Dr. P.K. Mishra addresses the 22nd Foundation Day of PPVFRA and Plant Genome Saviour Award Ceremony

Dr. P.K. Mishra calls for linking farmers' traditional knowledge with scientific research, seed systems and markets

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Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, Dr. P.K. Mishra, today called for recognising farmers as custodians and innovators of India's agricultural biodiversity and linking their traditional knowledge with scientific research, seed systems and market opportunities. Addressing the 22nd Foundation Day of the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Authority (PPVFRA) and the Plant Genome Saviour Award Ceremony, Dr. Mishra noted that the occasion marked 25 years of the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act, 2001.

He said India's rich agricultural biodiversity was vital for developing crops resilient to climate change, water stress, pests and diseases, while preserving traditional knowledge, food cultures and community livelihoods. He highlighted India's 22 agro-biodiversity hotspots and cited Koraput in Odisha, recognised by FAO in 2012 as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System, as an example of community-led conservation.

Highlighting India's distinctive framework for farmers' rights, Dr. Mishra said the Act balanced plant breeders' rights with recognition of farmers as conservers, cultivators and developers of plant varieties. Nearly half of the varieties registered under PPVFRA were farmers' varieties. He also emphasised the role of benefit-sharing provisions and the National Gene Fund in ensuring fair returns to communities conserving genetic resources.

Referring to India's scientific capabilities, he noted that the National Genebank at ICAR-NBPGR was the second largest in the world and that around 3,000 climate-resilient crop varieties had been developed under the National Agricultural Research System. He also highlighted the potential of Geographical Indications in creating economic opportunities for distinctive agricultural products.

Dr. Mishra highlighted India's contribution to international efforts on farmers' rights through its engagement with the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, the 2022 Governing Body session in New Delhi and the 2023 Global Symposium on Farmers' Rights. He also referred to the Indore Declaration adopted by BRICS Agriculture Ministers and the establishment of a Global Forum on Farmers' Rights in Seed Systems.

Calling for a shift from recognition to empowerment, Dr. Mishra emphasised strengthening community seed banks and field gene banks, connecting traditional knowledge with modern scientific research, and linking farmers' varieties with quality seed systems, Farmer Producer Organisations and wider markets. He called for promoting farmer entrepreneurship and ensuring fair and transparent benefit-sharing so that conservation translated into sustainable economic opportunities.

Concluding his address, Dr. Mishra said farmers must be recognised not merely as participants in India's agricultural transformation but also as contributors and beneficiaries of it.Emphasising the need for sustained economic returns for farmers conserving traditional varieties, he observed: “An award honours a farmer once; a seed chain, a market and a fair share of benefits sustain the farmer every season.” He said safeguarding agricultural diversity was a shared responsibility of farmers, scientists, universities, industry, the State and society, and congratulated the Authority and all award recipients.

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