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## ***"Impact of Covid-19 on Indian Food and Agriculture"***

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### **Abstract:**

The COVID-19 pandemic is a global health crisis that is already having devastating impacts on the world economy - both directly and through necessary measures to contain the spread of the disease. These impacts are also being felt by the food and agriculture sector. While the supply of food has held up well to date, in many countries, the measures put in place to contain the spread of the virus are starting to disrupt the supply of agro-food products to markets and consumers, both within and across borders. The sector is also experiencing a substantial shift in the composition and - for some commodities - the level of demand.

**Key Words:-** Bio-fuels, Pesticides and Nutrition

### **Impacts on agricultural production and incomes :-**

Limits on the mobility of people across borders and lockdowns are contributing to labour shortages for agricultural sectors in many countries, particularly those characterized by periods of peak seasonal labour demand or labour-intensive production. For example, newly implemented travel bans within the European Union, as well as the closure of the Schengen Area, have significantly reduced the available workforce for the fruit and vegetable sector in a number of European countries. Harvesting season is imminent for many products in the northern hemisphere, and a shortage of labour could lead to production losses and shortages in the market. In many countries, this comes on top of existing difficulties in sourcing seasonal labour.

On the other hand, disruptions downstream from the farm gate are in some cases causing surpluses to accumulate, putting a strain on storage facilities and, for highly perishables, increasing food losses. For some products, supply side disruptions are being compounded by demand side reductions (in particular foods typically eaten away from home, and luxury items - see below). In combination, these effects are putting a strain on farm incomes. The COVID-19 pandemic may also affect the availability of key intermediate inputs for farmers. Production of pesticides declined sharply and only resumed gradually after production plants were shut down following the outbreak. Low availability and/or high prices of inputs such as pesticides could weigh on yields and crop production in 2020 and 2021, particularly in developing countries.

### **Shifts in consumer demand:**

Most major economies are expected to enter recession as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the OECD has estimated that for each month the necessary containment measures continue the drop in output is equivalent to a decline in annual GDP growth of up to 1.5 percentage points. In developed countries, the macroeconomic shock to consumer demand and employment will reduce overall food demand only slightly, but is expected to have a stronger impact on demand for higher value premium products and those with more service addition. Moreover, lower oil prices - a result of forecast lower GDP due to COVID 19 and an oil price war - are reducing demand for crops for biofuels.

The collapse in consumption of food away from home will have a particularly large impact in developed countries. The closure of restaurants and food service providers in schools, hotels and catering businesses has shrunk the market for some commodities - for example, potatoes for French fries, seafood, and dairy products - with some of those losses compensated for by increased demand from supermarkets. This significant change in the composition - and for some commodities, the level - of demand will put whole value chains under pressure. Manufacturers are adjusting production and distribution. These demand shifts are a direct result of containment measures to control the disease.



Some of these shifts could also have the potential to re-shape dietary habits and consumer behaviour over the longer term, in particular should confinement measures prove long-lasting. The uncertainty associated with how consumption will evolve after the pandemic is likely to affect investment decisions by some firms, which could also affect the future development of food chains. For some, however, these changes could present new business opportunities.

#### **Disturbance for food supply chains:-**

Measures put in place to prevent or slow the spread of COVID-19 are also disrupting the functioning of food supply chains. The impacts on labour are of particular concern. The food sector will be vulnerable to the negative impacts on the workforce from the spread of COVID-19 and will face additional production and distribution costs as a result of health and safety measures introduced to reduce the exposure of their workforce. While the virus transmission mechanisms are not fully understood, two clear mechanisms are: (i) people working in close proximity; and (ii) people touching contaminated surfaces. Managing these risks will require immediate changes to the way food is processed and distributed. Many of those changes are already underway, but may be difficult to implement in the short term due to challenges related to sourcing masks and protective equipment for workers.

#### **International markets in agriculture and food products open, transparent and predictable**

The COVID-19 pandemic has not so far caused a supply shock for staple grains. Nevertheless, several large exporters have restricted exports, while some countries that rely on imported grains to feed their populations have ramped up purchases to ensure they have sufficient stockpiles to see out the pandemic.

- Ensure market transparency via the provision of timely market information. A lesson from the 2007/08 food price crisis is that transparency and information sharing are important. This can help mitigate panic buying and generate trust in markets. It can also improve trust among countries, thereby encouraging co-operative solutions. Countries can also benefit from peer learning in terms of what kinds of policy approaches are proving effective.

- Provide clear and transparent communication at the domestic level. A number of governments have taken steps to deter panic buying and hoarding by ensuring the release of timely information about the availability and safety of food stocks.

- Avoid trade restrictions. Export restrictions increase instability in global markets and undermine supply, particularly for countries that are more exposed to price fluctuations. OECD analysis has shown that export restrictions and the breakdown of international trade pose a significant threat to food security by reducing the availability of food, which can result in a significant increase in undernourishment in the case of an economic crisis.

The Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS) is an inter-agency platform to enhance food market transparency and policy response for food security. It was launched in 2011 by the G20 Ministers of Agriculture following the global food price hikes in 2007/08 and 2010. Bringing together the principal trading countries of agricultural commodities, AMIS assesses global food supplies (focusing on wheat, maize, rice and soybeans) and provides a platform to co-ordinate policy action in times of market uncertainty.

#### **Minimal the avoidable trade costs of measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19:-**

New non-tariff measures (SPS and TBT measures) are already being put in place that could have disruptive impacts on global food value chains. While such measures can be necessary to manage sanitary risks, they could also significantly increase costs for food exporters, particularly if requirements differ between markets. There is thus a need to reduce unnecessary costs associated with such measures, with a view to keeping safe and affordable food available globally. Indeed, some WTO Members have notified that they are implementing measures to facilitate trade through, for example, the use of expedited submission of electronic documentation.



- Ensure that SPS and TBT measures implemented in response to the risk of COVID-19 are science-based, transparent, non-discriminatory and do not unnecessarily disrupt trade or increase trade costs. The need for such measures should also be re-evaluated as evidence about risks becomes available.
- Ensure sharing of best practices and, to the extent possible, harmonization of measures between countries to smooth processes at the border. Regionally coordinated strategies that allow flexibility within existing regulatory frameworks and build trust among trading partners can also help ensure that food is able to move to where it is needed.

**Ensure the food and nutrition needs of vulnerable populations are met - now and in the future**

Most major economies are expected to enter into recession as a result of measures implemented to combat COVID-19, and considerable job losses have already occurred. This may have a significant impact on food insecure populations in both developing and developed countries.

In developed countries, some groups, like the elderly, chronically ill and poorer households, may be particularly vulnerable to short-term shortages of food as a result of the closure of school meal programmes; closure of, or increased demands upon, food banks; and panic buying that reduces essential supplies and low cost options in supermarkets. Ensuring the food security and nutrition needs of vulnerable populations is essential, including through ensuring access to appropriate social safety nets. Many countries have swiftly implemented policy responses in this area mostly by expanding funding for pre-existing food assistance programmes and in some cases implementing new measures. Governments are also working with non-governmental Address the immediate needs of the vulnerable populations, for example, by means of emergency food assistance or targeted transfers.

- Further develop social protection systems. Cash transfers – both conditional payments, through systems such as adaptive safety nets, and unconditional transfers – provide a more efficient and effective response to food security concerns than market interventions, including those operated through public distribution systems.
- Explore co-operative global solutions to address the needs of the poorest countries and ensure that COVID-19 does not result in a food crisis in these countries.

Looking ahead, COVID-19 offers an opportunity to enhance the resilience, sustainability, and productivity of the agriculture and food sector

**Learn from the emergency to grow preparedness for future shocks**

- Work with stakeholders and international organizations to identify weaknesses, choke points and vulnerabilities in agriculture and food systems, and critical services that need to be strengthened in order to increase preparedness for systemic risks and identify opportunities to strengthen networks between public and private stakeholders to make these investments.
- Accelerate investments and reforms that would further strengthen the resilience of the food system to a range of risks, for example:

**Support the transition to a more resilient agricultural sector and food system**

- Ensure that support measures intended to provide temporary relief to farmers and other food system stakeholders are consistent with wider socio-economic policies, reach vulnerable socio-economic groups and contain clear exit strategies.
- Consider wider opportunities to repurpose agricultural support in ways that provide clear public goods, in particular in the form of climate change mitigation and improved environmental outcomes.
- Secure and build on positive trade facilitation steps that have been taken to reduce distortions at the border, to reinforce the role that global markets can play in ensuring securing and stable food supplies.
- Continue efforts to build and maintain mechanisms to ensure transparency and policy dialogue on food systems, such as AMIS, to build confidence in global markets and co-operation.
- In moving forward, consider how adopting an integrated approach can help ensure the resilience of the global food system. With enhanced resilience the food system will be better able to deliver on the triple challenge: providing safe, affordable food for a growing world population and livelihoods for the



many people involved in food around the world (including the majority of the world's poor who live in rural areas), while ensuring environmental sustainability in the face of complex environmental challenges and a climate emergency.

**Conclusion:-**

There is an opportunity today to not just respond effectively to the current crisis, but to roll back distortive, inefficient and environmentally harmful support, thereby freeing up financial resources for investments in a more productive, sustainable and resilient food system able to meet new challenges. This, together with accompanying regulatory reforms, can help build an enabling environment for the entire food system that is aligned with natural resource limits, a changing climate, market demand, technological developments, and "low probability, high impact" catastrophic risks. The unanticipated shock of COVID-19 underscores the need for a shift from "business as usual" policies to a more forward looking policy package that invests in the productivity, sustainability, and the resilience of the global food system.

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