



Budget 2024: One crore farmers to be initiated into natural farming next 2 years

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Agriculture Ministry has been preparing detailed Cabinet note to launch National Mission on Natural Farming

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Promoting natural farming will help increase demand for organic manure, a key by-product of biogas production |

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Finance Minister
Nirmala
Sitharaman
announced in
her Budget
speech that in
the next two
years, one crore
farmers across
the country will
be initiated into
natural farming
supported by
certification and
branding.

Experts say it is
not immediately
clear whether
this will only
cover those
farmers who
have not been
using any
chemical
fertilizer or
pesticides by
tradition or
target to shift
those using
chemicals.

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“The announcement, it seems, will not entail any expenditure as farmers doing natural farming on their own for years and are not part of any governmental scheme can be easily organised through such an initiative. Though they do not need any fiscal incentive, nevertheless, if the government meets the costs on certification and branding, it will be a great service to boost their income,” said an expert.

The minister said its implementation will be through scientific institutions and

willing gram panchayats. Besides, 10,000 need-based bio-input resource centres will be established, she said.

According to sources, the Agriculture Ministry has been preparing a detailed Cabinet note to launch the National Mission on Natural Farming, for which standards have also been devised similar to the one on organic products.

The need for the shift — from targeting the area coverage to number of farmers now — was felt as 30-40 per cent out of

about 10 lakh farmers re-shifted to chemical farming after three years when they received complete financial incentives of about ₹12,000/hectare under the Bharatiya Prakritik Krishi Paddhati (BPKP), which is a sub-scheme of the Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY).

The BPKP scheme had a total outlay of ₹4,645.69 crore for six years (2019-20 to 2024-25) and is implemented on demand driven basis. Major States promoting natural farming include Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Gujarat,

Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. “In comparison to China and developed countries, the usage of chemical fertilizers and pesticides is low in India. The current initiative as announced will be an impetus to a large number of farmers already practicing natural farming. There is a myth that chemical-free agriculture is natural farming, that needs a clarity with a proper definition of natural farming in an ‘Indian way’ to create USP for our farmers,” said

S
Chandrasekaran,
a noted trade
policy expert.

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**‘Timely
access’**

Satyajit Hange,
co-founder of
Two Brothers
Organic Farms,
said, “Success
would depend
largely on timely
access to
financial aid
under the
appropriate
schemes along
with support for
branding and
certification. The
Budget has
underscored the
key role scientific
institutions,
cooperative
societies and
gram panchayats
could play in

educating traditional and new-age farmers to improve their productivity and self-reliance when climate-related concerns continue to hamper their produce.”

Crisil said that establishment of 10,000 need-based bio-inputs units will support the area under organic farming, which has increased at 23 per cent (CAGR) between 1990 and 2023. This comes at a time when chemical fertilizers have been significantly affecting the crop response ratio (quantity of fertilisers used versus yield), it said.

According to Gaurav Kedia, Chairman of Indian Biogas Association, said promoting natural farming will help increase demand for organic manure, a key by-product of biogas production. "The bio input resource centres can serve as hubs for knowledge dissemination and adoption of biogas technology. The support to FPOs can facilitate the marketing of fermented organic manure (FOM) as a value-added product," Kedia said.