



Expanding India's Food Security Net

This editorial is based on [“Expand the food safety net without any more delay”](#) which was published in The Hindu on 10/12/2022. It talks about Food Security in India and issues related to Public Distribution System coverage.

For Prelims: Green Revolution, Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), Food Corporation of India (FCI), Fall Armyworm (Pest), Public Distribution System, Biofuels, National Food Security Mission, Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY), Integrated Schemes on Oilseeds, Pulses, Palm oil and Maize (ISOPOM), eNAM Portal, One Nation One Ration Card.

For Mains: Current Framework for Food Security in India, Challenges Related to Food Security in India, Recent Government Initiatives Related to Food Security.

The [Green Revolution](#) initiated in the late **1960s** was a historic watershed that transformed the [Food Security](#) situation in India. It tripled **food grain production** over the next three or four decades and consequently **reduced by over 50% both the levels of food insecurity and poverty in the country**, this was **achieved in spite of the increase in population** during the period.

The country succeeded in the laudable task of becoming a **food self-sufficient Nation**, at least at the **macro level**. But with rising **land degradation, loss of soil fertility and water logging, climate change**, and **global supply chain disruption (Russia-Ukraine War)** giving rise to the challenges faced by the farming community. The fall in ground water levels is adding to the problem.

Therefore, India needs to **examine these issues holistically** in order to maintain food sustainability.

What is Food Security?

- The [Food and Agricultural Organization \(FAO\)](#) states that food security emerges when all people at all times have physical and economic access to **sufficient, safe and nutritious food** to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.
- Food security has three important and closely related components, which are **availability, accessibility and affordability of food**.

What is the Current Framework for Food Security in India?

- **Constitutional Provision:** Although the **Indian Constitution** does not explicitly state that **food is a fundamental right**, [Article 21](#) of the Constitution can be interpreted so that it includes the **right to live in dignity**, including the **right to food and other basic necessities**.

- **Buffer Stock:** The [Food Corporation of India \(FCI\)](#) has the **primary responsibility of procuring food grains at [minimum support prices \(MSPs\)](#)** and storing them in its warehouses at various locations for supply to the state governments.
- **Public Distribution System:** Under the **PDS**, presently the commodities namely **wheat, rice, sugar and kerosene** are being allocated to the States/UTs for distribution.
 - Some States/UTs also distribute additional items of mass consumption through the **PDS outlets such as pulses, edible oils, iodized salt, spices, etc.**
- **National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA):** Through the **NFSA**, food security has shifted from a **welfare to a rights-based approach**. It covers **75% of the rural population** and 50% of the urban population under the following categories:
 - **Antyodaya Anna Yojana:** It constitutes the **poorest-of-the-poor**, and is entitled to receive 35 kg of foodgrains per household per month.
 - **Priority Households (PHH):** Households covered under PHH category are entitled to receive **5 kg of foodgrains per person per month**.

What are the Challenges Related to Food Security in India?

- **Menace of Climate Change:** **United Nations** called out climate change, extreme weather events as the **key factors driving growing food insecurity**.
 - Increased temperatures, weather variability, invasive crops and pests, and more frequent extreme weather events have **detrimental effects on farming** – from **diminishing agricultural yields, to weakening the nutritional quality** of produce on farms, to **reducing farmer incomes**.
- **Pest and Weed Attacks:** Over the past **15 years**, India has experienced more than **10 major invasive pest and weed attacks**.
 - [Fall Armyworm \(Pest\)](#) destroyed nearly all the **maize crop in India in 2018**, forcing India to import maize in 2019.
 - **Rajasthan and Gujarat** were also affected by [locust attacks](#) in 2020.
- **Volatile Market Pricing:** The concept of [globalisation](#) has given more **openness to agricultural commerce**, but it is unable to **assure more stable market pricing**.
 - The lack of remunerative prices for **end goods, distressed sales, high cultivation costs** combined with **inappropriate market prices** act as a **barrier in the path of food security**.
- **Waterlogging:** **Excessive irrigation causes [waterlogging](#)** that is often accompanied by [soil salinity](#) as **waterlogged** soils prevent **leaching of the salts** imported by the irrigation water.
 - The **presence of waterlogged soil hinders plant growth** and reduces agricultural productivity.
- **Lack of Food Management Policy:** There is no strict management policy for food security in India, and the [Public Distribution System](#) is **prone to leaks and diversion, errors in inclusion and exclusion**, fake and bogus ration cards, and a **weak grievance redress and social audit system**.
- **Shifting Focus to Biofuels:** The **growth of the [biofuel](#) market has reduced the land used for growing food crops**. Also, massive quantities of water are required for proper irrigation of biofuel crops as well as to manufacture the fuel, which **strain local and regional water resources, that is the essence of food security**.

