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Farmers' suicides in India- Causes and Solutions

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#### Introduction

Agriculture is the backbone of Indian economy as it supports food security of the nation and provides various livelihood opportunities to the rural people (Vasta, 2013). According to Indian Economic Survey, 2018 report, agriculture is considered as one of the major contributing sectors of national economy as it employs about 50 per cent of the Indian workforce and has contributed nearly 17-18 percent to country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Low and volatile growth rates under the sector and the recent escalation of an agrarian crisis in several parts of the country pose a threat not only to national food security but also to the economic well-being of the nation as a whole. Farmers are facing distress due to many factors such as poverty, indebtedness, crop failures, distress, lack of awareness on new technologies, inadequate debt, marketing of produce, natural calamities such as floods, drought, erratic rainfall and depletion of water levels (Sravanth and Sundaram, 2019).

Thus, this severe distress has led to dramatic rise in the number of suicides among farmer communities in various parts of the country. A record of 251260 farmers has committed suicide in India over the last 15 years. The States which come either under dry zone or areas under rainfed agriculture have reported the highest number of suicides the major states are Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh follow closely, with two thirds (68.4%) of farmer suicides being reported from these states (Ashalatha and Rajeshwari, 2018). Trend of farmers' suicide over 16 years has been presented in Table 1 and major states with most farmer suicides in India have been listed in Table 2.

Year	Suicide committed by the
	farmers (Number)
2000	16603
2001	16415
2002	17971
2003	17164
2004	18241
2005	17131
2006	17060
2007	16632
2008	16196
2009	17368
2010	15964
2011	14027
2012	13754
2013	11772

**Table 1**: Number of farmers (Farming/Agricultural labourers) committed suicide during 2000-2015 in India

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2015	12602
2014	12360

Source: National Crime Records Bureau, 2015

 Table 2: Top 5 states with most farmer suicides in India in 2015

State	Suicide committed by the farmers (Number)
Maharashtra	3003
Telangana	1358
Karnataka	1197
Chhattisgarh	854
Madhya Pradesh	581

Source: National Crime Record Bureau, 2015

#### Causes

Considering a single defining cause for farmer suicides in India is impossible (Merriot, 2017). So here are some of the reasons for the agrarian distress, vagaries of nature like drought, flood, erratic rainfall and cyclone, land fragmentation as fragmented land holdings result in low productivity, due to rising agricultural costs- rural wages are depressed resulting in rural distress causing migration of youth towards cities, lack of institutional credit- indebtedness being the single largest cause of farmers suicide, agricultural marketing and lack of infrastructure as well as ineffective government response as focus is on credit and loan, rather than productivity, income and farmer prosperity.

Other causes like poverty, property dispute, debt burden, health issues, family problems (marriage of daughters) and personal issues. If reviewed deeply increase in input costs like chemicals, seeds, fertilizers, which are to be procured from outside, water disputes and crisis, dominance of money lenders and contractors over marketing channels are the most important factors responsible for farmers suicide.

### Solutions

Giving monetary relief is not an effective solution. The solutions should aim at the entire structure of agriculture. Here are some solutions that could help in improving the state of the farmers by reducing the dependency of agriculture on nature, making institutional finance available to every farmer, farmers need to be guided and advised on economical methods of cultivation, small farmers should be encouraged to develop alternative sources of income to reduce the dependency on agriculture as the sole source of income (Basha 2018). Strategies for doubling farmers' income should be opted by giving emphasis on irrigation along with end to end solution on creation of resources for 'More crop per drop' Krishi Sinchayi Yojana' and by providing quality seeds and nutrients according to the soil quality of each farm.

Organic farming method can be one of best option for farmers. Since, it leads to sustainable agricultural development with better organic manures that can improve soil fertility, better yield, less input cost and better return than conventional farming (Mariappan and Zhou, 2019). This will further reduce the cost of cultivation; will reduce socio-economic problems such as farmers' suicides in the future of Indian agriculture.

"Give a man a fish, he will eat for a day but teach him how to fish, he will eat for the rest of his life", so goes the popular saying, the case of our Indian farmers is similar to this,

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what they need is a means to sustain throughout their lives without having the face the desperation that adversity drives them to. If India has to shine, it is these farmers that need to be empowered.

### Conclusion

Efforts should be targeted at improving the entire structure of the small farmers where in the relief is not given on a drought to drought basis, rather they should be taught to overcome their difficulties through their own skills and capabilities. The Government needs to come up with pro-active solutions and the nation has to realize that farmers' suicides are not minor issues happening in remote parts of a few states, it is a reflection of the true state of the basis of our economy. Hence, it can be concluded that, unless all these causes are simultaneously dealt, the situation cannot be improved.

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