

Karnataka

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Jury wants pro-farmer research to sustain agriculture

Special Correspondent

Suggests that farmers should be made stakeholders

— Photo: K. Bhagya Prakash



FOR GREATER SAY: Farmers at 'The Verdict by a Farmers Jury on Democratising the Governance of Agricultural Research' organised by the Alliance for Democratising Agricultural Research in South Asia and the Institute of Agricultural Technologists in Bangalore on Saturday.

BANGALORE: "With today's farmer unable to either return to traditional farming or pursue expensive modern farming practices, there is a need for pro-farmer agricultural research".

This was the verdict delivered by 30 selected farmers, who had gathered as a jury at Fireflies Intercultural Centre on Kanakapura Road near here for three days between December 1 and 3 as part of a meeting on Democratisation of Agricultural Research.

The farmers' jury had been put in place by Alliance for Democratising Agricultural Research in South Asia to address the agricultural crisis plaguing the country.

Although the need for "stakeholder" involvement in decision making in all other fields had been recognised, the jury felt that this question was singularly absent in agricultural research.

Hence, the farmer finds himself at crossroads.

The jury said the Government must seriously recognise farmers' innovations and suitably compensate them just the way scientists in formal institutions were rewarded.

"We don't want research in hybrid crops, which demand pesticides.

"Instead, we demand research on local land races that are adaptable to their eco-systems, are drought-resistant, provide quality and tasty food and fodder," the jury said.

Agriculture universities and other public sector research institutions should make farmers partners in their research and offer an equal share of profits resulting out of this research to farmers, said the farmers' jury while delivering their verdict.

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The jury made out a case for introduction of agriculture in the school syllabi with a view to educating the younger generation on farming.

Convener of the alliance P.V. Satheesh told *The Hindu* that the increase in farmer suicides, agri-sector debts, massive acquisition of farming land for industrial purposes and threats related to new technologies had been central to the shape and dimensions of the crisis agriculture sector faced in the country.

"A major contributor to the crisis is the focus of agricultural research, which is gradually moving away from farmers' concerns and is embracing agri-business as the solution.

The solutions are worse than the crisis itself and clearly reflect the policy-farming disconnect", he said.

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