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Mains Practice Questions

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Q. In light of the recent farmers' protests, discuss the causes of agricultural distress in India and suggest measures to tackle these issues. (250 words)

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Approach:-

- Highlight the issue.
- List the causes of Agrarian distress.
- Suggest measures to address the issue.

Introduction

- Recently Mass protest was launched by farmers for farm loan waiver due to their inability to pay back loan due to crop failure or low productivity; collapsing farm prices, poor income, institutional constraints etc.
- Indian agriculture is confronted with high price volatility, climate risks, and indebtedness. Government investment too in the sector remains low.

Body

Causes of Agrarian distress

- **Fragmented land holdings**
 - It creates difficulties for marginal farmers to access credit or new technology, severely affecting farm productivity and their incomes, making them entirely dependent on usurious moneylenders.
 - Lack of non-farm employment opportunities has resulted in excessive dependence on agriculture.
 - There is a huge burden of agricultural labour on scarce land resource which ultimately leads to seasonal and disguise unemployment.
- **Institutional Constraints**
 - There is an overall shortage in infrastructure such as- poor rural connectivity, shortage of cold storage, unavailability of market place etc due to lack of finances, manpower and proper facilities.
 - Rural areas suffer from inadequate linkage to the formal credit system.
- **Low level of technology**
 - Yield of the majority of crops in India is lower than the world average due to low irrigation, use of low quality seeds, low adoption of the latest technology, and knowledge deficit about improved agricultural practices.
 - Affordability of Technology remains a challenge due to the dominance of small and marginal farmers.
 - Agricultural research in the country is constrained by resource inadequacy, regulations and intellectual property rights (IPR).
 - A huge gap exists between the demand for and supply of skills in agriculture, hindering diversification, adoption of precision agriculture and on farm post-harvest value addition.

Measures to be taken

- **Increasing incomes**
 - Knowledge dissemination system needs to be made more robust and farmers should be made aware to take up more High Value Crops instead of cereal crops.
 - Recycling and utilizing agricultural waste would give a further fillip to farmers' income.
 - Several breakthroughs have the clear potential for quickly doubling farmers' income such as ZBNF (Zero Budget Natural Farming), herbal inputs that improve soil quality and make plants more pest resistant etc.
- **Reducing risks in agriculture**
 - There is a need to provide impetus to improve technologies by strengthening the seed sector by replacing the old variety of seeds with hybrid and enhanced seeds along with developing climate resilient varieties of crops to increase productivity.
 - Developing mechanisms to ensure minimum support prices in the event of a crash in farm harvest prices.
 - Strengthening the Soil Health Card scheme to increase the efficiency of fertilizer usage.
 - Subsidy should be provided on liquid fertilizers to encourage fertigation with micro-irrigation.
- **Developing Agri-infrastructure**
 - Development of value chains by linking production and marketing centers, and giving them infrastructural status in order for them to avail fiscal benefits.
 - Focus needs to shift on precision agriculture such as micro irrigation, climate smart technologies, internet of things (IoT), and the use of technology.
 - Integrating Farming value chain, covering production, postproduction, processing and other value addition activities will turn cost effective for the agriculture sector.
- **Improving the quality of rural life**
 - Government collection centers and warehousing facilities should be set up at the village/block level to benefit small and marginal farmers.
 - Need for revisiting criteria for identification of rural habitats for road connectivity.
 - Private entrepreneurs should be incentivized to establish small farm implement mechanization hubs and big machinery hubs.

Way forward

- More resources should be allocated to agriculture to increase irrigated area, improve soil health, promote agro-processing, and cover production risk, among many others.

- Despite various schemes already existing in the agriculture sector, it continues to remain a laggard, in order to ensure flourishing and vibrant agriculture effective implementation of schemes at the root level is required.