

Welcome Address

By

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Good morning friends.

We are delighted to welcome you to the First Mustard Conclave being organised by SEA in the historic city of Jaipur. It seems Almighty God has also showered His blessings on this Conclave with a bumper Mustard harvest after two years of low production. We had deliberated on the venue for this Conclave and the unanimous view was that there cannot be a better city than Jaipur for hosting this Conclave. **Rajasthan is the Mustard State of India and Jaipur qualifies to be the Mustard Capital of India just like Indore, the Soya Capital of India.**

Friends, as you all may be knowing SEA has been Organising International Castor Conference for last 15 years and the success of the same has prompted us to take up the challenge of giving similar thrust to Mustard .We Intend making this Conclave an annual feature of SEA Calender and with your support we hope our efforts would make a difference to Mustard production. **This Conclave would be totally focused on Mustard along with crop estimates and demand supply projections.**

Why Mustard..?

The importance of mustard in the food chain of Indians cannot be trifled with. For a majority of North Indians and people from Eastern India no meal is complete if some dish is not cooked in Mustard oil. In spite of such importance mustard production over the years has stagnated around 6 million ton level and the yields have also stuck around 1.0 mts per hectare.

Mustard is one oilseed which has the potential of reducing India's dependence on ever increasing imports .Being a high oil bearing oilseed, unlike Soya, any breakthrough in its cultivation would go a long way in augmenting domestic supplies.

Friends, Indian imports of Edible Oils has already reached alarming levels of close to 15 million tons and the increase every year is around 1.0 million ton. At this rate of growth and with stagnant local production we would be importing close to 25 Mln tons by 2025. This is a scary scenario and would result in forfeiture of our Edible Oil security. Can our Nation afford this? The answer obviously is NO. The trouble is that in spite of the fact that we are aware of the looming threat on the horizon we are doing precious little to remedy the situation. Mustard Conclave is a small step in the effort to remedy the situation.

A few years back I had written an article on weaning away the farmers of Punjab and Haryana from Wheat /Rice crop cycle which was playing havoc with the water table of these states. I was given to understand the water table was dropping almost 30 cms. per annum. Nothing much has changed since then. India does not need so much rice and wheat which chokes our warehousing system year after year. **Instead of wheat rice cycle we should encourage Mustard/Corn cycle in atleast 25% of land in these states.**

For Southern States we should allow free import of wheat as has been done this year. Needless to mention it is more expensive to send wheat from Northern India to South than moving it from Black Sea. Its a win win situation and would free a lot of land for mustard cultivation. Food for thought?

GM Mustard:

We are a nation of great debaters .The success of Arnab Goswami's programme on Times Now is a case in point. We have been debating for ages on introduction of GM variety of mustard seed but to no avail. The best way to stall any project in India is to approach courts and get a stay order. Our NGO s are experts in making use of this tool and have ensured GM mustard trials are not allowed to be undertaken.

At a personal level I fail to understand why India has to oppose technological interventions in Agriculture. It is no secret that Indian yields are woefully low and may be just about 30% of world average .The only area where GM has been allowed, yields have gone up exponentially. BT cotton has changed the rural economy in Gujarat and there is no reason why the same cannot be replicated in case of mustard in Rajasthan ,UP and other mustard growing states. All this talk of GM mustard harming the health of our citizens is nothing but mere hog wash.We have been eating GM Oils for ages and our cattle has been merrily eating GM BT cotton cake and we are not aware of any health issues. Needless to say the whole world has been eating GM food for decades without any problems.

Why not allow our farmers and consumers the option of choosing what to grow and eat.

I am sure the deliberations during the course of the day would help in clearing a lot of cob webs.

Crop Forecast:

This year we are breaking away from tradition of putting out crop numbers through Consensus among stakeholders. We felt the system was flawed as doubts always remained about the sanctity of the crop figures. To eliminate all biases creeping into crop estimations we have hired the respected A C Nielson to do crop survey and report on crop numbers basis their findings at field level. I am sure all stakeholders would appreciate this welcome change.

Further, we have lined up an array of eminent personalities as speakers and their views should help us in building consensus on way forward to reach a level of 10 million tons of mustard production. I am sure this is achievable.

All the best and thank you for your attention.