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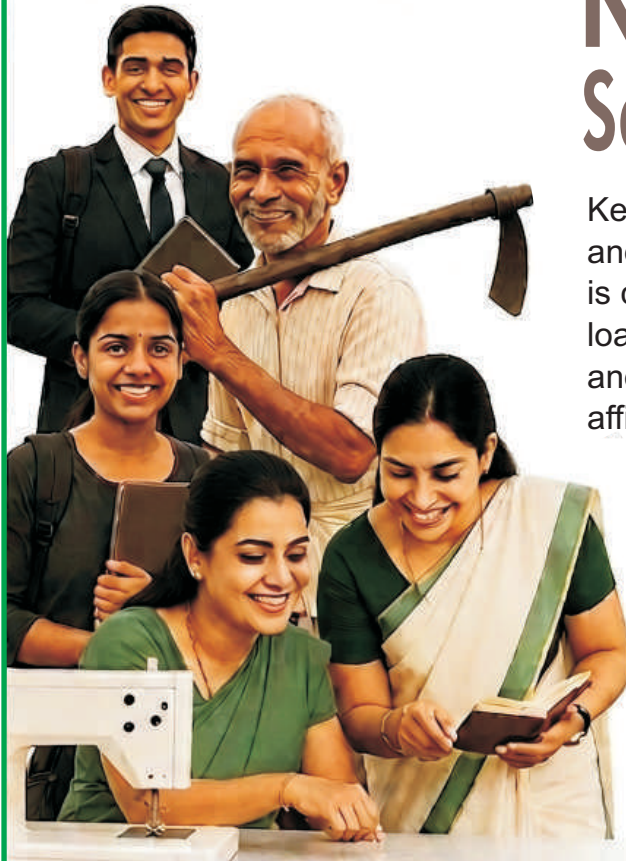
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The original design of ARDB as a non-resource based lending agency for long-term agricultural credit led to certain serious deficiencies in their working. Total dependence on external funding for advancing loans and lack of internal resources to meet the short term credit needs of long-term borrowers for production/working capital and consumption requirements are foremost among them. Further, business planning and business expansion based on needs of members became difficult in the absence of internal resources and assured external funding support for lending.

The various committee on rural credit appointed by the Govt or RBI in the 70s and 80s recommended integration or effective functional coordination between ARDBs and the short-term credit structure to address this issue. However, none of these recommendations could be implemented due to resistance from both the sectors as well as absence of initiatives to evolve a consensual approach at national level. At the same time, by 90s, non-availability of short term credit became a major issue for long term borrowers affecting their income and repaying capacity. This led to the idea of promoting deposit mobilisation to boost lendable resources of ARDBs.

Reserve Bank of India in 1995 appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Dr M C Bhandari to study the scope and feasibility of deposit mobilisation by ARDB. The committee observed that ARDBs need to come out from the borrower centric set up with a total dependence on external funding support to self-reliance banking ecosystem to meet the diverse credit needs of members to maintain their financial viability by augmenting internal resources. Based on the recommendations of Bhandari committee, NABARD with the concurrence of Reserve Bank of India issued guidelines in 1997 for deposit mobilisation by ARDBs. These guidelines permitted

ARDBs to accept term deposits from individuals and institutions subject to terms and conditions as applicable to NBFCs including ceiling equivalent to net worth.

ARDBs like other credit cooperatives are also allowed to accept deposits from voting members for any duration without any ceiling as applicable to deposits collected from non-members. Under the provisions of Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Act (BUDS Act) 2019, deposits collected under "any scheme or an arrangement made or offered by a co-operative society" is recognised as regulated deposits under the regulatory regime of the State Govt.

Deposit Mobilisation is critical for ARDBs to maintain viable business level apart from meeting the short term credit requirements of members who by and large are unable to access credit from other agencies as their land is mortgaged with the ARDB.

However the overall performance of ARDBs in mobilising deposits is far short of requirements and potential. The SCARDBs in some states are yet to start savings and thrift schemes for members and also start suitable short-term products to deploy deposits without tenure mismatch.

Absence of insurance coverage for deposits is a major concern in most of the states. The NABCONS study report on 'Reforms, Restructuring and Innovations in ARDBs' recommended State govts to implement Deposit insurance schemes for cooperatives including ARDBs in the pattern of the Kerala Co-operative Deposit Guarantee Scheme which provides deposit protection of up to ₹10 lakhs. Deposit protection schemes at state level is vital to promote deposit mobilisation by cooperatives including ARDBs which are not covered under DICGC Act.

K. K. Ravindran
Managing Editor



SPEAKING THE FARMER'S LANGUAGE: LANGUAGE AS THE MISSING LINK IN DIGITAL RURAL FINANCE

Abstract

India's decade-long investment in digital public infrastructure has dramatically expanded access to financial services in rural areas. Yet access does not necessarily translate into meaningful participation. This commentary argues that linguistic accessibility remains a critical but underappreciated barrier to financial inclusion. Drawing on recent evidence from agricultural economics and the broader literature on financial trust, insurance comprehension, and multilingual technologies, it contends that language should be recognized as an essential component of financial infrastructure, alongside physical and digital connectivity. It examines the implications for agricultural credit, crop insurance, and rural service delivery, assesses the potential of artificial intelligence to enable cost-effective multilingual financial services, and proposes policy recommendations for regulators, banks, and extension agencies.

Introduction

India has built one of the world's most ambitious digital financial systems. The Jan Dhan–Aadhaar–Mobile trinity - designed to provide universal access to banking, identity, and connectivity - has on boarded hundreds of millions of previously unbanked citizens into the formal financial system. Over 84% of Indians now hold a bank account, the Unified Payments Interface processes billions of transactions each month, and direct benefit transfers reach farm households that were once entirely outside the formal system (World Bank 2022). By the benchmarks that development institutions use to track financial access, the progress has been remarkable.

Yet the translation of access into meaningful participation has been uneven. India's multidimensional Financial Inclusion Index, maintained by the Reserve Bank of India, stood at 60.1 in 2023 - up from 56.4 the previous year, but still well short of full inclusion when measured against usability, awareness, and the quality of services rather than mere account ownership (Reserve Bank of India, 2023). The shortfall is most visible in agricultural credit, crop insurance, and rural service delivery: nearly half of all Jan Dhan

Nithin M* and
Ritu Santh**



accounts have seen no transaction in the past year, enrollment under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) persistently falls short of its potential, and formal agricultural credit continues to lose ground to informal lenders in many districts. The standard explanations focus on connectivity gaps, digital illiteracy, and the cost of devices. These barriers are real, but they are not the complete story.

This commentary argues that language is the missing variable in India's financial inclusion diagnosis. When financial products, digital interfaces, and agricultural advisory services are unavailable in the languages farmers actually use, the practical value of even well-designed digital infrastructure is substantially eroded. Recent research provides strong and growing evidence for this claim, and advances in artificial intelligence have made addressing this barrier more tractable than at any point in the past.

The argument can be stated simply: linguistic accessibility should be recognised as a component of financial infrastructure, not an optional feature of financial service design. Physical infrastructure connects communities to markets. Digital infrastructure connects individuals to services. Linguistic infrastructure determines whether they can understand, evaluate, and benefit from those services. Without the third, the first two remain incomplete.

Information as an Agricultural Input

Modern farming is an information-intensive activity. A farmer's decisions about what to plant, when to plant, how much fertilizer to apply, whether to purchase crop insurance, and how to sell the harvest now depend on a continuous flow of information: price signals from commodity markets, weather forecasts from meteorological services, agronomic recommendations from extension systems, pest and disease alerts, and the terms of financial products that bridge the gap between planting costs and harvest revenue.

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Digital technology has dramatically increased the volume of information potentially available to rural households. A farmer with a smartphone and an internet connection can, in principle, access market prices from the National Agriculture Market (e-NAM), receive weather alerts from the India Meteorological Department, consult an agricultural advisory, and apply for a crop loan all without visiting a government office or bank branch. Research confirms that this availability matters: digital agricultural information has been shown to increase farm yields by approximately 4% and improve the odds of technology adoption by 22% (Fabregas et al. 2024). The potential for information to function as an agricultural input is now well established.

