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**Emerging Innovative Trends in Higher Education  
An Interdisciplinary Approach**

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## Farmer Suicide in India Reasons and Responces

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India is an agrarian country with around 70% of its people depending directly or indirectly upon agriculture. But farmers' suicides in India is worrying. As per the Central Government despite a multi-pronged approach to improving income and social security of farmers, over 12,000 suicides were reported in the agricultural sector every year since 2013. Farmer suicides account for approximately 10% of all suicides in India. There is no denying that the menace of farmer's suicides exists and runs counter to the aspirations of reaping benefits of our demographic dividend. In this article, we are analysing the farmers' suicides in India and its related data, the reasons and the way forward.

### Farmers' Suicides – What do the facts say?

- The list includes farmers-cultivators and agricultural labourers.
- Seven states account for 87.5% of total suicides in the farming sector in the country. The states are Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu 606.
- Both marginal farmers and small farmers are committing suicide.
- Maharashtra is the worst affected state.
- Ironically, Punjab, which benefited most from the Green Revolution, also presents a depressing picture of farmer's suicides in India. Between 1995-2015, 4687 farmers' suicides have been reported from the state of Punjab of which 1334 from one Mansa district alone.

### What are the reasons behind farmers' suicides in India?

Scholars have given various reasons such as monsoon failure, climate change, high debt burdens, government policies, mental health, personal issues and family problems among the reasons of farmers' suicides in India. Let's analyse.

- **The surge in input costs:** A major cause of the farmers' suicides in India has been the increasing burden on the farmers due to inflated prices of agricultural inputs. The culmination of these factors is seen in the **overall increase in the cost of cultivation**, for wheat, the cost at present is three times than it was in 2005.
- **Cost of chemicals and seeds:** Be it the fertilisers, crop protection chemicals or even the seeds for cultivation, farming has become expensive for the already indebted farmers.
- **Costs of Agricultural equipment:** The input costs, moreover, aren't limited to the basic raw materials. Using agricultural equipment and machinery like tractors, submersible pumps etc adds to the already surging costs. Besides, these secondary inputs have themselves become less affordable for the small and marginal farmers.
- **Labour costs:** Likewise, hiring labourers and animals is getting costlier too. While this may reflect an improvement in the socio-economic status of the labourers, driven primarily by MGNREGA and hike in minimum basic income, this has not gone too well with boosting the agriculture sector.





**Distressed due to loans:**

- NCRB data points out that in 2474 suicides out of the studied 3000 farmer suicides in 2015 the victims had unpaid loans from local banks. This is clear enough an indication for drawing correlations between the two. Whether or not the banks had been harassing them, however, is a long-drawn debate and needs more specific empirical evidence.
- Moreover, a shift away from usual trend also revealed that of the loans taken by these farmers, only 9.8% were loans from money-lenders. Thus the pressure or muscle-power of money-lenders could be far from being a major driving force, as is otherwise perceived.
- Another source of strong linkages between farmer suicides and indebtedness is reflected from the spread of the two. While Maharashtra had 1293 suicides for indebtedness, Karnataka had 946. Note that both these states saw one of the highest incidences of farmer suicides as well as indebtedness.

**Lack of direct integration with the market:**

Although initiatives like the National Agricultural Market and contract farming are helping integrate the farmers' produce directly with the market, cutting the role of intermediaries, the reality is still lagging behind.

**Lack of awareness:**

The digital divide, as well as the literacy gap, has made the marginal and small farmers particularly vulnerable due to their inability to utilise the positives of government policies. This is reflected in the continued unsustainable cropping practices – like cultivating sugarcane in water-deficit regions.

**Water crisis:**

The concentration of these suicides in the water-deficit regions of states like Maharashtra, Karnataka is a manifestation of how the water crisis and thereby failure to meet production demands have intensified the menace. This is particularly true in the backdrop of continued failed monsoons.

**Interstate water disputes:**

What has added to the already prevalent crisis is the unwillingness to cater to each other's water needs amongst the states. A case in point is the recently resurfaced Kaveri dispute that saw Karnataka and Tamil Nadu battle out water shortage both in and outside the tribunal even to the extent of non-compliance with the tribunal award.

**Climate change** has acted as the last nail in the coffin by resulting in furthering of the uncertainties associated with the already uncertain monsoon system and hence agricultural production. While incidents like flash floods have led to crop losses, deferred monsoons have seen production shortfall year-in and year-out

**India's urban consumer driven economic policies:**

The political economy of India is driven more by the urban consumers than the rural producers. This is reflected in the *urgency to impose price controls* in case of price rise (imposing Minimum Export Prices, bringing items under Essential Commodities etc) and a *lacklustre withdrawal* once the price is under control. Contrast this with how we have been imposing minimum import price to secure our steel sector. This differential treatment to primary sector also limits profit margin and thereby hinders farmers' chances of breaking free from the cycle of indebtedness.







**Loan waivers instead of restructuring, re-investment measures:**

Our approach of handling farmer indebtedness and hence farmer suicides has been appeasement politics like the recent move by the UP government to waive off Rs 36000 crore worth of loans. Surprisingly this comes at a time when agricultural yield is expected to be better in the wake of a good monsoon.

In essence, the factors sum up to crop failure, unsustainable production and subsequent farmer indebtedness leading to failure of strengthening the economic state of the farmer as the driving force behind these suicides.

**Is Suicide a matter of economics?**

The National Mental Health Association of the USA states that "No matter the race or age of the person; how rich or poor they are, it is true that most people who commit suicide have a mental or emotional disorder". **Suicide is not a matter of economics.**

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