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BUSINESS

Budget 2026: What changes for Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, and Fisheries? Nirmala Sitharaman BIG promises, what experts say

Commenting on Budget 2026, Mr Sandeep Sabharwal, Group CEO, SLCM Ltd, suggests it is a "bold vision" for Indian agriculture, achieving seven per cent sector growth and advancing rural poverty alleviation.



Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday emphasised the agriculture sector, proposing a push on high-value crops such as Coconur, sandalwood, cocoa and cashew in coastal areas. Coconut Promotion Scheme to be launched to increase production, as well as Bharat-VISTAAR (Virtually Integrated System to Access Agricultural Resources), a multilingual AI tool to integrate the AgriStack portals and the ICAR package on agricultural practices with AI systems for farmers.

The government aims to diversify farm outputs, increase productivity, enhance farmers' incomes, and create new employment opportunities. It also proposes plans to support the productivity of Agar trees in the North East and nuts such as almonds, walnuts and pine nuts in our hilly regions.

Commenting on Budget 2026, Mr Sandeep Sabharwal, Group CEO, SLCM Ltd, suggests it is a "bold vision" for Indian agriculture, achieving seven per cent sector growth and advancing rural poverty alleviation. "Promoting high-value crops—coconut via tree replacement schemes, cashew, cocoa for self-reliance and exports by 2030, sandalwood, and walnuts—will effectively diversify farmers' incomes. Bharat Vistaar, our multilingual Artificial Intelligence platform integrating the agri-stack, Indian Council of Agricultural Research practices, the Kisan Call Centre, and real-time weather Application Programming Interfaces, equips farmers with precise advisories to reduce risks. Credit-linked subsidies for livestock Farmer Producer Organisations in animal husbandry and aquaculture promise robust rural employment, driving sustainable prosperity," says Mr Sabharwal.

Budget 2026: Bharat-VISTAAR, high-value crops, farmers' income

CropLife India says, "These initiatives will translate into consistent farm-level outcomes only if they are supported by stronger on-ground extension systems and sustained investment in crop science research to help farmers manage climate stress, rising pest pressure and resistance."

"Integrating Agri Stack's digital farmer records with ICAR's validated package of practices can support more precise, need-based decisions at the field level. However, digital advisory delivers results only when it is backed by effective on-ground extension systems that ensure guidance reaches farmers in time and is applied correctly in local conditions," says Mr Ankur Aggarwal, Chairman, CropLife India and Executive Chairman & Managing Director, Crystal Crop Protection Ltd.

"Farmers today operate in a far more complex risk environment. Climate variability is increasing uncertainty, pest pressures are changing, and resistance is affecting the performance of older solutions. At the same time, farmers moving into high-value crops must meet stricter quality and food safety standards. Addressing these realities requires sustained investment in crop science R&D, faster access to newer and low-dose technologies, and policies that help farmers manage costs, protect yields and comply with Good Agricultural Practices and international standards such as Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs)," Mr Aggarwal added.

The industry association further reiterates that "improving farmer incomes in this evolving risk environment requires a supportive and predictable policy framework. In line with its long-standing position, the association urges the Government to consider providing a 200 per cent weighted deduction on R&D expenditure, reducing GST on agrochemicals from 18 per cent to 5 per cent, and retaining a stable and uniform basic customs duty of 10% for both technical raw materials and formulations to improve affordability and access for farmers."

Budget 2026: Animal Husbandry, Fisheries

While Livestock contributes close to 16% of farm income, Nirmala Sitharaman proposes to roll out a loan-linked Capital subsidy support scheme for the establishment of veterinary and paravet colleges, veterinary hospitals, diagnostic laboratories and breeding facilities in the private sector. In addition, the government pushes for collaboration between Indian and foreign institutions, which will also be facilitated. The government aims to strengthen the fisheries value chain in coastal areas and enable market linkages involving start-ups and women-led groups together with Fish Farmers Producer Organisations.

"The focus on developing 500 reservoirs and Amrit Sarovars in coastal areas will help strengthen fish availability at the source, and involving women and local groups will bring greater stability and continuity to the supply chain, something the seafood industry has long needed. The budget also gives a fresh momentum to fisheries by focusing on sustainability, infrastructure and stronger market linkages. Investments in landing centres, cold chains and processing will help reduce losses and improve price realisation. The decision to allow duty-free fish catch by Indian vessels in the EEZ and on the high seas, and to treat landings at foreign ports as exports, is a positive step that improves competitiveness and opens up better access to global markets, especially with the US Tariff scenario," says Divya Kumar Gulati, Chairman, CLFMA of India.

"In animal husbandry, the credit-linked subsidy programme and technology modernisation in dairy and poultry directly address long-standing challenges around productivity and efficiency. By strengthening value chains from accessibility of veterinary professionals to agricultural output and processing, the Budget supports higher efficiency, greater farmer participation in value-added segments and improved availability of milk, eggs and protein-rich foods, highlighting the growing role of allied sectors in India's journey toward Viksit Bharat. The extension of tax deductions for cooperative members supplying cattle feed is another practical measure that helps ease input cost pressures and strengthens the cooperative ecosystem. Taken together, these initiatives can improve farmer-industry linkages, ensure more consistent raw material supply and support sustainable, organised growth across India's protein sectors," adds CLFMA chairman.

"Budget recognises dairy as key driver of farm income stability"

"The Union Budget 2026 recognises dairy as a key driver of farm income stability, nutrition security and rural employment," says Akshali Shah, Executive Director, Parag Milk Foods. She said the announcement of a credit-linked subsidy programme to promote entrepreneurship in animal husbandry, including dairy, is a timely step. She welcomed the initiative of scaling up the availability of veterinary professionals by more than 20,000, which will play a vital role in supporting the dairy industry at the grassroots level.

"For the FMCG and dairy sector, a stronger focus on dairy-led income diversification and allied value chains reinforces the agricultural backbone that supports essential food categories such as milk and dairy products. By encouraging entrepreneurship and investment in dairy enterprises, the Budget creates a supportive environment for sustainable supply chains while contributing to inclusive rural growth," she adds.