But availability is not the same as accessibility, and a striking finding illustrates the gap. Govt soil health cards, which carry directly actionable agronomic advice personalised to specific plots, achieved farmer comprehension rates of only 8% in baseline surveys. When the same information was redesigned for mobile delivery in a more accessible format, comprehension improved to at least 40% (Fabregas et al. 2024). The gap between information existing and information being understood is not always geographical; it is often communicative. Language is the mechanism widens or narrows this gap.

Agricultural economists have long recognised that information asymmetries are a source of market failure in rural economies. Lenders charge higher interest rates because they cannot assess borrower creditworthiness. Insurance providers struggle with adverse selection because they cannot observe farmer behaviour. Extension systems lose effectiveness when recommendations designed for average conditions do not reach specific local situations. Language barriers create a compounding form of this problem: one in which information has been produced and transmitted, but has not arrived at its intended destination in a form the recipient can process and use.

Evidence from Recent Research

The most direct evidence for the language channel in agricultural economics comes from a study by Abhimanyu Gupta, Jacopo Ponticelli, and Andrea Tesei, published in the *Review of Economics and Statistics* (Gupta et al. 2024). The paper investigates how language barriers shape farmers' ability to benefit from agricultural advisory services in India — a setting that is particularly informative because of the country's extraordinary linguistic heterogeneity.

India's linguistic geography is complex in ways that

aggregate descriptions understate. The Constitution recognizes twenty-two scheduled languages, and census enumerators have documented over 120 languages with more than 10,000 speakers each, with dialect counts extending as high as 800 distinct mother tongues (Mital 2024). The languages that most rural communities use in daily life frequently differ from the official languages in which govt services, extension information, and financial communications are delivered.

The Gupta–Ponticelli–Tesei study exploits variation in the linguistic match between the language in which agricultural advice is delivered and the language that farmers naturally speak. The vehicle for this test is the government's Kisan Call Center scheme, which offers advisory through state-designated call centers. Because each state's call center operates in the state's official language, farmers living close to state borders are similar in geography, agronomy, and economic conditions, but served by call centers in different languages. This provides a natural experiment in the value of language matching. The findings are unambiguous: farmers who receive agricultural advice in a language closer to their own adopt new technologies at substantially higher rates and achieve measurably better productivity outcomes. The language channel operates through comprehension and trust simultaneously, a finding with direct implications for financial service delivery.

The agricultural advisory context is important because it establishes the principle. If language barriers are large enough to measurably affect adoption of agronomic recommendations, which involve relatively concrete and verifiable claims about seeds and inputs, the effects on financial product adoption which involves more abstract concepts, longer time horizons, and higher stakes are likely to be at least as large.

Why Language Matters for Rural Finance

Financial products are more complex than agricultural recommendations. A Kisan Credit Card comes with interest rates, collateral requirements, repayment schedules, interest subvention conditions, and insurance linkages. The Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana requires a farmer to understand which crops and risks are covered, how yield loss is assessed, what documentation is required to file a claim, and within what window claims must be submitted. This complexity interacts with language in ways that are easy to underestimate.

Research consistently shows that linguistic familiarity is a



pivotal determinant of financial trust. Naganska and Cichocki (2022) demonstrate that comprehension and trust are deeply intertwined in financial markets: people who do not understand financial communications in their own language are substantially less likely to engage with financial institutions (Naganska and Cichocki 2022). Importantly, this problem persists even among speakers who are functionally literate in a majority language such as Hindi as a second or third language, since the level of fluency required to accurately interpret financial jargon in a non-native language is significantly higher than everyday conversational competence (Matthews 2019).

The demographic evidence compounds this concern. A district-level analysis of India's CRISIL Financial Inclusion Index found that 72% of the 50 worst-performing districts had predominantly minority language-speaking populations (Mital 2024). These districts are not poor performers because of language alone, but the overlap of geographical remoteness, economic marginalization, and linguistic exclusion that creates mutually reinforcing barriers that standard financial literacy interventions cannot fully address. Research further shows that all 50 of these underperforming districts are rural, many located in tribal regions where languages such as Gondi, Bodo, and Santali are the primary means of economic communication.

The scale of non-English and non-Hindi digital engagement in India makes the urgency concrete. Only 10% of India's population understands English, and 90% of new internet adopters are non-English speakers (Hazarika et al. 2025). As rural India comes online, the population arriving at the digital financial system is predominantly non-English and often non-Hindi. The mobile banking applications, loan portals, and insurance enrolment platforms that await them have been designed, in the main, for a different user. The result is that the same digital infrastructure that works for an urban professional with English literacy produces confusion, disengagement, and dormancy when accessed by a smallholder farmer in a linguistically distinct region.

The AI Opportunity

For much of the past decade, addressing linguistic barriers in financial services required a choice between two unsatisfactory options: investing in staff who speak the relevant languages, often at considerable cost and sometimes not at all feasible, or accepting that many farmers would receive services in languages they did not fully understand. Advances in artificial intelligence have

substantially changed this trade-off, and the change is consequential for rural finance.

Large language models and neural machine translation systems now operate at quality levels across many Indian languages that would have been unavailable five years ago. AI-powered speech recognition particularly relevant given the higher rates of spoken versus written language use in many rural communities has improved substantially for Indian languages, including several with smaller speaker populations. Empirical evidence from deployment confirms the returns: making financial interfaces available in users' preferred languages increased task completion rates by more than 20%, extended session engagement by nearly 43%, and improved 30-day user retention by over 54% in a recent Indian FinTech pilot (Hazarika et al. 2025). These are not marginal improvements. They represent the difference between a platform that serves farmers and one that merely exists for them.

Several initiatives point toward deployable solutions. Bhashini, the govts AI language platform, provides open-source translation, text-to-speech, and speech recognition across the 22 scheduled languages. The Reserve Bank Innovation Hub has piloted Bhashini-enabled credit platforms with AI voice assistance, and Jugalbandi — developed by AI4Bharat in partnership with Microsoft extends these capabilities to code-mixed speech and documentation in less-resourced regional languages. These tools do not eliminate the language problem, but they lower the cost of addressing it to a level at which institutional inaccessibility is a choice rather than a constraint.

Honest acknowledgment of limitations remains necessary. AI translation at the level of sub-regional dialects and code-mixed speech remains imperfect, and errors in financial communications can have real monetary consequences for borrowers and claimants. Rural connectivity continues to constrain seamless voice-based applications in the most remote areas, while technology-based solutions remain inaccessible to those without suitable devices or the confidence to use them. These limitations suggest that artificial intelligence is not a substitute for broader investments in digital literacy and infrastructure. Rather, its greatest contribution lies in substantially lowering the cost of delivering multilingual financial services at scale.

Policy Recommendations

The evidence identifies the specific junctures at which language failure occurs in agricultural credit and rural



service delivery. The following recommendations target those junctures directly.

Agricultural credit and the Kisan Credit Card. The Kisan Credit Card reaches over 7.7 crore farmers and represents the most significant instrument of formal agricultural credit available to smallholders. Yet research consistently identifies procedural complexity and limited comprehension as the primary reasons eligible farmers remain outside the scheme. Language is a compounding factor in both: documentation that a farmer cannot read in her own language is effectively inaccessible documentation, and awareness campaigns broadcast in Hindi to communities whose daily language is Gondi, Bodo, or Tulu fail to reach their intended audience. NABARD's refinancing criteria for cooperative banks and regional rural banks should incorporate linguistic coverage as a performance condition - requiring that loan application forms, sanction letters, repayment schedules, and foreclosure notices be available in the primary language of the institution's service area. This is an extension of the RBI's existing mandate that bank branches provide services in the local language, applied consistently to the credit cycle rather than to branch operations alone.

Business Correspondents and last-mile service delivery. India's approximately 500,000 rural Business Correspondents (BC) are the primary point of contact between formal financial institutions and farming communities - nearly six times the number of traditional bank branches. The BC channel is structurally well-suited for linguistic accommodation: its decentralised, agent-based model makes local recruitment and deployment feasible in ways not possible for centralized institutions. Yet the potential for language-matched BC deployment remains largely unrealized. RBI guidelines for BC programs should incorporate language matching as an explicit criterion for program quality and contract renewal, requiring that agents are recruited from or trained in the primary language of their assigned community. Equipping BC agents with Bhashini-enabled, voice-based interfaces for loan applications, account management, and insurance enrolment would further close the language gap at precisely the point where it matters most. The infrastructure for this combination already exists; what is required is a regulatory decision to deploy it.

