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Integrated Intensive Farming Systems (IIFS)-Climate-resilient pathways to a sustainable food-secure future

Indian agriculture is facing a serious crisis due to stagnation in productivity, less profitability, declining soil health and dwindling water supply. Integrated Intensive Farming Systems (IIFS) have been proven to be promising options for several farmers to tide over the current imbroglio, especially with the climate change looming large. Integrated intensive farming practices seek to combine environmentally benign modern scientific methods with ecologically sound and time-honored farmers' practices.

Studies show that the unique feature of some farming families, which have successfully adapted IIFS in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, is that they shifted to IIFS mostly on their own without any motivation or technical support whatsoever coming from 'outsiders'. This speaks volumes about the credibility of the IIFS approach. All these farmers had multi-tier and multi-species cropping and effectively used the horizontal and vertical space and harvested more crops per unit of investment, soil, water, air and solar incidence. The increased cropping intensity also helped as an insurance cover against various risks, and the technologies and the crop-mix involved were found to be climate-resilient.

The following conclusions were derived from the study: (a) The cost of production of various agricultural commodities is lesser in IIFS as compared to modern farming system as experienced by the farmers; (b) The net annual returns per unit area and per unit investment, land and water is higher in IIFS; (c) IIFS provides assured jobs and income for the farming family all through the year; (d) IIFS ensures sustainable soil health improvement and prevents water pollution; (e) IIFS is a sound integration of climate-resilient crop and livestock mix backed-up by eco-friendly technologies; (f) IIFS provides an intellectually challenging and economically lucrative option for the new genre of farmers; (g) It can help in arresting rural-urban migration and usher in a vibrant rural economy; (h) IIFS offers nutrition- and livelihood-security for the farming families; and (i) IIFS promotes more non-farming opportunities for rural landless.

Based on the study, the following specific recommendations aimed at influencing policy-makers to ensure conducive policies are made: (a) IIFS should be supported by sound and fair price policy; (b) IIFS should be encouraged by adequate incentives; (c) IIFS needs the sound agricultural extension services through a network of seasoned IIFS practitioners; (d) IIFS should be backed up with quality inputs in adequate quantities at times of need; and (e) IIFS should be supported with the necessary credit facilities.

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