their fields as ban was imposed movement because of the pandemic and all were facing the acute dearth of agricultural labourers.

8. Sudden diversification leading to changes: As sufficient rice stocks are with India, a major shift in cropping pattern away from rice in northern India is overdue and imperative. In this part of India rice cultivation is a heady mix of skewed policy as free water and an advantaged procurement price regime favouring rice cultivation. About 4 tonnes of water is required to grow 1 kg of rice. A considerable shift from economically and environmentally challenged rice cultivation in northern India which obviate the malady of crop burning residue. This could be major contributor to reducing the pollutant load in the month of October and November. Also, many marginal and small farmers in peri urban Bangalore diversified their crops from rose to vegetable cultivation to meet local needs.

Challenges to Farmers
1. Immediate impact on their activity which will result to economic and political order that will be seen after crisis.
2. Gradually, taking shape its impact on climate change and thing entailed with rain pattern, temperature alteration - choice to crop selection.

Govt. Efforts
Immediately after nation-wide lockdown was announced government has taken different mitigation measures to provide relief in adverse situation of pandemic to protect the vulnerable section of society. The government has raised the wage rate for workers engaged under NREGS. Additional grain allotment are announced for next three months to the registered beneficiary under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana. Also, cash and food assistance is provided to persons engaged in the informal sector such as migrant labourers etc. For which PM-CARES fund has been create. Other government measures for agricultural sector are:-
- Realising the importance of timely completion of important farm operations such as harvesting, marketing and the upkeep of the crop produce, the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) issued state wise guidelines for farmers, farm labourers and other stakeholders in this lockdown. The broad objectives of these advisories are to save the farm workers from getting affected with coronavirus and preventing the spread. Specific practices are mentioned by the advisory form harvest and other operations to minimise the impact of this pandemic on Indian agriculture. The national as well as the state-specific advisories are translated into 15 languages and circulated in the form of an e-book.
- During COVID 19 lockdown period that is 24th March 2020 till 17th April 2020, the DBT payments under all the Central Sector/Centrally Sponsored Schemes through PFMIS amounted to Rs. 27,442.08 crore in the accounts of 11, 42, 02, 592 beneficiaries through schemes like PM Kisan, Mahatma Gandhi National Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), National Social Assistance Program (NSAP), Prime Minster’s Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY), National Health Mission (NHM), National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), Scholarship Schemes of various ministries through National Scholarship Portal (NSP) are provided. For short term crop loan Interest subvention and Prompt Repayment Incentive (PRI) during the year 2018-19 and 2019-20 is provided by the government.
- The Union Minister of Agriculture & Farmers’ Welfare have launched new features of National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) Platform to strengthen agriculture marketing by farmers to reduce the need to physically come to wholesale mandis for selling their harvested produce, at a time when there is critical need to decongest mandis to effectively fight against COVID-19. Food grains were provided to Non-NFSA beneficiaries with ration card issued by State governments. FCI sets up new record transporting 77 rakes carrying about 2.16 Lakh MT food grains across the nation.

The states were informed about the various exemptions by the Centre as follows:
- Agencies engaged in procurement of agriculture products, including MSP operations;
- Farming operations by farmers and farm workers in the field;
- ‘Mandis’ operated by the Agriculture Produce Market Committee or as notified by the State Government;
- ‘Mandis’ include direct marketing, facilitated by the State Government/UT Administration, directly from the farmers/groups of farmers. FPOs, Cooperatives, etc.
- Shops for Seeds, Fertilisers and Pesticides;
- Manufacturing and packaging units of Seeds, Fertilisers and Pesticides;
- Custom Hiring Centres (CHC) related to farm machinery;
- Intra and inter-state movement of harvesting and sowing related machines like combined harvester and other agriculture/ horticulture implements;
- Cold storage and warehousing services;
- Manufacturing units of packaging material for food items;
- Transportation for essential goods;
- Shops of agriculture machinery, its spare parts (including its supply chain) and repairs.
- Tea industry, including plantation with maximum of 50% workers.

A presentation was made by centre and states were requested for the following:
- To sensitize their field agencies for facilitating smooth farming operations including sowing, harvesting and marketing.
- To ensure expeditious permission for movement of staff and labour and goods, machines and materials of...
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