Crop insurance and the comprehension gap. PMFBY's persistent difficulties reflect, in part, a comprehension

deficit that operates through language. Program evaluations show that only approximately 7% of enrolled farmers identify insurance as their primary mechanism for managing crop loss - a figure suggesting that most enrolled farmers do not understand the product sufficiently to value it above its premium (3ie 2023). Declining enrolment since the program's voluntary phase began in 2020 is a direct consequence: voluntary enrolment requires genuine understanding and trust, neither of which can be built through documentation in a language the farmer does not confidently read. Research on barriers to agricultural insurance adoption more broadly confirms that low comprehension of product terms - not merely affordability is a central obstacle to uptake (Cole et al. 2013). NABARD and participating insurance companies should require that all farmer-facing PMFBY communications such as enrolment materials, coverage summaries, claims procedures, and settlement notices be available in the local language of each operational area, and that claims officers in linguistically diverse districts have access to interpretation services.

Regulatory framework and the Financial Inclusion Index. The RBI's Financial Inclusion Index does not currently include linguistic accessibility as a parameter, which means the problem is invisible in the primary metric that regulators and policymakers use to assess progress. Incorporating a linguistic coverage indicator that measures the share of financial products, BC touchpoints, and digital interfaces available in the scheduled and prominent regional languages of each state would make the issue measurable and, consequently enhance institutional accountability.

Agricultural extension and digital advisory services. Agricultural extension services remain the primary information channel through which smallholder farmers receive both agronomic and financial advice. Research demonstrates that digital agricultural advisory significantly improves technology adoption and farm productivity when delivered in accessible formats and languages (Fabregas et al. 2024). State govts should audit the linguistic match between extension personnel and the communities they serve and invest in multilingual training materials, particularly in linguistic minority regions and districts where state boundaries create language mismatches. Financial advisory including information on agricultural credit, crop insurance, market prices, and govt support schemes should be integrated into multilingual extension platforms to provide farmers with a single, accessible source of



information. Such investments would strengthen rural service delivery by complementing India's digital public infrastructure with the linguistic infrastructure needed for farmers to understand, trust, and effectively use financial services.

Conclusion

India's digital financial inclusion effort is, by any reasonable standard, one of the most ambitious in the world. The infrastructure built over the past decade - the Jan Dhan accounts, the Aadhaar identity system, the UPI payment rails, the direct benefit transfer architecture represents a genuine transformation in the relationship between the state, financial institutions, and rural citizens. The scale of this achievement should not be understated.

But infrastructure is only valuable if it is used, and it is only used if it is understood. The evidence from agricultural economics, financial trust research, and technology adoption studies converges on the same conclusion: when services are delivered in languages that recipients do not fully understand, the practical value of the underlying infrastructure is substantially reduced. This is not a marginal problem at the edges of financial inclusion. It is concentrated precisely in the districts and communities where financial exclusion is already deepest - the tribal regions, the linguistic frontier zones, the districts where minority language speakers transact in languages that formal financial systems do not routinely accommodate.

Language is not the only barrier, and addressing it alone will not resolve the broader challenges of credit market failures, insurance design, or digital literacy. Nevertheless, it remains an important constraint that has received relatively little attention in discussions of financial inclusion. Encouragingly, recent advances in multilingual AI and language technologies have significantly reduced the cost and complexity of delivering financial services in multiple languages. What remains is a matter of regulatory priority and institutional design.

Physical infrastructure connects communities to markets. Digital infrastructure connects individuals to services. Linguistic infrastructure determines whether they can understand, trust, and benefit from what those services offer. In the digital age, language is not merely a medium of communication; it is an essential component of what makes financial infrastructure inclusive. Recognising it as such is the next step in India's financial inclusion agenda.

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ROLE OF COOPERATIVE SOCIETIES AND ITS SUCCESS STORY IN INDIA

I Introduction:

In India, cooperative societies are governed by either the Co-operative Societies Act of the respective state or the Multi-State Co-operative Societies Act of 2002. If a society aims to serve members in a specific state, it follows that state's law. If its reach extends beyond one state, it abides by the Multi-State Co-operative Societies Act. The National Co-operative Union of India (NCUI) and the National Co-operative Development Corporation (NCDC) play crucial roles in promoting cooperative movements in the country. They help these societies thrive and contribute to the economic well-being of their members. The role of cooperative societies in different fields are as under:-

Agricultural Credit and Rural Development:

Cooperative credit societies in India, such as the Krishak Cooperative Credit Society in Haryana, play a pivotal role in supporting the agricultural sector and rural development. By providing financial assistance to farmers, these cooperatives enable them to meet various agricultural and allied needs, including purchasing seeds, fertilisers, and equipment. Importantly, they offer a lifeline to farmers by facilitating easy access to credit, thereby reducing their dependency on exploitative moneylenders. This cooperative model helps prevent farmers from falling into the debt trap. Additionally, cooperative credit societies contribute to rural development by not only addressing the immediate financial needs of farmers but also supporting broader agricultural activities and related infrastructure projects.

Marketing and Processing:

Agricultural marketing cooperatives, exemplified by the Sahakari Bazaar Samiti in Maharashtra, are instrumental in empowering farmers to collectively sell their produce. This cooperative creates a platform for farmers to pool their resources and negotiate with buyers, ensuring better prices and improved market access. Simultaneously, processing cooperatives, like the Nilgiris Dairy Farm in Tamil Nadu,

contribute to value addition by engaging in activities like food processing. Nilgiris is a cooperative that not only markets dairy products but also processes them, ensuring higher returns to its members.

Consumer Cooperatives:

Consumer cooperatives, such as the Jaipur Consumer Cooperative Stores Limited in Rajasthan, focus on eliminating middlemen and providing essential goods to members at reasonable prices. By doing so, they ensure the availability of quality products and protect consumers from exploitation. The Jaipur Consumer Cooperative Stores Limited supplies goods at affordable rates to its members, addressing the needs of consumers while promoting ethical business practices.

Housing Cooperatives:

Housing cooperatives, like the Bangalore Metropolitan Region Development Authority (BMRDA) Cooperative Housing Society in Karnataka, enable individuals to collectively address their housing needs. Members pool their resources to construct, maintain, and manage residential complexes. This cooperative model leads to cost-effective and well-maintained living spaces, making home ownership more affordable.

Handloom and Handicraft Cooperatives:

Cooperatives in the handloom and handicraft sector, such as the Pochampally Handloom Weavers Cooperative Society in Telangana, support artisans and weavers. These cooperatives provide a platform for collective production, marketing, and selling of handloom and handicraft products, empowering skilled artisans and preserving traditional crafts.

Fishery and Dairy Cooperatives:

In the fisheries and dairy sectors, cooperatives empower fishermen and dairy farmers by offering support in production, marketing, and value addition. For instance, the Kerala State Poultry Development Corporation (KEPCO) promotes poultry farming cooperatives, ensuring fair returns

* The Cooperator - August 2026 Issue



to poultry farmers. In the dairy sector the Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF), popularly known as Amul, exemplifies the success of cooperative endeavours in enhancing the income of dairy farmers.

Credit and Thrift Cooperatives:

Credit cooperatives, like the Thrissur District Cooperative Bank in Kerala, extend financial services to members for various purposes, including business ventures and personal needs. Thrift cooperatives encourage members to save and promote a culture of financial discipline. The Thrissur District Cooperative Bank provides credit facilities to diverse sectors, contributing to the sustainable development of the region.

Multi-State Cooperative Societies (MSCS):

Multi-State Cooperative Societies, such as the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (NAFED), operate across multiple states, fostering economic integration and coordination among different regions. NAFED facilitates cooperation and collaboration on a larger scale, contributing to national economic growth. This cooperative plays a crucial role in marketing agricultural produce and ensuring fair prices for farmers.

Livestock and Poultry Cooperatives:

Cooperatives in the livestock and poultry sector like the Udaipur Zila Dugdh Utpadak Sahakari Sangh, support animal husbandry activities, including breeding, feed supply, and marketing of livestock products. These cooperatives enhance the bargaining power of small-scale producers in the market. The Udaipur Zila Dugdh Utpadak Sahakari Sangh promotes dairy farming cooperatives, benefiting dairy farmers in the region.

