Maruru farmers to create sustainable agri-business model to up incomes

Over 1,000 farmers - both men and women - in Maruru village, Anantapur district, Andhra Pradesh, a dryland region, will create a self-sustaining agri-business model aimed at doubling farm incomes. The Walmart Foundation, as part of its global philanthropy support, and the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid-Tropics (ICRISAT), in its continuous efforts to turn dryland farming into a profitable enterprise, are working together to accelerate value chain benefits with innovative post-harvest management and food processing opportunities for over 6,000 smallholder farmers in the southern state.

The primary processing unit for groundnut, launched in Maruru village recently, will help the farmers’ collective realise an additional income of up to $1,00,000 annually, according to ICRISAT. This two-year programme will enable farmers to move into an entrepreneurial model to seize income opportunities while creating new farm-based employment prospects for women and youth. Launching the project at the Accion Fraterna Ecology Centre (AFEC) campus in Anantapur, Marco Ferroni, chair, System Management Board, Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), said, “Smallholder farmers in Andhra Pradesh operate under challenging conditions of extreme weather events, and dryland farmers face even more hardships due to climate vagaries which deprive them of sustaining agriculture.”

Coupled with better crop practices, processing units handled by the farmers themselves as a business opportunity will help them link their produce to the retail and last-mile markets and capture a better price,” he added. Rajneesh Kumar, senior vice-president and chief corporate affairs officer, Walmart India, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Walmart Inc, said, “The key to improving the livelihoods of farmers and enhancing their income, is to strengthen the entire agricultural supply chain.” A robust supply chain that provides market linkages and logistics support, and helps farmers get fair price for their produce, as well as reduces food wastage is crucial to promote sustainable agriculture in India,” he added. Eliminating the systemic barriers that prevent farmers from increasing their productivity and market access, therefore, must attain priority, which is why the Walmart Foundation’s grant of $2 million to ICRISAT to help create an improved business model is crucial,” Kumar said.

Multiple interventions have been planned as part of the project at various levels in the agricultural value chain, ranging from improved cropping system-based approaches and drought management strategies to post-harvest management and food processing opportunities. AFEC will be the implementing partner at the field level, coordinating project activities. Nigel Kerby, chair, governing board, ICRISAT, stated that an enabling environment would be created under the project will include regular training and capacity building of the stakeholders at all levels to turn the project into a self-sustaining business model. The processing unit set up at Maruru village includes a decorticator-cum-grader to separate the