



Dryland Congress 2026 Concludes with Delhi Declaration on Drylands

Three-Day Dryland Congress Ends with Call for Science, Innovation and Partnerships to Transform Drylands

Robust Data Systems, Living Laboratories Essential to Build Resilient Dryland Agri-Food Systems: Dr M.L. Jat, Secretary DARE

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The three-day Dryland Congress 2026 concluded today in New Delhi with a strong call for greater South–South and triangular cooperation to accelerate solutions for dryland agriculture. The final day coincided with the United Nations Day for South–South Cooperation and culminated in the adoption of the Delhi Declaration on Drylands (3D), setting out a shared agenda for transforming dryland agriculture through collaboration, knowledge exchange, innovation and collective action across the Global South. It was endorsed at the closing plenary by participating governments, institutions, partners and delegates of the Dryland Congress 2026.

Addressing the concluding session, Dr M. L. Jat, Secretary, DARE and Director General, ICAR, emphasised the need to bring foresight to the centre of efforts on dryland agriculture. He called for a strong institutional mechanism and stated that the ICAR-National Institute of Agricultural Economics and Policy Research (ICAR-NIAP) should be mandated to lead foresight work on dryland agriculture. He also stressed the need for robust data and information systems for dryland agri-food systems, as well as common innovation grounds or living laboratories that connect research with practice and policy.

Dr Himanshu Pathak, Director General, ICRISAT, underlined the strategic importance of drylands for global food security and called for the deliberations of the past three days to be translated into concrete action. He emphasised the need to distil the deliberations and prioritise them into short- and long-term actions, moving from ideas to concepts and from concepts to concrete action and implementation by bringing together expertise, knowledge and camaraderie.

The Valedictory Session also highlighted new partnerships and collaborations emerging from the Congress. New agreements and Memoranda of Understanding were announced with the Global Crop Diversity Trust. ICRISAT also exchanged MoUs with Avior Life Sciences, NIFTEM, Wipro Limited, and the Angul and Rayagada District Administrations of Odisha, further strengthening partnerships supporting innovation and action in dryland agriculture. The Co-Chairs of the Congress, Dr D.K. Yadava, DDG (Crop Science), ICAR, and Dr Stanford Blade, DDG (Research & Innovation), ICRISAT, presented a summary of the three-day deliberations and highlighted key outcomes and recommendations emerging from the conference.

Earlier, the day opened with a Commemoration Ceremony for the UN Day for South–South Cooperation, featuring messages from the UN Secretary-General, the FAO Director-General and UNOSSC Director Ms Dima Al-Khatib. Dr Himanshu Pathak, Director General, ICRISAT, shared the vision of the International Solidarity for South-South Cooperation in Agriculture (ISSCA) and highlighted the importance of strengthening partnerships across the Global South. Representatives of ICRISAT, ICAR, CGIAR, RIS, NABARD and the CGIAR Capacity Sharing Accelerator reaffirmed their commitment to advancing South–South cooperation for greater impact.

This was followed by the session “Knowledge Without Borders: Advancing South–South and Triangular Cooperation,” convened with CGIAR. Two panel discussions examined approaches to making South–South and triangular cooperation effective and taking successful models to scale. Speakers from national agricultural research systems in Ethiopia, Senegal, Brazil, China and India, along with representatives from CGIAR, FARA and APAARI shared experiences and perspectives.

The Congress also witnessed the presentation of the ISSCA Global Awards 2026, an annual flagship initiative recognising proven agricultural innovations from institutions across the Global South with strong potential for scale and cross-country adaptation. The inaugural edition received 170 nominations from 34 countries across Asia, Southeast Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America and the Caribbean. The ISSCA Global Award for Transformative Excellence (Mega Award) was presented to ICARDA, Lebanon, for TAAT Wheat Compact Technologies: Heat-Tolerant Wheat Varieties; CIMMYT, Mexico, for e-Agrology 360; and Odisha Livelihoods Mission, Government of Odisha, India, for Women-Led Sustainable Farming for Nutrition and Rural Resilience.

The Crop Improvement & Production Technologies awards went to Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI), Bangladesh, for BARI Chinabadam-9; University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharwad, India, for GPBD 4; and Department of Agricultural Research (DAR), Myanmar, for climate-smart, early-maturing chickpea, pigeonpea and groundnut varieties. The Natural Resource Management & Climate Resilience awards recognised the Karnataka State Department of Agriculture for Krishi Bhagya; NECTAR, India, for integrated banana pseudo-stem processing; Department of Agriculture, Government of Bihar, for rejuvenating Aahar–Pyne landscapes; and Sustainable Farming Solutions, Malawi, for digital land-restoration stewardship.

The Agribusiness & Market Systems awards recognised BIID Foundation, Bangladesh, for e-Krishok; Tamil Nadu Agricultural University for the TNAU-FPO Linkage Programme; and Nigerian Stored Products Research Institute for its Parabolic-Shaped Solar Dryer. The Digital Agriculture awards went to the Department of Horticulture, Government of Andhra Pradesh, for the APMIP Digital Ecosystem and the Agriculture, Farmers Welfare and Co-operation Department, Government of Gujarat, for Krushi Pragati.

The Livestock Improvement & Production Technologies awards recognised WorldFish, Bangladesh, for its improved carp seed system and International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), Kenya, for the Participatory Indigenous Chicken Breed Improvement Program (PIC-BIP). In addition, 16 Best Poster Awards were presented to students and research scholars, recognising promising research and emerging scientific talent in dryland agriculture.

Held under the theme “Transforming Dryland Agriculture with South–South Cooperation,” the Congress concluded with a renewed commitment to translate scientific knowledge into action, scale proven innovations and strengthen partnerships for resilient and sustainable dryland agriculture across the Global South.

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