Women Empowerment:

Women's cooperative societies, such as the Banashankari Women's Cooperative Society in Karnataka, empower women by providing them with opportunities for economic participation and skill development. These cooperatives often focus on sectors like handicrafts, weaving, and small-scale entrepreneurship. The Banashankari Women's Cooperative Society has been instrumental in uplifting

women economically through various activities, including handicrafts and textile production.

1. Amul (Anand Milk Union Limited):

Amul's journey began in 1946 in the town of Anand, Gujarat, when farmers, led by visionary leaders like Tribhuvandas Patel and Verghese Kurien, came together to form cooperative societies. Frustrated by the exploitation of middlemen and the volatile dairy market, these farmers decided to take control of their destiny. They pooled their resources, established milk collection centers, and built a dairy processing plant. Through collective effort and innovative marketing strategies, such as the iconic "Amul girl" advertisements, Amul gained widespread popularity and became synonymous with quality dairy products. Today, it stands as a shining example of the power of cooperative enterprise, empowering millions of dairy farmers and transforming the landscape of the Indian dairy industry.

2. Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative Limited (IFFCO):

IFFCO traces its roots back to the mid-1960s when farmers across India faced challenges in accessing affordable fertilizers. Recognizing the need for a cooperative solution, leaders like Dr. U.S. Awasthi spearheaded the formation of IFFCO. By mobilizing resources from farmers and partnering with government agencies, IFFCO established fertilizer manufacturing plants and distribution networks. Through cooperative principles of collective ownership and democratic control, IFFCO ensured that farmers had access to high-quality fertilizers at reasonable prices. Over the years, it has expanded its operations, diversified into allied sectors, and emerged as a global player in the fertilizer industry, empowering farmers and driving agricultural growth.

3. Saraswat Bank:

Saraswat Bank has its origins in the early 20th century when a group of social reformers and visionaries in Mumbai sought to address the financial needs of the local community. In 1918, they laid the foundation for Saraswat Bank as a cooperative society with the aim of providing accessible and



affordable banking services to all. Over the decades, Saraswat Bank expanded its reach, embraced technological advancements, and diversified its product offerings. By adhering to cooperative principles of member ownership, community involvement, and social responsibility, Saraswat Bank earned the trust of its customers and emerged as one of the leading cooperative banks in India, contributing to financial inclusion and economic development.

4. Nandini Milk Cooperative:

The story of Nandini Milk Cooperative begins in Karnataka, where dairy farmers faced challenges in marketing their milk and obtaining fair prices. In the 1970s, inspired by the success of the Amul model, farmers in Karnataka decided to replicate the cooperative dairy model in their region. With support from the govt and dairy development agencies, they formed Nandini Milk Cooperative. By establishing milk collection centers, processing facilities, and marketing channels, Nandini empowered dairy farmers, improved milk quality, and ensured a steady income for its members. Today, Nandini is a household name in Karnataka, symbolizing the success of cooperative dairy farming in the state.

5. Kerala State Cooperative Rubber Marketing Federation (RUBBERMARK'S):

RUBBERMARK's journey began in Kerala, where rubber farmers struggled with fluctuating prices and lack of market access. In the early 2000s, recognizing the need to empower rubber farmers, the Kerala govt and rubber growers' associations came together to form RUBBERMARK. The federation provided a platform for rubber farmers to collectively market their produce, negotiate fair prices, and access value-added services. Through initiatives like quality certification, market intelligence, and technology adoption, RUBBERMARK transformed the rubber industry in Kerala, empowering farmers and ensuring sustainable livelihoods.

6. Sahakar Bharati:

Sahakar Bharati originated as a grassroots movement to promote the cooperative ideology and empower communities across India. Formed by visionary leaders and

social activists in the 1970s, Sahakar Bharati aimed to revitalize the cooperative sector, which was facing challenges due to policy neglect and bureaucratic interference. Through advocacy campaigns, policy dialogues, and capacity-building initiatives, Sahakar Bharati mobilized support for cooperative principles. The organization played a pivotal role in shaping co-operative policies, fostering co-operative education, and strengthening grassroots cooperatives in various sectors, including agriculture, banking, and housing.

7. Tamil Nadu Cooperative Milk Producers' Federation (TCMPF):

TCMPF, popularly known as Aavin, traces its roots to Tamil Nadu, where dairy farmers struggled with low milk prices and lack of market integration. In the 1960s, inspired by the success of the Amul model, Tamil Nadu dairy farmers decided to organize themselves into cooperatives. With support from the govt and dairy development agencies, TCMPF was established to streamline milk collection, processing, and marketing. Through a network of dairy cooperatives and modern processing plants, Aavin revolutionized the dairy industry in Tamil Nadu, empowering farmers and ensuring a steady supply of quality milk to consumers.

8. Kudumbashree:

Kudumbashree's journey began in Kerala as a poverty alleviation program aimed at empowering women and marginalized communities. Launched in 1998 by the Govt of Kerala, Kudumbashree adopted a community-based, participatory approach to development. Through the formation of neighborhood groups, women were mobilized to pool their resources, skills, and talents. Kudumbashree provided training, financial support, and market linkages to these groups, enabling them to undertake various income-generating activities. Over the years, Kudumbashree has evolved into one of the largest women's empowerment programs in India, empowering millions of women and families to improve their socio-economic status.





IMPORTANCE OF THE COOPERATIVE SECTOR IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Introduction:-

The cooperative sector plays a vital role in promoting rural development by empowering farmers, artisans, labourers, and small entrepreneurs. A cooperative is an organization owned and managed by its members for their mutual benefit. In rural areas, cooperatives help improve economic conditions, increase productivity, and ensure social welfare. They operate on the principles of self-help, democracy, equality, and mutual cooperation.

1. Providing Agricultural Credit:-

One of the primary functions of rural cooperatives is to provide affordable credit to farmers. Cooperative credit societies offer loans at reasonable interest rates, helping farmers purchase seeds, fertilizers, equipment, and other agricultural inputs. This reduces dependence on moneylenders and supports agricultural growth.

2. Improving Agricultural Productivity:-

Cooperatives assist farmers by supplying quality seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, and modern farming equipment. They also provide technical guidance and training, enabling farmers to adopt advanced agricultural practices and increase crop yields.

3. Marketing Agricultural Product:-

Marketing cooperatives help farmers sell their produce at fair prices by eliminating middlemen. They facilitate storage, transportation, grading and distribution of agricultural products, ensuring better returns for producers.

4. Generating Employment Opportunities:-

The cooperative sector creates employment in various activities such as dairy farming, handicrafts, fisheries, weaving, and food processing. These opportunities help reduce rural unemployment and improve living standards.

5. Promoting Rural Industries:-

Cooperatives encourage the development of small-scale and cottage industries by providing financial assistance, raw materials, and marketing support. This strengthens the rural economy and diversifies income sources.

6. Reducing Poverty and Inequality:-

By providing economic opportunities to weaker sections of society, cooperatives help reduce poverty and income inequality. They enable small and marginal farmers to access resources and participate in economic activities.

7. Encouraging Social Development:-

Cooperatives contribute to social development by promoting education, healthcare, sanitation, and community welfare programs. They strengthen social unity and encourage collective decision-making among rural communities.

8. Empowering Women:-

Women's cooperatives provide training, employment, and financial support, helping women become economically independent. This leads to greater participation of women in social and economic development.

Challenges Faced by Cooperatives

Despite their importance, cooperatives face several challenges:

- Lack of professional management
- Inadequate financial resources
- Political interference
- Low member participation
- Limited awareness and training
- Competition from private enterprises

Addressing these challenges is essential for improving the effectiveness of the cooperative sector.

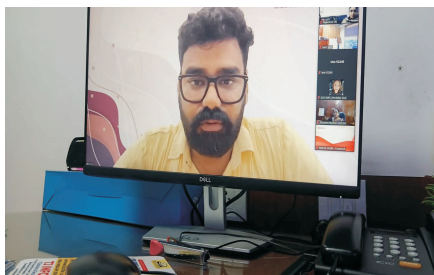
Conclusion

The cooperative sector is a powerful instrument for rural development. It supports agricultural growth, creates employment, reduces poverty, promotes social welfare, and empowers marginalized groups. By encouraging collective action and mutual support, cooperatives contribute significantly to sustainable rural development. Strengthening cooperative institutions through better management, financial support, and member participation can further enhance their role in transforming rural economies.

