

Growers taking up 'natural farming' may get more aid

An assistance of ₹32,500/ha will be provided over 4 years

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The Centre will soon raise the assistance on "natural farming" by more than two-fold to ₹32,500 per hectare in three years, making the subsidy at par with what organic farmers currently receive.

The Agriculture Ministry has already finalised the ₹2,500 crore proposal on natural farming and it may soon be sent to Cabinet for approval, sources said. Under the plan, assistance will be provided over four years and the target is to bring in 5-6 lakh hectares of additional area under natural farming by 2026, sources said.

Until now, government-assisted natural farming area has reached 4.09 lakh hectares for which ₹49.81 crore has been disbursed in eight States, including Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Kerala. About 290 districts account for consumption of 85 per cent of fertilisers used in the farm sector and the government will not promote natural farming in these areas due to a possible fall in production, sources said.

Hike in assistance

The proposed increase in assistance has come on the suggestion of Gujarat Governor Acharya Devvrat, a major architect of the Centre's push for chemical-free farming. He proposed that farmers practising organic and natural farming receive the same subsidy. Earlier, support of assistance for natural farming was



drawn from Bhartiya Prakritik Krishi Padhati (BPKP), which was introduced as a sub-scheme of Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) in 2020-21. Each farmer under the scheme gets ₹12,200/hectare for three years for cluster formation, capacity building and continuous hand-holding.

In the 2022-23 Budget, both the BPKP and PKVY have been subsumed under Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY).

Branding the products

The Agriculture Ministry recently set up a committee to recommend standards for products to be produced through adoption of natural farming. "It is a new concept, branding has to be done as a premium product over organic if natural farming is to succeed. Only a separate Board can do justice looking after export opportunities as done in case of coconut," said an expert.

The current BPKP scheme emphasises exclusion of all synthetic chemical inputs and promotes on-farm biomass recycling with major stress on biomass mulching, use of cow dung-urine formulations and plant-based preparations.

Allocation under RKVY has been tripled to ₹10,433 crore for 2022-23 from ₹3,712.44 crore (BE) in current fiscal. The hike is over five times from revised estimate.