

Session 2 - Indian Cotton 2021 and Beyond - How to Increase Cotton Productivity / Yield in India

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I would like to wish the members of CAI a happy World Cotton Day.

I would like to make the following points mainly on the current stagnation of cotton productivity.

For the last 7-8 years the productivity of Indian cotton has been hovering around 450-475 kg lint per ha. When we analysed the district wise data on productivity, it revealed that nearly 26 districts are very efficient in productivity with average yield of 600-750 kg lint per ha, 16 efficient with more than national average of 550-650 kg and the inefficient 115 districts with yield of 280-400. I think if we concentrate on improving the yields of these inefficient areas then we can attain double the productivity. Now this can be done.

Majority of these inefficient producing areas fall in rain-dependent tracts of Maharashtra, Telangana, Karnataka and may be in AP.

They can be brought under new planting pattern called “High Density Planting System” (HDPS) with deployment of short duration, compact and pest resistant cultivars.

Micro-irrigation is a very powerful factor in improving yield in rain-fed areas. Our studies in Vidarbha show that some 5-10% farmers use drip irrigation and are consistently getting a yield of 800-1000 kg lint per ha. A policy decision in this regard will be very useful.

Government must shed its negative attitude towards GM technologies in seed. Nearly 20 years have passed since the introduction of Bt, and the country has been under unwritten moratorium for the new genic technologies. Already farmers have illegally planted HT/Bt cotton every year, due to expensive manual weed control. There are also drought-resistant and gossypol-free GM technologies available which if permitted can revolutionise cotton productivity.

Cotton cultivation needs community approach for management of pests and diseases. It was demonstrated way back in 1997-2000 in one village level project called Ashta Project that ran for 3 years on community basis to show doubling of farmers income through community approach.

My organisation, SABC and Agrovision Foundation have taken up management of pink bollworm pest using the new technology of mating disruption called PB-ROBE under Project Bandhan in three villages in Nagpur districts on 300 acres with farmer participation. I am sure if we can unite all the stakeholders in the value chain of cotton, from seed-farmers, pesticides dealers, ginners, spinners and cloth makers, there will be win-win situation for all. India can easily retain its King Cotton position in the world.