Farm health in times of corona: Govt must ensure the agri supply-chain remains uninterrupted

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The evolving situation around Covid-19 is becoming critical. Governments have already announced guidelines for citizens to keep themselves safe. Packages have also been declared to safeguard interests of various sectors. What could be the possible fall out on the agriculture sector—50% of population still depends on it—is indeed a cause of concern.

After the announcement of nationwide lockdown for 21 days, the FM declared a relief package of Rs 1.76 lakh crore. At a time when large crowds of poor and marginalised people are struggling to sustain; and the perils of hunger, joblessness, disease, and death looming large in their faces, the announcement of the economic relief package is indeed an appropriate step and provides a ray of hope. In a bid to provide immediate and material assistance to workers in the unorganised sector, migrant workers, as well as the urban and rural poor who have been left without food and money in their hands, the FM detailed the modalities for transfer. As per the newly christened Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana, an additional 5 kg of wheat or rice per household, and 1 kg of pulses available regionally will be given free for three months to 60% population.

Majority of rural people are expected to benefit from these measures. The immediate benefit would be from the early release of first installment of Rs 2,000 directly under PM-KISAN. Moreover, the government has increased the wage rate of workers under MGNREGS, that is expected to take care of the needs of wage earners including agricultural labourers (who don’t get benefit under PM-KISAN).

While the salaried middle-class is learning to cope with this unprecedented shutdown across the country, it is creating substantial hardships for the poorer sections, who have lost only means of livelihood.