

# 50 Years of ICAR–ICRISAT Partnership Celebrated at Dryland Congress 2026

## Experts Deliberate on Resilient Farming Systems, Seed Systems, Gender and Youth-Centred Transformation

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The second day of Dryland Congress 2026 in New Delhi today featured a special session commemorating 50 years of collaboration between the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT). The session brought together former and current leaders of both institutions to reflect on five decades of partnership and deliberate on a roadmap for strengthening collaboration and accelerating agricultural transformation towards Viksit Bharat 2047.



The special session was co-chaired by Dr R. S. Paroda, Former Director General, ICAR, and Dr William D. Dar, Former Director General, ICRISAT. Former leaders of ICAR and ICRISAT, including Dr Panjab Singh, Former Secretary, DARE and Director General, ICAR; Dr C. L. L. Gowda, Former Deputy Director General, ICRISAT; Dr T. R. Sharma, Former Deputy Director General, Crop Science, ICAR; and Dr Swapan Datta, Former Deputy Director General, Crop Science, ICAR, shared their reflections on the evolution and achievements of the partnership.



Dr M. L. Jat, Secretary, Department of Agricultural Research and Education (DARE) and Director General, ICAR, provided a strategic outlook for the partnership and emphasised the need to leverage the complementary strengths of ICAR and ICRISAT to address emerging agricultural challenges and create greater impact. He said, “We value the partnership, we support the partnership, and we will continue to support the partnership. By leveraging the complementary strengths of ICAR and ICRISAT, we can take on bigger challenges and create greater impact in the years ahead.”

Looking ahead, Dr D. K. Yadava, Deputy Director General, Crop Science, ICAR, and Dr Raman Babu, Global Research Program Director, Accelerated Crop Improvement, ICRISAT, presented a roadmap for strengthening ICAR–ICRISAT collaboration towards Viksit Bharat 2047, with emphasis on leveraging scientific capabilities and translating research into greater impact.

The second day of the Congress also featured three thematic panel discussions on “Reimagining Resilient Dryland Farming Systems,” “Transforming Seed Systems in the Global South,” and “Gender and Youth-Centered Transformation.” The discussions examined integrated and climate-smart approaches for smallholder farmers, strengthening seed delivery systems and public-private partnerships across Asia and Africa, and promoting inclusive policies, leadership and youth engagement in dryland agri-food systems.

These deliberations were complemented by parallel technical sessions covering resilient dryland farming systems, seed systems in the Global South, and gender- and youth-centred transformation. The sessions brought together researchers, policymakers, development partners and other stakeholders to discuss approaches for strengthening resilience, improving access to agricultural innovations and ensuring greater participation of women and young people in dryland agriculture.

Poster presentations also commenced as part of the Congress, with students and research scholars showcasing their scientific research. More than 145 posters are being evaluated on 10 and 11 September for the Best Poster Awards, providing a platform for emerging researchers to present their work and engage with experts from India and abroad.

A key highlight of the day was a visionary talk by Dr R. S. Paroda, Former Secretary, DARE and Director General, ICAR, on “Agrobiodiversity for Building Resilience of Drylands.” He highlighted the importance of conserving and effectively utilising agrobiodiversity to strengthen the resilience and sustainability of dryland farming systems.

Speaking on the 50-year partnership, Dr Himanshu Pathak, Director General, ICRISAT, said that the collaboration between ICAR and ICRISAT had translated scientific research into impact and that the next phase should focus on strengthening innovation, South-South cooperation and collective action for accelerating the transformation of drylands in India and beyond.



Dr R. S. Paroda said that the 50-year milestone was an opportunity to celebrate the achievements of the partnership while also looking ahead, adding that aligning resources, expertise and vision could accelerate the transformation of dryland agriculture.

Dr Panjab Singh highlighted the significant outcomes achieved through the ICAR–ICRISAT partnership over the past five decades and stressed that the next phase should focus on scaling successful models and ensuring that innovations reach farmers on a larger scale.

Dr William D. Dar emphasised that the future of dryland agriculture would depend on combining scientific capabilities with strong partnerships, innovation and scale, with greater focus on income security, nutrition security and resilience of farming communities.

On gender and youth-centred transformation, Prof. Yaye Gassama, ICRISAT Board Member, emphasised the importance of greater participation of women and young people in shaping solutions for dryland regions through leadership, innovation and enterprise.

Dr A. V. Bhavani Shankar, Chief General Manager, NABARD, highlighted the importance of developing scalable innovations and taking them beyond individual interventions towards systems-level and landscape-level deployment. He noted that the discussions at the Congress had emphasised the need to strengthen the scaling of innovations for wider impact.

The second day of Dryland Congress 2026 focused on strengthening institutional partnerships, accelerating scientific innovation, building resilient farming and seed systems, and ensuring greater participation of women and youth in the transformation of dryland agri-food systems. The Congress will conclude with further deliberations on pathways for translating scientific knowledge and partnerships into scalable solutions for dryland regions.

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