* The Cooperator – August 2026 Issue



ICA-AP Webinar on Financing Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Livelihoods

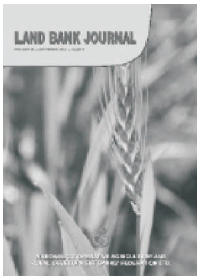


The ICA-AP Credit & Banking Committee organized a Webinar on “Financing Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Livelihoods”. Dr. Justin Bomda, Managing Director & CEO of MUFID Union, Cameroon was the main Speaker in the first part of the Webinar held on 21st July 2026. Chairman of ICA-AP Credit & Banking Committee Shri K.K. Ravindran (Managing Director, NAFCARD); Mr. Bhima Subrahmanyam, Chairman, ICBA and Mr. Balu Iyer, Regional Director, ICA-AP also addressed the Webinar.

NAFCARD Board Meeting, Annual General Meeting and Workshop on Restructuring of ARDBs



NAFCARD held its 185th Board Meeting and Annual General Meeting on 31st August 2026 at Hotel Holiday Inn, Jaipur. A Workshop on Restructuring of ARDBs was also held in conjunction with the Board Meeting.



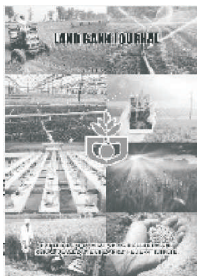
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Shri Amit Shah to launch several projects as Ministry of Cooperation completes five years

Union Home and Cooperation Minister Shri Amit Shah laid the foundation stone for 47 grain storage godowns and inaugurated several major projects on 06.07.2026 on the occasion of the completion of five years of the Ministry of Cooperation (MOC). The Minister, among other initiatives, also launched a centralised core banking platform, and Sahakar Sahyogi, a conversational AI-powered platform for Urban Cooperative Banks. The Ministry emphasised cooperation with States as a key pillar of implementing its initiatives over the past five years. MOC aimed to increase milk procurement in the country by 50% over the next five years by expanding cooperative coverage, generating employment and empowering women under White Revolution 2.0. As part of the programme, more than 25,282 Dairy Cooperative Societies (DCSs) have been registered across 31 States and Union Territories. Cooperative societies had also been enabled to function as Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samriddhi Kendras (PMKSKs) and Bank Mitras, while members of dairy cooperatives were being provided RuPay Kisan Credit Cards to improve access to affordable credit. The Ministry further launched sustainability initiatives in the dairy sector, including the registration of new Multi-State Cooperatives for dairy inputs and manure management,

alongside the creation of the Sardar Patel Cooperative Dairy Federation Limited (SPCDF), which aimed to connect over 20 lakh dairy farmers from more than 20,000 villages across 20 States to an organised cooperative structure. Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) had been strengthened by transforming them into multi-purpose rural institutions. Model by-laws were introduced to enable PACS to undertake more than 25 business activities, while a nationwide computerisation drive had brought over 63,000 PACS onto a common ERP-based platform. The govt has also promoted the creation of new PACS, dairy and fishery cooperatives, with more than 37,000 such societies registered since 2023. PACS have been integrated with a range of govt services and schemes, including Common Service Centres (CSCs), PM Bharatiya Jan Aushadhi Kendras, PM Kisan Samriddhi Kendras, LPG distributorships, fuel outlets and rural water supply management, in an effort to make them the focal point of economic activity and service delivery in rural India. Bharat Taxi, another initiative of the Cooperative Ministry that was launched in February 2026, operated on a “zero commission” model under which drivers retained the full fare instead of paying commissions to aggregators.

Shri Amit Shah moots Co-op Life Insurance Company

Union Home and Cooperation Minister Shri Amit Shah has announced that the Centre will establish a cooperative life insurance company, describing it as the next major step in expanding the cooperative movement into the financial services sector. Making the announcement during the fifth Foundation Day celebrations of the Ministry of Cooperation. The proposed insurer would build on the successful cooperative insurance model of IFFCO-TOKIO and

significantly increase the presence of cooperatives in life insurance. He also revealed plans to launch a utility aggregator cooperative on the lines of Bharat Taxi, underscoring the govt's strategy of taking cooperatives into emerging sectors. These initiatives would strengthen financial inclusion, create new opportunities for cooperative institutions and benefit millions of members across the country.

PM-KISAN scheme gets 5-year extension and ₹3.1 lakh crore

The union Cabinet on 31.07.2026 approved a five-year extension of the PM-KISAN income support scheme through FY31, committing ₹3.15 lakh crore to continue direct cash transfers to eligible farmer families. The decision provides for an outlay of ₹3,15,614 crore for the period from 2026-27

to 2030-31. Launched in February 2019, the PM-KISAN scheme provides ₹6,000 a year to eligible landholding farmers in three equal instalments through the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) system. The govt said the extension would help farmers meet agricultural expenses, improve



productivity, mitigate farm-related risks and support rural economic growth by ensuring timely and transparent transfer of financial assistance. Since its launch, the scheme has disbursed over ₹4.47 lakh crore through 23 instalments. The latest instalment alone transferred over ₹18,984 crore to more than 9.49 crore beneficiaries. Women farmers have received over ₹1.06 lakh crore, accounting for nearly one-

fourth of all beneficiaries. The Centre cited an assessment by Niti Aayog's Development Monitoring and Evaluation Office, which found that over 92% of beneficiaries used the assistance for farm-related activities while about 85% reported higher farm incomes and reduced reliance on informal borrowing.

Credit Co-ops with ₹10,000cr Deposits Eligible; RBI issues Guidelines

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on 05.08.2026 released draft guidelines for "on-tap" licensing of Urban Co-operative Banks (UCBs), allowing eligible Multi-State Credit Cooperative Societies to apply continuously for new banking licences. Applicants must have at least 10 years of operation, ₹10,000 crore in deposits, ₹300 crore net worth, 12% CRAR and below 3% Net NPA, along with a strong five-year financial track record. The draft prescribes stringent governance standards. No member can hold more than 5% shareholding, while directors must satisfy RBI's 'fit and proper' criteria, possess sound credentials and integrity, and should not have defaulted to any bank or financial

institution. The framework also prescribes strict governance, technology, cybersecurity and business-plan requirements. Applications must be submitted through RBI's PRAVAAH portal along with a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the Central Registrar of Cooperative Societies (CRCS), a shareholder resolution approving conversion into a bank and other prescribed documents. The RBI has invited stakeholder comments until 05.09.2026, with licences to be granted selectively after due diligence and inspection before the proposal is examined by an Internal Screening Committee and finally considered by the Committee of the Central Board.

Rural Demand Surges as Agri Credit hits ₹30 Lakh Cr

Rural demand showed a sharp improvement in 2025-26, with tractor and two-wheeler sales registering strong growth, even as bank credit to the agriculture and allied sector continued to expand, the govt informed the Lok Sabha on 10.08.2026. Credit disbursed to agriculture and allied activities rose from ₹18.6 lakh crore in 2021-22 to ₹30 lakh crore in 2025-26, recording a CAGR of 12.7%. Rural tractor sales increased from 7.7 lakh units in 2021-22 to 10.6 lakh in 2025-26, a CAGR of 8.3%. Two-wheeler sales climbed

from 123.7 lakh to 197.3 lakh units over the same period, registering a CAGR of 12.4%. The momentum strengthened in FY26, with tractor sales rising 23% and two-wheeler sales 10% over the previous year. The govt also cited the RBI's July 2026 Bulletin, which said domestic demand was supported by a sharp pick-up in rural demand in June 2026, with tractor and two-wheeler sales recording robust growth amid the start of kharif sowing.

Farmers' income increased significantly in recent years

Indian agricultural growth has been the highest among the large economies in the last decade, resulting in significant increase in farmers' income, said Economic Advisory Council to Prime Minister (EAC-PM) Chairman Shri S Mahendra. India achieved significant progress in agriculture production since the green revolution, transforming itself

from a food deficit nation into one of the world's largest producers of food grains, fruits, vegetables, milk, and fisheries. The average growth of Indian agriculture has been close to 4.5% over the last decade or so, probably the highest among the large economies of the world.



