

# MNREGA to raise farmers' income

**Govt plans to fulfil pledge to kisans and address farm workforce dearth**

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With an eye on the polls and under pressure of farmers' unions, the Centre is considering a proposal to link the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) with agriculture. Besides increasing farmers' income, the move will also help meet the demand of shortage of farm labourers during pre-sowing and post-harvest phases across the country and create jobs in the rural sector and.

Officials said the Prime Minister recently constituted a committee consisting of Chief Ministers of seven States — Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, West Bengal and Sikkim — to examine the feasibility of the proposal. The committee will meet in Bhopal on August 6.

The PM expressed concern over low corporate investment



Representational image

in agriculture sector and wanted States to formulate policies that promote corporate investment in areas such as warehousing, transportation, value addition and food processing. After hiking the minimum support prices of 14 kharif crops, including paddy, the Narendra Modi Government is hoping that linking MGNREGA with the agriculture will help increase farmers' income, as promised by the Centre.

Besides, it will also help address the problem of shortage of farm labourers during kharif and rabi seasons. Under MNREGA, the Central Government has to provide at least 100 days of guaranteed employment involving

unskilled manual work in a financial year to every household in rural areas as per demand.

The Government has taken several steps in the last four years to improve the financial and working health of the farmers in the country. These include Soil Health Cards, Kisan Credit Cards, quality fertilisers with the help of neem-coated urea, crop insurance through Fasal Bima Yojana and irrigation through Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana, which had brought 29 lakh hectare under irrigation and 100 projects are being completed.

As many as 62 farmers' unions under the aegis of the

Rashtriya Kisan Mahashangha (RKM) have written to the PM and CMs of 28 States, demanding linking of the MGNREGA to the agriculture. As per data, 263 million people are engaged in the agriculture sector and over half of them are now agricultural labourers.

According to farmers' leaders, there is a large number of agriculture related works under MGNREGA such as water conservation and water harvesting, renovating of traditional water bodies, drought proofing, micro irrigation activities, small and large level watershed interventions which directly affects agriculture sector.

"MGNREGA has ruined agriculture in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Odisha and Jharkhand by making the labour scarce. Now the kharif season is going on in eastern States, shortage of agricultural labourers has emerged as a major cause of concern for the farmers," said Pandey.

The farmers' unions will soon launch a nationwide signature campaign and also demanded that the Government should consult farmers on this issue.

*Continued on Page 4*

## MNREGA to raise farmers' ...

From Page 1

Farmers union said that linking MGNREGA with agriculture will push agricultural labourers' wages up, as farmers had to at least match the MGNREGA wage if they wanted to attract workers to work in their fields. "Second, by reducing or mitigating distress migration to the urban areas, it contributed to push up wages also in the non-farm sector, thus benefiting casual workers in towns and cities too. Third, it has allowed one member of the family to work under MGNREGA, while another member works in the fields, thus doubling their daily income," they said.

During Kharif sowing season, agricultural labourers from Bihar, Odisha, UP, Jharkhand and West Bengal also prefer to migrate to Punjab, Haryana and Western Uttar Pradesh to get higher wages.