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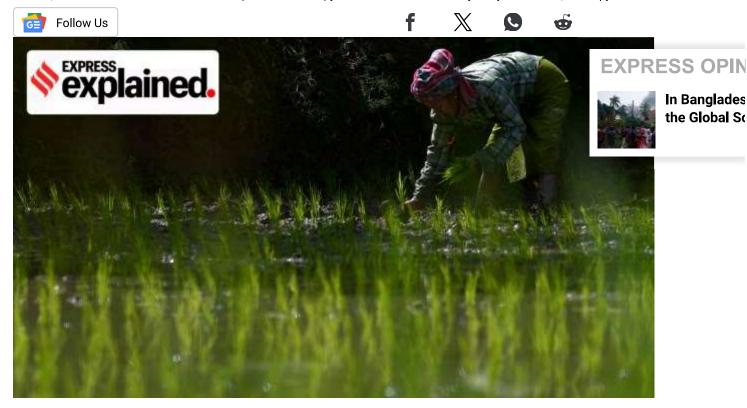
Big plans for farms: What is in the Rs 2,800-cr Digital Agriculture Mission?

The Mission, which seeks to create robust Digital Public Infrastructure in the agriculture sector, will bring together data and information about farm lands, crops, and yields, and is expected to benefit both individual cultivators and the farm economy

Written by **Harikishan Sharma** (Follow)

New Delhi | September 2, 2024 19:41 IST

✅**NewsGuard**

Farmers plant seedlings at a paddy field on the outskirts of Agartala, capital of the Northeastern state of Tripura, India. (Abhisek Saha/Express File Photo)

The Union Cabinet on Monday (September 2) approved the Rs 2,817-crore **Digital Agriculture Mission** for the creation of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) in the farm sector.

What is the Mission, and what impact will it have on farmers and the farm sector?

The DPI Mission

The mission to create Digital Public Infrastructure in the agriculture sector is similar to the government's flagship e-governance initiatives in other sectors, which have over the years resulted in digital solutions such as the Aadhaar unique ID, the DigiLocker document folder, the eSign electronic signature service, the unified payments interface (UPI) instant money transfer protocol, and electronic health records.

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Three major components of DPI are envisaged under the Digital Agriculture Mission: AgriStack, Krishi Decision Support System (DSS), and Soil Profile Maps. Each of these DPI components will provide solutions that will allow farmers to access and avail of various services. (Details below)

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The mission also aims to create a tech-based ecosystem, the Digital General Crop Estimation Survey (DGCES), which will provide accurate estimates of agricultural production.

Funding for Mission

A budgetary allocation of Rs 2,817 crore has been made for the Mission, of which Rs 1,940 crore will be provided by the Centre, and the rest by the states and Union Territories (UTs).

The launch of the Mission is part of the Agriculture Ministry's activities planned for the first 100 days of the Narendra Modi government in its third term. The Mission will be rolled out across the country over the next two years (until 2025-26).

The Mission was planned for launch in the financial year 2021-22, but the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic upset these plans, a source said. The government subsequently announced the building of Digital Public Infrastructure for agriculture in the Union Budgets of both 2023-24 and 2024-25.

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In her Budget speech on July 23, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said: "Buoyed by the success of the pilot project, our government, in partnership with the states, will facilitate the implementation of the Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) in agriculture for coverage of farmers and their lands in three years.

"During this year, digital crop survey for Kharif using the DPI will be taken up in 400 districts. The details of 6 crore farmers and their lands will be brought into the farmer and land registries."

Three pillars of Mission

The Agriculture Ministry is in the process of signing Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with state governments for the creation and implementation of the DPI for agriculture. Nineteen states have come on board so far, a source said.

The basic IT infrastructure for implementing AgriStack, one of the three DPIs to be built under the Mission, has been developed and tested on a pilot basis, the source said.

(i) AgriStack

The farmer-centric DPI AgriStack consists of three foundational agri-sector registries or databases: Farmers' Registry, Geo-referenced Village Maps, and Sown Registry, all of which will be created and maintained by state/ UT governments.

FARMERS' REGISTRY: Farmers will be given a digital identity ('Farmer ID') similar to Aadhaar, which will be linked dynamically to records of land, ownership of livestock, crops sown, demographic details, family details, schemes and benefits availed, etc.

Pilots projects for the creation of Farmer IDs have been carried out in six districts — Farrukhabad (Uttar Pradesh), Gandhinagar (Gujarat), Beed (Maharashtra), Yamuna Nagar (Haryana), Fatehgarh Sahib (Punjab), and Virudhunagar (Tamil Nadu), another source said.

According to sources, the government aims to create digital identities for 11 crore farmers, 6 crore of whom will be covered in the current (2024-25) financial year, another 3 crore in 2025-26, and the remaining 2 crore farmers in 2026-27.

Last month, Rs 5,000 crore was earmarked for incentives for states to create the Farmers' Registry under the Scheme for Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment, 2024-25. This amount is separate from the budgetary allocations made for the Digital Agriculture Mission.

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The Ministry of Finance circulated guidelines for the scheme to states on August 9. Once the Registry is created, individual farmers will be able to digitally identify and authenticate themselves to access benefits and services, obviating cumbersome paperwork, and with little or no need to physically visit various offices or service providers, sources said.

CROP SOWN REGISTRY: The Crop Sown Registry will provide details of crops planted by farmers. The information will be recorded through Digital Crop Surveys

— mobile-based ground surveys — in each crop season.

A pilot Digital Crop Survey was conducted in 11 states in 2023-24 in order to develop the Crop Sown Registry, a source said. The government aims to laun Digital Crop Survey across the nation over the next two years, covering 400 in the current (2024-25) financial year, and the remaining in FY2025-26, sou said.

GEO-REFERENCED VILLAGE MAPS: The maps will link geographic information on land records with their physical locations.

(ii) Krishi DSS

The Krishi Decision Support System, which was unveiled recently, will create a comprehensive geospatial system to unify remote sensing-based information on crops, soil, weather, and water resources, etc.

This information will support crop map generation for identifying crop sown patterns, droughts/ flood monitoring, and technology-/ model-based yield assessment for settling crop insurance claims by farmers.

(iii) Soil Profile Maps

Under the Mission, detailed Soil Profile Maps (on a 1:10,000 scale) of about 142 million hectares of agricultural land are envisaged to be prepared. A detailed soil profile inventory of about 29 million ha has already been completed, sources said.

Digital General Crop Estimation Survey (DGCES)

This will be a major push to improve the existing crop yield estimation system, and to make the data more robust, addressing concerns that are sometimes raised about the accuracy of India's agriculture production estimates.

Better data will help government agencies make schemes and services such as paperless Minimum Support Price (MSP)-based procurement, crop insurance, and credit card-linked crop loans more efficient and transparent, and develop systems for the balanced use of fertilisers, the sources said.

The digitally captured data on crop-sown area, along with the DGCES-based yield and remote-sensing data, will help improve the accuracy of crop production estimates, the sources said. The data will also help facilitate crop diversifica evaluate irrigation needs according to the crop and season.

The DGCES will provide yield estimates based on scientifically designed crop-cutting experiments, which will be useful in making accurate estimates of agricultural production, according to the sources.

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