Maharashtra Cabinet nod to remove cap on availing agriculture loan waiver

The Maharashtra Cabinet on 14.07.2026 approved significant changes to the latest farm loan waiver scheme, removing key eligibility conditions, including the previous ₹50,000 upper limit applicable for the beneficiaries of the 2019 waiver. At a meeting chaired by Chief Minister Shri Devendra Fadnavis, the Cabinet approved amendments to the Punyashlok Ahilyadevi Holkar Farmer Loan Waiver Scheme, 2026, removing the earlier ₹50,000 cap applicable to around 13 lakh farmers who had benefited under the 2019 loan waiver scheme. The change will enable these farmers to avail loan waiver benefits of up to ₹2 lakh under the new scheme, subject to its provisions. The Cabinet also withdrew the condition requiring farmers to take fresh crop loans and repay them on time during 2026-27 to qualify for incentive benefits. The decision is expected to benefit about 23 lakh

farmers. The overall scheme aims to provide assistance worth ₹36,585 crore to around 56 lakh farmers. Around 56 lakh farmers would benefit from the loan waiver scheme, which is the "largest loan waiver in the country". The govt had expanded eligibility by removing conditions that had left many outside its ambit. The Cabinet also decided to fast-track the redevelopment of Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) land by exempting the projects from the State's public-private partnership policy. The transport corporation owns around 3,500 acres of land at nearly 850 locations, many of them in prime urban areas. The land is proposed to be developed through long-term leases for commercial, residential, mixed-use and industrial purposes to generate a sustainable source of revenue for the cash strapped corporation.

Crop insurance registrations in Maharashtra rise to 81.4 mn

The number of farmers registering for crop insurance in Maharashtra has risen to 81.4 lakh following a 10-day extension granted by the state govt. A total of 81,40,913 farmers have registered as of 10.08.2026. The registration deadline for non-borrower farmers (those who have not taken crop loans) has ended, while the banks have been given time until the end of August to submit details of borrower farmers and pay their insurance premiums to the concerned crop insurance companies. Of the total registrations, 77,16,246 are non-borrowers. The total sum insured under the scheme stands at ₹30,281 crore. The state had initially set July-end as the deadline for registration, till then only 61,82,218 farmers had enrolled, compared with around 95 lakh farmers who had registered under the scheme last year. The lower response this year was attributed to farmers not receiving expected benefits from the crop insurance scheme last year and the tighter eligibility criteria introduced for the current season. The govt

subsequently extended the registration period by 10 days. Banks have been allowed to complete the registration of borrower farmers and remit their insurance premiums by the end of August. They will deduct the insurance premium from the loan amount and pay it to the crop insurance company, while the remaining amount will be disbursed to the farmer as a loan. Around 31 lakh farmers in Maharashtra had taken crop loans by July-end last year, of whom nearly 16 lakh had borrowed for sugarcane cultivation. Sugarcane is not covered under the crop insurance scheme. Considering the remaining borrower farmers, the total number of such farmers registering for crop insurance could rise to around 10 lakh this year. Nanded recorded the highest number of registrations at 9,48,736, followed by Beed (9,34,802), Latur (6,21,776), Parbhani (5,23,392) and Ahilyanagar (5,00,232). The lowest registrations were recorded in Ratnagiri (10,426), Kolhapur (11,182), Raigad (16,034), Sindhudurg (24,225) and Gadchiroli (25,182).

Rajasthan all set to promote natural, organic farming

Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) signed by the Rajasthan govts Agriculture Department on 10.07.2026 with

as many as 32 institutions are set to promote natural farming, climate-resilient agriculture, agricultural



innovations, dissemination of modern technologies and a sustainable increase in farmers' income in the State. The organisations with which the MoUs were signed included the National Institute of Agricultural Marketing, 10 agritech start-ups and 20 civil society organisations. The initiative is expected to transform Rajasthan's agriculture sector into a modern and sustainable system capable of meeting future challenges. A 'Khet Bachao Abhiyan (save the farm campaign)' has already been launched to support the goal of establishing Rajasthan as a hub for natural and organic farming. Principal Agriculture Secretary Shri Manju Rajpal said a strong collaboration among the govt, research

institutions, start-ups and farmers was essential to address the challenges in the agriculture sector. All the MoUs are non-financial in nature. The collaborations will enhance the effectiveness of schemes through optimum utilisation of available resources. The partnerships would facilitate joint efforts in the critical areas such as water conservation, community resource management, agricultural training, capacity building, agricultural policy formulation, carbon credits, value addition, certification, marketing, empowerment of women farmers and agricultural development in tribal areas.

Rajasthan takes banking to villagers' doorsteps

The Rajasthan govt has initiated steps for expanding fintech based doorstep banking for the rural population through cooperative institutions. A campaign titled 'Sahakar Se Samriddhi (prosperity through cooperatives)' has made new facilities available to the villagers for financial transactions and disbursement of loans. Principal Cooperative Secretary Shri Samit Sharma reviewed the "todo list" for officials of the Rajasthan State Cooperative Bank on 03.06.2026 and asked them to designate all active primary dairy cooperative societies as banking correspondents and provide them with

micro ATMs. The agricultural credit societies have also been associated with the campaign. Micro ATMs would be provided to 5,000 cooperative societies by 30.09.2026, and all the 12,000 active primary milk producer cooperative societies by 31.03.2027. The micro ATMs, which are portable and handheld devices used by banking agents, will provide the facilities of checking account balance, conducting financial transactions, disbursing loan amounts and depositing loan repayments to the villagers.

Bihar to join crop insurance scheme from next rabi season

Bihar will join the highly subsidised crop insurance scheme jointly run by the Centre and state govts from the next rabi season (2026-27). West Bengal has rolled out the scheme for farmers from the current kharif season. Currently, 25 states and Union Territories are implementing the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY). Both Bihar and West Bengal are major producers of rice, wheat and maize crops, while several parts of these states are prone to adverse climatic conditions such as excessive rainfall, floods and prolonged dry spells. Since its launch in kharif 2016, 27 states and Union Territories have implemented the scheme in several seasons. Bihar, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Gujarat opted out of the scheme due to factors including financial constraints. Over the last one year, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand and West Bengal have rejoined the PMFBY. Gujarat currently implements its own

Mukhyamantri Kisan Sahay Yojana, while Punjab has given in-principle approval for implementing PMFBY. Farmers pay a fixed premium of 1.5% of the sum insured for rabi crops, 2% for kharif crops and 5% for cash crops. The premium subsidy is shared equally between the Centre and the State, except in the Northeastern States, where it is shared in a 9:1 ratio between the Centre and States. This voluntary scheme provides for comprehensive risk insurance against crop damage due to non-preventable natural risks from pre-sowing to post-harvest for the notified crops and areas. States and farmers subscribe to the scheme as per their risk perception. Insurance companies have paid over ₹86,731 crore to farmers under PMFBY as compensation for crop loss between FY22-FY26, against the total farmers total premium contribution of ₹18,351 crore.





Himachal farmers pioneer sustainable cultivation of endangered Himalayan herb 'Kutki'

Farmers in Himachal Pradesh's Mandi district are pioneering a sustainable method of cultivating Kutki (*Picrorhiza kurroa*), a high-value medicinal herb native to the alpine and sub-alpine regions of the Himalayas. The initiative is helping conserve the endangered species while creating an additional source of income for mountain farmers. Kutki has traditionally been collected from the wild by uprooting the entire plant, contributing to the depletion of its natural populations. The herb is categorised as endangered on the IUCN Red List and is also included in Appendix II of CITES, which regulates its international trade. Researchers at the Himalayan Research Group (HRG), Shimla, have spent more than a decade developing and demonstrating a sustainable harvesting technique. Instead of uprooting the plant, farmers harvest only its side branches, known as stolons. These are actually creeping stems with nodes and contain the medicinal constituents, while the fibrous roots have little medicinal value. The mother plant remains intact and continues to produce new stolons, allowing Kutki to be cultivated as a perennial crop. The initiative, supported initially under the Department of Biotechnology's Himalayan Bioresource Mission in 2022, has expanded into a major

private-land cultivation cluster involving nearly 180 farmers in Mandi district. The herbal and pharmaceutical industry has strong demand for Kutki, which is reported to be used in more than 2,000 herbal formulations. Declining wild populations and rising demand have increased its market value and encouraged farmers to take up scientific cultivation. For farmers, the crop is providing an additional source of income. Farmers have also sought greater govt support for promoting cultivation and assured procurement. HRG has promoted marketing through the Junee Mountain Farmers Producer Company Limited. During the initial three years of cultivation, farmers produced about 50 kg of dried, high-quality marketable Kutki, which was sold at around ₹1,500 per kg. Plans are also underway to use digital platforms for direct marketing, which could help farmers reduce dependence on intermediaries and improve their returns. The Kutki initiative demonstrates how scientific cultivation, sustainable harvesting and farmer-led marketing can work together to conserve a threatened Himalayan medicinal plant while strengthening the livelihoods of rural mountain communities.

