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IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON INDIAN AGRICULTURE: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

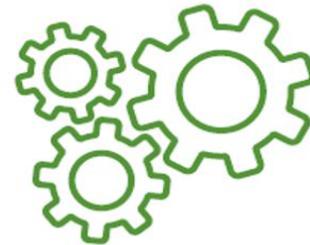
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The novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) epidemic has quickly spread over the world, wreaking havoc on millions of people's lives and livelihoods. India's first outbreak was detected on January 30, 2020, causing officials to take immediate action to halt the spread of the disease. Because the sickness is extremely contagious, a much-needed global lockdown was implemented on March 25, 2020, to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.



The Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) epidemic, which began at a seafood market in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, in mid-December 2019, has already spread to 214 countries, territories, and places throughout the world (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2019). India's agriculture system has been devastated by the COVID-19 epidemic. Nonetheless, the most recent quarterly GDP predictions post-COVID scenario show that Indian agriculture is strong and resilient, since it is the only sector to grow at a positive rate of 3.4 percent in fiscal year 2020–21.

Meanwhile, growth for the most recent quarter is expected to be 5.9%, down 2.5 per cent points from the prior quarter. In this context, we'd want to gather preliminary data on COVID-19's impact on the Indian agriculture sector, including production, marketing, and consumption, as well as a set of potential recovery and post-pandemic strategies. According

to survey findings, the pandemic slowed production and marketing due to labour and logistical challenges, while the negative income shock reduced market access and elevated food commodity costs, influencing consumption habits. On a physical, social, economic, and emotional level, the virus wreaked devastation on all players in the Indian agriculture industry.

The agriculture and allied industry is extremely important to India's economy. It accounts for roughly a sixth of India's national GDP and employs nearly half of the country's workers. It is critical for the nation's food security and, through its forward and backward links, impacts the growth of the secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy. Agricultural development decreases poverty both directly and indirectly by increasing farm earnings and lowering food prices. To put it another way, a strong agricultural sector benefits almost every area of the Indian economy.

The influence of the Covid-19 on Indian agriculture may be divided into two categories: lockdown and post-lockdown.

During lockdown time	After lockdown time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Labour shortage - due to imposition of largest lockdown of the in the world. ✓ Harvesting of <i>rabi</i> crop is delayed due to the labour shortage. ✓ Delay in sowing - summer and <i>kharif</i> crop due to the labour shortage. ✓ Change in the choice of crop and method of sowing due to the labour problem. ✓ Closing of market due to lockdown ✓ Farmers could not able to sell the produce. ✓ Huge drop in demand for perishable products like milk, fruits, vegetables, chicken meat. ✓ Assam swine fever - first time reported in India. ✓ Locust attack has been enhanced due to the lockdown. ✓ Disruption in the supply chain due non-availability in supply chain. ✓ Lack of access to warehouse, cold storage and processing facilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Hike in fuel - increased machinery wages. ✓ Hike in food commodities price. ✓ Schools shutdown affecting education of children. ✓ Global zero hunger by 2030 could be delayed. ✓ Change in farm ordinances by the central government. ✓ Change in food habits. ✓ Tribal people following Indigenous methods to sustain. ✓ Poaching of wild animals increased. ✓ Lowering growth in agriculture. ✓ Less income per person in agriculture. ✓ Doubling the farmer's income by 2022 could be delayed. ✓ Proposal to discontinue free power supply to farmers. ✓ Impact on export and import (Sahoo and Samal, 2020).

Opportunities Allowed By the Covid-19 Pandemic in the Agricultural Field

- 1) Change in method of crop establishment.
- 2) Change in choice of crop.
- 3) Farm Mechanization.
- 4) Value addition mainly in horticultural crops.
- 5) Integrated Farming for small and marginal farmers.
- 6) Change in government policy.
- 7) Attract youth towards agriculture.
- 8) Restructuring food system/ Food distribution system.
- 9) Increase food production due to increase in area.
- 10) Strengthening e-NAM (Sahoo *et al.* 2020)
- 11) Hike in MSP - for promoting non-cereals production.
- 12) Strengthening of MGNREGA for rural development.

Conclusion

COVID-19 is the deadliest disaster in human history. The growth and development of all major countries in the globe has slowed. Due to the country's long-term lockdown, India is the most directly or indirectly afflicted country in the globe by this epidemic. Agriculture is the only sector with positive growth of 3.4 per cent, despite a 23.9 per cent drop in GDP. In agriculture, the benefits presented by this epidemic outnumber the risks. So, if we make appropriate use of these chances, we can certainly expect increased agricultural growth for the benefit of farmers.

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