

Farmers demand open, transparent agri R&D

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A Farmers' Round Table held in Dharwad has demanded that the state agricultural universities in Dharwad and Bangalore must present their research initiatives of the year in front of a farmers' jury mainly of the small and marginalised and commit to respect its verdict.

The Round Table also demanded that at every Krishi Mela held across the state, there should be a mini farmers' jury to openly and transparently discuss the state initiatives in farming research and farming policies.

These demands were made in the Dharwad Farmers' Round Table which was held at the Kannada Cultural Centre here recently. Some 35 farmer leaders from Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha, Sayavava Krishi Mission, Krishaka Samaja, Sarvodaya Maha Sangha and Krushi Prayog Parivar from Dharwad, Haveri, Koppal and Gadag Districts were present.

The Round Table was second of the six farmers' round tables being planned across Karnataka by ADARSA (Alliance for Democratising Agricultural Research in South Asia). According to ADARSA co ordinator P V Satish these round tables are an effort to meant to spread the underlying values of the message of Raita Teerpu (Farmers' Judgement), a unique farmers' jury on agricultural research held at Bangalore in December 2009.

Through Raitateerpu, for the first time in the world, small and marginal farmers questioned the current pattern of agricultural research and gave a historic verdict.

The jury led by women, indigenious, dalit, small and marginal farmers heard 12 top agricultural scientists, researchers, social scientists, consumer activists, pastoralists and environmentalists and then asked them searching questions on the current trends and intent of agricultural research.

Prakash Bhat explained the concept of food sovereignty. He said that unless farmers moved to the concept of food sovereignty, they can never achieve freedom in their farming decisions which was crucial to tide over the current agrarian crisis.

The round table came up with 22 point declaration called the Dharwad Declaration on Farmers' Judgement. The significant ones among them are:

- A strong organisation in the state is necessary to challenge the priorities and content of agricultural research.
- An immediate debate must be started with agricultural universities to pressure them to engage in pro farmer researches.

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- All the farmer organisations must take the message of farmers' judgement to their village units and thoroughly disseminate it.
- More and more farmer leaders must engage themselves in taking forward the message of Raita Teerpu
- Civil society organizations [NGOs] and their networks must internalise the values of Raita Teerpu and spread its message
- Many dialogues must be initiated with citizens and consumers to make them aware of the significance of the Raita Teerpu process.
- Agricultural lands must not be used for non agricultural purposes even by farmers themselves.
- State must never acquire any agricultural land for non agricultural uses.
- While deciding on their cropping system, farmers must not have monetary profit as the sole consideration.

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