Assam includes tea landholding in farmers' registry portal

The Assam govt has included tea and plantation class landholdings in the farmers' registry portal, which Chief Minister Shri Himanta Biswa Sarma said would prove to be a game-changing move for Small Tea Growers (STGs) in the State. He said the facility, formalised on 26.06.2026, would enable the STGs to obtain a Farmer ID and ensure the timely, requirement-based availability of fertilisers, govt scheme benefits, and other services on a single platform. This will also allow credit with better terms for the STGs and eliminate middlemen who exploit tea growers which is a major leap for the tea community. The tea industry has hailed the Assam govts initiative. Officially, there are 133,626 small tea growers in Assam, although the actual number is estimated to be more than 1.5 lakh. Assuming an average household size of four, this well-conceived initiative of the Chief Minister will directly benefit more than six lakh people.

This step would strengthen and empower the STGs, who contribute nearly 50% of Assam's total green leaf production. A farmers' registry portal is a centralised digital database created by govt agricultural departments to establish a verified Farmer ID or unique digital identity for individual farmers. It links a farmer's personal details, Aadhaar, and land records to streamline access to subsidies, crop insurance, and agricultural schemes. Once registered, farmers do not need to provide repetitive paperwork to prove their identity or land ownership for govt benefits. The registry also integrates with land records to map ownership, allowing farmers to view their land records, update linkages, and log their seasonal crop surveys online. By creating a transparent, verified database, the govt can directly transfer financial aid, fertiliser subsidies, and other scheme benefits to eligible farmers without leakage.



Maharashtra passes Women Farmers' Empowerment Bill towards recognising women farmers

Maharashtra's passage of the Women Farmers' Empowerment Bill, granting women independent recognition as farmers irrespective of land ownership, brings into focus the structural bias against the female agricultural workforce, highlights the need for a database of women farmers and using it to ensure access to welfare schemes. In July 2026, Maharashtra passed the Women Farmers' Empowerment Bill, granting women independent recognition as farmers irrespective of land ownership, through a Woman Farmer Certificate. This is the first Indian State legislation to give enforceable legal form to the activity-based, land-delinked definition of 'farmer' that the National Policy for Farmers set out in 2007 but never operationalised. The Bill arrives nearly two decades after that policy, and 15 years after a comparable law was first proposed at the national level (a lapsed bill introduced in the Rajya Sabha in 2011). It is, in effect, the culmination of three decades of women farmers' movements backed by civil society organisations. State-level efforts have also sought to recognise women farmers before this. Kerala's Kudumbashree collectives have enabled women to participate in group farming, while Odisha's KALIA scheme

has reached landless and sharecropper women. But a women farmers' registry delinked from land records had been missing. Maharashtra's legislation, therefore, represents a potentially important shift, from recognising the owner of agricultural land to recognising the person who actually farms. This matters because women's participation in agriculture has risen sharply. In 2025, agriculture employed roughly 110 million women and 127 million men (rural, as per the PLFS, Census adjusted), bringing the sector close to gender parity. Women's agricultural workforce has more than doubled since 2017–18, and nearly three-quarters of all rural women workers are now in agriculture, compared with less than half of men. Regrettably most women work without pay. In 2025, more than 41% of female agricultural workers were unpaid, against 20% of men. By contrast, nearly 63% of men were own-account workers compared with 39% of women. While women's position has improved over time, the gap remains stark. This is where the question of recognition becomes critical, as women are increasingly farming but are not necessarily recognised as farmers.

New species of wild brinjal discovered from Andamans

A new species of wild brinjal was discovered from one of the remote islands of Andaman and Nicobar archipelago by a scientist from the Botanical Survey of India (BSI). The species *Solanum pandeyi* was recorded in the evergreen forest of middle Andaman by Dr Lal Ji Singh, head of the BSI Andaman and Nicobar regional centre. Dr. Singh said that the specimens of the species were found growing in the open along the forest edges and was locally known as wild orange eggplant. He recorded the ethnobotanical information on *Solanum pandeyi* from local people. The plant was used by an indigenous Negrito tribe, Great Andamanese, for food and medicinal purposes. Most seeds and roots are used to treat tooth infection. Ripe fruit with jaggery, chilli, garlic, ginger, and salt are used to make sour-sweet sauce by the Ranchi and Bengali settler community of the island. While the species is marked by morphological features like the presence or absence of spines, stellate or nonstellate hairs, a phylogenetic analysis was done to confirm the identity of

this new species and determine its position in relation to the main clades recognised in the genus. The genetic analysis of *Solanum pandeyi* was done by Smt Shruti Kasana from University of Delhi. The details of the discovery were published in a paper titled A New Species of *Solanum* L. (*Solanaceae*) From the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, India: Taxonomic and Phylogenetic Insights, in an international peer reviewed journal Feddes Repertorium which is a journal of botanical taxonomy. The ethnobotanical and genetic potentials of *Solanum pandeyi* are clearly visible from its usage by local people and indicate that it has all the qualities of a good genetic resource. In future, this species might be a choice of genetic base for plant breeders to develop high yielding, disease resistant varieties of brinjal crop. Dr. Singh said there are about 1,250 species of genus *Solanum* recorded globally of which around 49 species are wild brinjal from India.



Rabi season preparations intensify amid monsoon deficit and El Nino concerns for winter crops

The agriculture ministry has stepped up preparations for the upcoming rabi season, working with states on crop planning, seed and fertiliser availability, and water management, as a deficient monsoon and an intensifying El Nino raise concerns over soil moisture and reservoir status for winter crops. The ministry is preparing for the national Rabi Conference by the end of September 2026 in consultation with states, where crop-wise production strategies for areas affected by deficient rainfall are expected to be discussed. The rabi preparations come amid renewed food-price pressures, with wholesale food inflation rising to 7.05% in August from 6.65% in July. Inadequate planting could affect

the output of winter staples such as wheat, pulses and oilseeds and potentially feed into food inflation in the coming months. States have been asked to assess district-wise conditions ahead of rabi sowing, including residual soil moisture and reservoir and groundwater availability, and identify areas where farmers may need alternative crops, short-duration varieties or other interventions. The move assumes greater significance this year as the southwest monsoon has remained deficient and El Nino has strengthened during the season, leaving parts of the country with lower soil moisture when rabi planting begins from October.

