Moving towards water sustainable agriculture

English Webinar- 5th March 2019, 2:30 pm- 3:30 pm IST;

Speakers

1. Louke Koopmans, Global Sustainable Sourcing Manager, MARS FOOD - OBL, Netherlands
2. Dr. Sudhir Yadav, Theme leader- Environmental Sustainability, Senior Scientist - Water Management Sustainable Impact Platform, International Rice Research Institute, Phillipnes
3. S.K. Sharma, Director, Central Water Commission, Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, Government of India

Participants

We witnessed roughly 50 participants from different sectors around the globe like Water and Environment groups from Uttarakhand and farmers from Haryana members from the Non profit/Civil Society sector- International Commission for Irrigation and Drainage as well as government, market leaders like LT Foods, Pakistan MARS Suppliers and Central Water Board, Chandigarh, India.

Discussion

Importance of technological developments and its implementation on ground surfaced as a prime line of discussion throughout. Furthermore, it touched issues like

- Is the market situation conducive to welcome water saving techniques?
- What can be possible macro policy level changes?
- Are farmers alone left to bear the burden of sustainable agriculture?
- How can the consumers make more responsible choices?

Future Course of Actions

- **Role of Technology-** Technology has been the driving force for new environmentally sustainable options available today like laser levelling, drip irrigation and Systematic Rice Intensification SRI. However it was concluded that there can be no one straight jacket solution which can be applied in all fields and all crops. For instance, excel flows are successful in coastal areas, Laser levelling is adopted in plain areas which is not possible in a hilly terrain. Hence, the need is to develop contextual knowledge and research.

- **Enabling Environment**- It was a common consensus that any technological intervention or behavioral change can only be possible when the farmers have easy and full access to the available resources. Introduction to new and advanced techniques will not suffice alone, there exists a vacuum in monitoring and improvising the adoption on ground, after all they are the actual decision makers.

- **Water Stewardship**- Governance at a community level should be the first step towards water sustainable agriculture; indigenous farming methods like early planting in Eastern Uttar Pradesh, India should be identified and implemented.

- **Traceability and Trust building**- Increasing consumers around the globe are interested to trace the origin of their food, right from the field to their table. In case of rice cultivation, this has created a new demand for proving the decisions made by the producers and distributors. Thus creating a shift in responsibility towards sustainability from the consumer's end as well.

- **Ecologically viable options** - As discussed repeatedly, it is believed Haryana and Punjab does not offer the appropriate conditions for rice cultivation. It receives only 40% of the annual rainfall, putting the pressure on groundwater resulting into depleted water tables. Therefore, the need is to back up future actions through scientific research which will create a win win situation both for ecological as well as economical sustainability.

- **Policy Changes**- Suggestions were made for policy changes based on experiences around the globe like introducing Climate green funds for promoting and implementing subsidies on ground. Carbon credits was one such scheme common in developed countries. Negative motivation in form of penalizations can be introduced like Priced excess water practiced in Pakistan. From the corporate side, premiums are provided for sustainably grown basmati like Mars.