In this Issue...

pg 1 FROM VICE CHANCELLOR’S DESK
Food grains- Social Gel?

MAJOR EVENTS

pg 4 Kharif Zonal Research & Extension
Advisory Committee Meets to Discuss
Farmers’ Feedback

pg 4 Forty-four Recommendations of SDAU
Ratified by the Combined Joint

pg 5 Agricultural Research
Committee of State Agricultural
Universities

pg 5 SDAU Develops New Varieties of
Wheat and Ajwain

pg 6 Brain Storming Workshop on
Application of ICT in Agriculture

pg 11 Fodder For Thought

FROM VICE CHANCELLOR’S DESK

Food grains- Social Gel?

I was returning from a meeting on food and nutritional security. The meeting entailed same cliché discussion like there is little chance of bringing more land under cultivation, that the cultivated area is likely to plummet to 112 m ha from 128 m ha by 2050, the input response is on the decline, climate change is going to exacerbate the risks inherently associated with agriculture; soil health is getting emaciated on time scale and the availability of water for irrigation might bottom up to 65 per cent of available water by 2050 as compared to 83 per cent right now; etc. The projected agricultural situations were too demanding to keep me content and gave me trepidations at the very thought of imminent food and nutritional security. This is despite I knew at the back of mind that India has done exceptionally well to produce over 257 million tons food grains during 2014-15 and the target of 275 million tons per annum by 2050 to feed estimated population of over 1600 million does not seem much difficult. My only soul searching was what good the modern development has done in making the socio-economic fabric strong and relevant to the civic society? The answer I got was obvious, the socio-economic fabric is in tatters, there are behemoth gains in agricultural production, the gains that obliterated the integral hunger tag that India inherited at the time of getting independence. However, storage infrastructures are still too meagre and that the handling losses including...
transport and distribution are often too gargantuan to feel contented. Over 30 per cent of the food grains are lost during handling and the quantity is good enough to feed the country for a year. And add to it the colossal national manpower and energy squandered inadvertently in making the food grains accessible to the needy populace by the so called Public Distribution System.

The wild thoughts were making me socially insecure and this insecurity carried me to about five decades back when I was in school and would visit my maternal place during summer vacation. I got overwhelmed with anecdotal bevy of manpower that would work with dedication and involvement in every activity in the farms. And in return they were ensured of food grains as a tranche of the produce right in the threshing flour. How much share was really interesting to guess? It was as much as one can lift at one go and my maternal uncle would carry produce home only after everyone’s share has been delivered. And the nutritious butter milk, called chhachh in local parlance, was free to all. This system was not only inclusive for food and nutritional security but was also a great strengthening gel to socio-economic fabric. I was awed by mutual care of each other that is missing right now in the society. The calamities were not known. This does not mean that the calamities were not there, they were there but the social zeal to fight them together were too strong to make them give in. The dedication and involvement of manpower in each activity was so much that they see no difference in day or night when it was a question of brazening out calamity. I still remember, my uncle would not know, how and when the farm problems had been solved. Everyone would do one’s best to seek solution. And of course, there were tons of pleasantries and associated commodity gifts in every festival to make the society happy and happening.

My thought process was too acute and constrained me to compare the situation now and then. There is not an iota of apprehension about the utility of the programmes like MANREGA and food security but the way they are being executed need some revisit. I believe the programmes have created a mindset not working commensurate to the wages and the programme has become a threat to the socio-economic fabric. The reason is obvious, if they can earn full wages without working full-time, why should they drudge and toil in farm field? I wandered why people were more content and secure of food. I believe it was more due to inordinate social gelling and mutual care for each other than anything else. My thoughts further nudged me whether a system could be developed where socio-fabric gelling programmes of old days can be synced with say the largest food security ensuring programme like Public Distribution System? The system entails large manpower, behemoth infrastructures, gargantuan wastage, enormous pilferage and above all consumption of energy in taking the commodities from one place to another. Could the excessive food grains produced in the village be stored by the producer himself at the nominal expense? The food grains requirements of the needy families can be worked out at the village level or cluster level. The local technologies that are not energy intensive and are eco-friendly may be encouraged for storage. The availability of excessive food grains in each village or cluster can also be data based. The government may directly pay to the producer for storage and processing. The needy families can be tied up to different nearby producers in the same village. The government may monitor the system by uploading all producers along with their stock, families tied up to each producer along with quantum of allotment over time scale and real time allotment data on the web. This way food security can be assured locally without much expenditure on storage, transport, supervisory manpower etc. It will also strengthen the socio-economic fabric that has gone very fragile over time scale. Our mythology consider food as sacred God, nobody wants to dishonour food; and this system will reduce the wastage of food grains, energy and manpower. Amen!