

'Timely weather forecast to farmers led to Rs 42000 cr profit'

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"Timely" weather forecast services to 11.5 million peasants resulted in economic profit worth Rs 42,000 crore during 2015, Minister for Science and Technology and Earth Sciences Harsh Vardhan said today.

He also made a strong pitch for expanding the web of facilities to all farmers to attain estimated profit of Rs 3.20 lakh crore.

Referring to a report by National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER), which carried out a third party audit of the forecast services provided last year, he noted 11.5 million farmers were benefited by the facilities during the year and sought to increase the coverage to all, that is, 90 million peasants, in time to come.

The minister claimed fishing community too reported similar benefits last year and noted strengthening marine forecast services was high on the government's agenda.

"According to NCAER, timely forecast services to 11.5 million farmers through SMSes resulted in profit of Rs 42,000 crore (on four principal crops) in GDP in a year.

"The profit is estimated to increase up to Rs 3.20 lakh crore, if we manage to cover each of the farmers under the services. We are taking efforts for that," he told reporters here.

Stating agro-meteorological advisory services (AAS) are being provided from 130 centres across 633 districts in the country currently, Harsh Vardhan said the network will be expanded at sub-district level with the help of NGOs.

"We will provide crop-specific information to farmers. Based on such scientific information, they can decide on whether to delay sowing of a crop or sow some other crop for a shorter period, if they should use pesticides or not, what to do if heavy rainfall is predicted to occur," he said.

The minister though did not specify any deadline by when all the farmers are expected to be brought under the net of the services, saying it is an on-going process.

"When we took charge, only two million farmers were benefited by forecast services. Now, according to the report, 11.5 million farmers are being benefited. So, we will continue to witness rise in number," Vardhan said.

The minister also said similar economic benefit expected when fishermen are provided with timely forecast services in terms of potential fishing zones (PFZ) and adverse conditions.

Union Minister of State for Science and Technology and Earth Sciences Y S Chowdary also attended the briefing.

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The GDP contribution of PFZ and Ocean State Forecasting services for the fisheries sector has been assessed at 3.9 per cent in 2012-13 from 1.9 per cent in 1995-96 and can potentially increase to 7.8 per cent. Accordingly, the additional income to fishermen is aggregated at Rs 3,034 crore annually, Vardhan said.

"There are 72 coastal districts where there are fisheries harbours. We will engage fishermen from there in awareness and training programmes," he said, adding the ministry has been asked to prepare action plans to achieve these targets by 2019.