Agriculture GVA rises to ₹52.08 lakh crore as India's farm economy expands

India's agriculture and allied sectors have witnessed significant expansion over the past decade, with higher agricultural production, increased farmer support, wider access to institutional credit and growing adoption of technology and sustainable farming practices. Agriculture and allied-sector Gross Value Added (GVA) rose from ₹20.94 lakh crore in 2014-15 to an estimated ₹52.08 lakh crore in 2025-26. The budget allocation for the Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare also increased from ₹27,663 crore in 2013-14 to ₹1,40,528.78 crore in 2026-27. Govt procurement and MSP have also increased. Institutional credit remains another major component of farmer support. As of 03.08.2026, 7.28 crore Kisan Credit Card accounts were operational, with outstanding credit under the scheme standing at ₹10.08 lakh crore. The govt has also expanded efforts towards sustainable agriculture. More than 26.09 crore Soil Health Cards had been issued by July 2026, while 18.93 lakh hectares had been covered under the Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana, benefiting 33.63 lakh farmers. Under the National Mission on Natural Farming, 18,893 clusters covering 10.32 lakh hectares and involving 20.93 lakh farmers were formed during 2025-26. More than 14.43 lakh farmers had been certified under the Natural Farming Certification System. Solar energy is also being

integrated into agriculture. Under PM-KUSUM, nearly 11.49 lakh off-grid solar pumps had been installed by 02.08.2026, while more than 15.89 lakh agricultural pumps were covered through feeder-level solarisation. The agricultural marketing network has expanded alongside production. As of June 2026, 1,656 mandis had been integrated with the National Agriculture Market, with 1.89 crore farmers and 2.78 lakh traders registered on the e-NAM platform. Under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana, 1,256 post-harvest infrastructure and processing projects had been completed or made operational by June 2026, benefiting about 37.76 lakh farmers and creating 9.16 lakh employment opportunities. Technology is increasingly being used at the farm level. More than 10.31 crore Farmer IDs had been created under the Digital Agriculture Mission as of 03.08.2026. During the Rabi 2025-26 season, the Digital Crop Survey covered more than 31.3 crore plots across 648 districts. Artificial intelligence-based initiatives are also being used for farm advisory services. The National Pest Surveillance System was being used by more than 10,000 extension workers covering 73 crops and 436 pests, while BharatVistaar had served more than three lakh farmers and addressed over 72 lakh farmer queries by July 2026.



Indian agriculture enters new phase as diets, incomes and climate reshape farming

India's agricultural economy is entering a new phase, with changing diets, rising incomes, climate risks and pressure on natural resources reshaping the priorities of farming. The focus is gradually moving from producing more foodgrains to creating greater value, diversifying production and using land and water more efficiently. A new paper in the latest edition of The Indian Journal of Agricultural Sciences traces this transformation and identifies three broad phases in India's agrifood system since the Green Revolution. The paper, 'Beyond the Green Revolution: Unravelling New Dynamics of India's Agrifood System Transformation', has been authored by Shri Mangi Lal Jat, Director General, Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR); Shri Pratap Singh BIRTHAL, Distinguished Fellow, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS); and Shri Sedithippa Janarthanan Balaji, Professor, Institute of Economic Growth (IEG). The first phase, from roughly 1967 to 1995, was dominated by the need to achieve food security. The adoption of high-yielding varieties of rice and wheat, expansion of irrigation, fertiliser use, rural infrastructure, agricultural research and extension transformed Indian agriculture. Foodgrain production increased from about 74 million tonnes in 1966–67 to 152 million tonnes in 1983–84. The Green Revolution helped India move towards food self-sufficiency. But the concentration on rice and wheat and intensive use of groundwater, fertilisers and other inputs also created environmental pressures in some regions, including groundwater depletion, declining soil fertility, biodiversity loss and pollution. As food scarcity became less dominant, India's consumption patterns began to change. Between 1996 and 2014, rising incomes, urbanisation, economic reforms and changing dietary preferences increased demand for fruits, vegetables, milk, meat, eggs and fish. The implication is significant: agriculture is increasingly being shaped by what consumers demand, rather than only by the traditional objective of producing more staple grains. The effects of these structural changes in the agrifood system are clearly reflected in the pace and composition of agricultural growth. Agricultural growth increased only modestly from 2.7% during 1967–1995 to about 3.0% during 1996–2014, but accelerated markedly to 4.5% after 2015. The composition of growth has changed

alongside the pace of growth. While foodgrains were the dominant driver during the earlier period, horticulture, dairy, fisheries and poultry have expanded rapidly in recent years. Between 2015 and 2025, milk production increased by about 10 million tonnes annually, while fisheries and poultry also recorded strong growth. Rice and wheat production continued to increase, supported particularly by higher yields. This means diversification is not about moving away from cereals. It is about building a broader agricultural economy in which foodgrains coexist with higher-value and demand-responsive sectors. The technology agenda is changing as well. Between 1969 and 2025, India released 7,206 crop varieties, including 3,236 during 2014–2025. Of the varieties released during the latter period, 2,996 were identified as climate-resilient and 187 as biofortified. The shift reflects a broader definition of agricultural productivity. Farmers increasingly need technologies that can raise yields while reducing risks from drought, pests, diseases and climate variability and improving resource-use efficiency. Digital technologies are adding another layer to this transformation. Remote sensing, geospatial systems, digital advisory platforms, pest surveillance and initiatives such as AgriStack are increasingly being integrated into agricultural governance and farmer services. The transformation is not limited to what happens on farms. Markets, infrastructure, finance, cooperatives and food processing are becoming increasingly important to agricultural performance. Investment and agricultural finance have also expanded substantially. Gross capital formation in agriculture increased from ₹427 billion in 1967 to ₹4,908 billion in 2024, while outstanding agricultural credit rose from ₹470 billion to ₹16,234 billion over the broader period covered by the study. These trends underline a crucial change in the economics of farming: farmer incomes increasingly depend not only on production, but also on how efficiently farmers are connected to markets, finance, infrastructure and consumers. Better storage and cold chains can reduce losses. Processing can increase the value of farm output. Efficient logistics can widen market access, while finance can support investment in technology and diversification. The changing structure of agriculture also requires a shift in policy priorities. The report points towards greater emphasis

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Shri Dileep Sanghani registers historic victory at ICA elections



IFFCO Chairman Shri Dileep Sanghani has been elected as an At-Large Director on the Global Board of the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), marking a significant achievement for India and its rapidly expanding cooperative movement. Shri Sanghani secured 526 votes in the ICA Global Board election held on 15.09.2026 at the ICA General Assembly in Panama City. He was India's sole candidate in the At-Large Director election, which featured cooperative leaders from several countries competing for 15 positions on the 30-member ICA Global Board. With 526 votes, Sanghani emerged as the third-highest vote-getter overall and the top vote-getter among candidates from Asia, Europe and Africa. His election gives India direct representation on the highest governing body of the global cooperative movement and is being seen as an important recognition of the country's growing role in international cooperation.

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on resource conservation, diversification, climate resilience, market development, value addition and farmer incomes, while retaining food security as a core objective. This will require stronger storage and cold-chain infrastructure, improved wholesale markets, greater processing capacity and better logistics. Agricultural policies will also need closer coordination across water, energy, climate, trade, nutrition and rural development. India's agricultural transformation is therefore moving beyond the Green Revolution's central objective of producing more grain. The next phase is about producing more value, greater diversity and better nutrition

while using land and water more efficiently. The Green Revolution created the foundation for food security. The expansion of horticulture, livestock and fisheries has broadened the agricultural economy. The emerging challenge is to connect these gains through better technology, infrastructure, markets and institutions. For Indian agriculture, the defining question is increasingly not simply how much more can be produced, but how much more value can be created from every hectare, every unit of water and every link in the farm-to-consumer chain.

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NEWS FROM MEMBER BANKS



Gujarat SCARDB

Kheti Bank's 74th Annual General Meeting Celebrating 75 Years of Glorious Service on 09th July, 2026 at Ahmedabad, Gujarat



Gujarat SCARDB held 74th AGM on 09th July 2026 at Ahmedabad, Gujarat. Shri Acharya Devvrat, Governor of Gujarat was the Chief Guest for the event with Shri Dolar Kotecha, Chairman, Gujarat SCARDB and other senior bank officials participating in the event.

Kheti Bank Celebrates the 80th Independence Day with Patriotic Fervour on 15th August 2026 in Ahmedabad



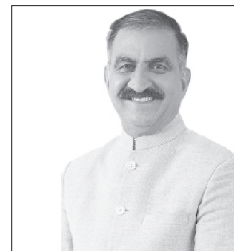
Gujarat SCARDB celebrated Independence Day under the leadership of Shri Dolar Kotecha, Chairman with flag hoisting by Shri Kiritbhai Patel, CGM on 15th August 2026 at Ahmedabad.

Himachal Pradesh SCARDB

Himachal Pradesh SCARDB Introduces Three OTS Schemes for Farmers



Shri Sanjay Singh Chauhan, Chairman, Himachal Pradesh SCARDB on 21st July 2026 launched three One-Time Settlement (OTS) schemes, valid up to 31st December 2026, to provide financial relief to farmers and improve loan recoveries at Shimla.



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- SSI - Manufacturing Units, Offset Printing Press, Handlooms and Handicraft etc
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