

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
ON THE OCCASION OF INAUGURATION OF THE CII
AGRO TECH INDIA - 2018**

Chandigarh, December 1, 2018

1. I am glad to be in Chandigarh and in this region of hardworking farmers and enormous agricultural legacies and achievements. I would like to congratulate the organisers of Agro Tech India 2018 – the Confederation of Indian Industry, in partnership with the Union Ministries of Agriculture and of Food Processing Industries; the governments of Punjab and Haryana; and other institutions. This event is a celebration of agriculture. It brings together farmers and industry, as well as farm technologists and innovators, from across the country and abroad.

2. The importance of Agro Tech India is apparent from the sheer number of exhibitors – 158 from India and 37 from other countries. I would particularly like to welcome international participants who have arrived from five continents and some 20 countries. I am happy to learn of full-fledged country pavilions being put up by Canada, China and the United Kingdom.

Ladies and Gentlemen

3. Agriculture is more than just a profession. It is a calling, a tradition and a way of life. Agriculture has been central to Indian identity for thousands of years, ever since our ancestors planted grains in the Indus Valley. Even today, agriculture employs 50 per cent of our work force and makes up about 15 per cent of our nation's gross value added or GVA.

4. The selfless efforts of our farmers have contributed to national development and security and to the wellbeing of our people. Initiatives such as the Green Revolution – which was carried

out with such determination in Punjab, Haryana and neighbouring states – have helped convert a country of chronic food shortages and imports to a food surplus economy. This was possible due to visionary policymakers, ingenious agricultural scientists – and above all, farmers who gave their sweat and toil.

5. Today India is a leading producer of several food commodities – cereals, fruits, vegetables, milk, eggs and fish. In the crop year 2017-18, food grain production has reached 284.83 million tonnes, a new record. Horticulture output is even higher. High-value crops are increasingly being produced. Agricultural growth has improved not just food security but also nutritional security. In turn, this has led to health and cognitive benefits for younger generations and strengthened our human capital.
6. The Indian farmer has proven to be remarkably adaptable – unafraid of innovation, new techniques and scientific inputs. The Indian farmer has been bold in embracing risk and converting risk into opportunity. As a result India has emerged as an exporter of key agricultural and allied products such as rice, marine products, fruits, vegetables and even flowers. Our farmers supply commercial crops like cotton to the rest of the world.
7. The challenge is to scale up. Indian agriculture needs a renewal of its marriage with contemporary technology; protection against climate change, price fluctuations and demand shocks; and sustained investment by and partnership with business. Together these will enhance agricultural value and competitiveness – as well as lead to better incomes. Indeed these are the areas on which the government has been focusing.
8. Take for example the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana. It was started in 2015 with the objective of Har Khet ko Pani and

More Crop per Drop. Its twin objective was not just to provide more water but also to extract more value out of every unit and every drop of water. So far the Yojana has covered about one million hectares. Similarly the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana for crop insurance has provided a safety net to about 25 million farmers. These are only a start. In the years to come, we have to cover more farmers and more farm land.

9. The government is working towards greater efficiency in agricultural markets. These will give our farmers access to a wider customer base and allow them to get better prices. In 2016, India inaugurated the National Agricultural Market or eNAM as an online platform for buying and selling agricultural commodities. This platform has linked farmers, traders and buyers across India. In addition, 22,000 rural haats have been set up or are being upgraded to Gramin Agricultural Markets to facilitate better deals for farmers.
10. Incentives have been provided for Farmer Producer Organisations. Schemes such as the Mudra Yojana and Start-up India are enabling small farmers to venture into food processing at a local and micro-level. All this is leading to a positive churn in the Indian agricultural space.
11. I am particularly happy at progress being made in connecting farming to food processing under various heads and through various programmes. The link between agriculture and industry must be strengthened for a seamless value chain and minimal wastage. To this end, 42 mega food parks are being set up and 228 integrated cold chain projects are underway in different parts of India.

Ladies and Gentlemen

12. Through human history, agriculture has moved ahead with cross-fertilisation. Bringing together different types of seeds or plants with different properties has fostered innovation and led to greater farm productivity and prosperity.

By permitting this process, nature holds a lesson for us. It tells us that agriculture is the ideal stage for partnerships, for symbiosis and for mutual learning and sharing.

13. Partnerships can be formed across sectors and across geographies. In previous decades, manufacturing and mechanisation have been of appreciable utility to agriculture. Today a strong relationship is emerging between agriculture and the services sector. Biotechnology, nanotechnology, data science, remote-sensing imaging, autonomous aerial and ground vehicles, and artificial intelligence hold the key to generating more value for agriculture.
14. Geographically too farmers are learning from other farmers and other farming cultures – within the country and across continents. While absolute numbers in India are impressive, there is a gap that our agriculture needs to fill in terms of higher productivity and checking wastage in the farm-to-fork value chain. This is where the experience and expertise of other countries can be very useful. I am confident that Agro Tech India 2018 will promote specific partnerships that will benefit India's farmers.
15. There are three areas in which participants at this event can build fruitful associations. First, the Indian agricultural sector is still at an early stage of technology adoption. Many of our farmers have limited access to mechanised tools, let alone to cutting-edge knowledge. Technology-based applications and services can help unlock economic impact in agriculture and help farmers get more for their labour and their produce.
16. Second, public-private partnerships in agriculture have the potential to modernise the sector and provide numerous benefits to small farmers. PPPs can be instrumental in developing agricultural value chains; conducting joint research

that focuses on innovation; building market infrastructure; and delivering business development services to farmers.

17. Third, we must boost Indian investments in agricultural R&D. While the National Agriculture Research System played a major role in the Green Revolution, recent years have not seen a major breakthrough. Many inputs are needed for that major breakthrough. More resources – including from private players – are certainly among them.

Ladies and Gentlemen

18. There is one other subject I would like to touch upon. The farmers of this region are a matter of pride for our country. Progressive farmers of Punjab and Haryana have never shied away from a challenge and a responsibility to larger society. Today we are facing a problem related to disposal of crop residue and of safe and clean removal of husk or stubble. In an extreme form, the burning of such items is leading to pollution that affects even little children. It is for all of us, including the state governments, the skilled and large-hearted farmers, and other stakeholders, to come up with a solution. And no doubt technology will help us find a solution.

19. I am sure that Agro Tech India 2018 will discuss all such issues and come up with practicable and definite outcomes. I wish the organisers and participants all the very best!

Jai Kisan, Jai Vigyan!

Jai Hind!