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ATMANIRBHAR CLEAN PLANT PROGRAM: REVOLUTIONIZING INDIA'S HORTICULTURAL SECTOR

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The agricultural sector plays a significant role in India's economy, contributing approximately 18.3% to the country's gross value added (GVA)¹, and engaging over half of the working-age population. With a focus on doubling farmers' income, India places particular emphasis on horticulture, which accounts for 33% of the agricultural GVA². Recent years have witnessed a surge in horticultural production, attributed to factors such as population growth, evolving consumer preferences, and government-led initiatives. India has emerged as the world's second-largest producer of fruits and vegetables, notably mangoes, bananas, and guavas. However, amidst challenges, efficient utilization of land and water resources remains paramount to meet domestic demand and enhance horticultural productivity.

Certifying planting materials as disease-free is crucial as viral infections are not visibly detectable by farmers and require laboratory testing. Farmers often obtain planting materials from nurseries, and if infected, this can result in reduced yields and lower product quality. Certification ensures healthy planting materials, preventing losses, and nurseries' propagation methods should undergo inspection under certification schemes.

In a determined stride towards self-reliance, India unveils the Atmanirbhar Clean Plant Program, a transformative initiative poised to reshape the nation's horticultural landscape. With a strategic focus on disease-free planting material and enhanced yield, this program holds the potential to bolster India's horticultural sector and amplify its global competitiveness.

Unveiling the Atmanirbhar Clean Plant Program:

Program Objectives: The Atmanirbhar Clean Plant Program is set to be launched with a substantial budget of Rs. 2,200 crores over the next 7 years, until 2030 (PIB Delhi). This ambitious initiative aims to achieve several key objectives:

- Elevate the yield of horticultural crops.
- Promote the dissemination and adoption of climate-resilient varieties.
- Safeguard the ecosystem through proactive measures against viruses and diseases.

Program Implementation: Spearheaded by the National Horticulture Board (NHB), the program will establish Clean Plant Centers across the nation. These centers will serve as vital hubs for producing high-quality planting material free from diseases. Success hinges on collaborative efforts with stakeholders to ensure widespread adoption of clean plant seeds and nurseries.

Asian Development Bank (ADB): ADB has approved a \$98 million loan to improve horticulture crop farmers' access to certified disease-free planting materials, which will boost their crops' yield, quality, and resilience to climate impacts.

Nurturing the Need for the Clean Plant Program

Global Best Practices: Drawing inspiration from leading nations such as the United States, Netherlands, and Israel, which have pioneered clean plant programs, India aims to tap into similar success stories. These initiatives have significantly enhanced crop yield, quality, and agricultural sustainability.

Quality Concerns: Despite India's significant production of fruits like banana, mango, pomegranate, and papaya, its share in global exports remains limited due to quality issues. For instance, while India contributes to 27% of global banana production, its export share is only around 1%. The Clean Plant Program seeks to address these concerns, catapulting India's exports to new heights.

Horticultural Growth and Exports: Over the past 7 years, India has witnessed substantial growth in horticulture, with the area expanding from 23.4 to 27.5 million hectares and production increasing from 280.9 to 333.25 million tonnes. The Clean Plant Program is poised to further accelerate this growth trajectory.

Summary: Establishing "Clean Plant Centers"

Pioneering Approach: The introduction of Clean Plant Centers marks a groundbreaking endeavor in India's horticultural sector. These centers are poised to revolutionize practices and play a pivotal role in reshaping the industry. Mainly government is planning to develop at least six public clean plant centers (CPC) across India that will comprise: quarantine blocks for all the domestic and imported materials that are intended for commercial propagation, laboratories for diagnostic testing and tissue culture; and foundation blocks to maintain and distribute clean planting materials from climate resilient varieties to certified nurseries.

Targeted Crops: Clean Plant Centers will focus on various fruit crops, including apple, walnut, almond, grapes, mango, and pomegranate. Fully funded by the central government and implemented in a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) mode, these centers will collaborate with research organizations, agricultural universities, and private sector partners.

Services Provided: These centers will offer a comprehensive range of services, including disease diagnostics, therapeutic interventions, multiplication of plants, and generation of mother plants. These critical services aim to ensure the propagation of high-quality planting material free from diseases.

Streamlining Imports: With the demand for imported planting material rising, Clean Plant Centers will significantly streamline the process. Currently, imported plants undergo a two-year quarantine period, hampering efficiency. Establishing these centres will reduce this period to just six months, facilitating smoother and faster imports.

Conclusion

The Atmanirbhar Clean Plant Program promises a paradigm shift in India's horticultural sector. By prioritizing disease-free planting material, enhancing yield, and embracing global best practices, the program aims to bolster India's position as a major player in the global horticultural market. As the program unfolds over the next decade, India's journey towards self-reliance and growth takes a significant leap forward.

Reference

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