What are the Recent Government Initiatives Related to Food Security?

- [National Food Security Mission](#)
- [Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana \(RKVY\)](#)
- [Integrated Schemes on Oilseeds, Pulses, Palm oil and Maize \(ISOPOM\)](#)
- [eNAM Portal](#)

What Should be the Way Forward?

- **Prioritising Supporting Infrastructural Development:** The government should prioritise

development of **warehouses, cold storage facilities, farm to factory corridors, and competitive market facilities.**

- Encouragement of the **PPP model in agriculture** will result in **speedier infrastructure development.**
- **More Transparent Food Security Measures:** The Indian government could ensure more transparency on **food stocks regulation in the private sector.** For that, there is a **need to set restrictions on the reserves that the private sector can hold,** as they often tend to **hoard food stocks to later sell at a profit.**
 - Internationally, **positional limits could be set on speculators** but that would require a **multilateral accord,** a topic which should be on the **agenda at the [India's G20 presidency.](#)**
- **Strengthening One Nation One Ration Card Scheme:** The plight of migrant workers at the height of the pandemic showcased that the **lack of a universal PDS is a major limitation in achieving food security.**
 - The **'[one nation one ration card](#)' scheme** should be operationalised through the **proper issuance of universal ration cards to individuals seeking foodgrain** so that the **PDS can be accessed at any geographical location in the country.**
- **Towards Sustainable Agriculture:** Sustainable agriculture practices such as **crop rotation, mixed cropping with pulses, using biofertilizers, limiting the use of pesticides and integrated pest management** must be encouraged and promoted.
 - **[Drip irrigation](#) and [solar panels](#) can be encouraged by redirecting the subsidy on electricity for drawing water for irrigation purposes to the adoption of drip irrigation techniques and installing solar panels.**
- **Incentivising Climate Resilient Crops: Investment** is needed for the **development and distribution of [climate-resilient crops](#)** that can handle temperature variation and precipitation fluctuations.
 - The government should **incentivise the production of water- and nutrient-efficient crops** (such as **millets and pulses**) and announce a **lucrative Minimum Support Price and input subsidies for farmers.**
- **Agricultural Diplomacy:** India can **provide support to other developing countries in Africa and Asia** through **technology partnerships, joint research in promoting drought resistant crops,** promoting climate smart agriculture, thereby establishing India as a major player of Global South.

Drishti Mains Question

Outline major pitfalls in India's Food Security Net and propose measures for universalisation of Public Distribution System.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. An objective of the National Food Security Mission is to increase the production of certain crops through area expansion and productivity enhancement in a sustainable manner in the identified districts of the country. What are those crops? (2010)

- (a) Rice and wheat only
- (b) Rice, wheat and pulses only
- (c) Rice, wheat, pulses and oil seeds only
- (d) Rice, wheat, pulses, oil seeds and vegetables

Ans: (b)

Mains

Q.1 In what way could replacement of price subsidy with Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) change the scenario of subsidies in India? Discuss. **(2015)**

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