

## How the Indian agriculture sector turns food loss challenges into opportunities



By Sandeep Sabharwal, CEO, Sohan Lal Commodity Management Pvt. Ltd. (SLCM)

Every year, India loses approximately 74 million tonnes of food, accounting for 10 per cent of total foodgrain and horticulture production in the country. The prime reason for this food grain loss is inadequate infrastructure, fragmented supply chains, lack of access to new age technology and also barriers in information majorly coming in because of lack of acceptance of new ideas by agri fraternity. The agri industry is making sure that it deals with this multifaceted problem with innovative solutions. This problem of food loss has created multiple opportunities for the agri tech industry to create solutions that were unthinkable earlier. This has led to job creation, better produce, economic growth and value addition to agricultural produce.

In this stead, utilising innovative Farming Techniques have emerged as a steppingstone. Such techniques can ensure that we can easily minimize food loss. Precision agriculture, hydroponics, or vertical farming, which optimize resource utilization and reduce wastage should be the way forward for farmers. Moreover, Technological Interventions are also being created by agri tech leaders. Today mobile apps for real-time market information, blockchain for transparent supply chains, and AI-driven analytics for predictive crop management are available. Though, there will be a need to handhold the agri fraternity and teach them the technology till they become comfortable with it, but the journey towards the goal has already begun.

Infrastructure Development is another area that has seen tremendous improvement in the past decade. Long gone are the traditional warehouses. Today the new, improved cold storage facilities, faster transportation networks, and packaging solutions have enabled the farmer to extend the shelf life of perishable goods. Farmers can make use scientific agri warehousing practices that enable them to timestamp when they store their produce and when they take it out. Online apps are also helping farmers to get their grains certified, which saves time and money and enables them to get the right value for their products.

Community Initiatives such as farmer cooperatives, food banks, and decentralized processing units also add value to surplus produce. In addition to it, Government Policies and Support in the form of subsidies for modern farming equipment, investment in rural infrastructure, and awareness campaigns on proper storage and handling practices are ensuring that the farmer is happy at the end of the day. This will ultimately lead to Market Diversification and thus reduced dependency on traditional channels, exploring avenues such as organic farming, niche markets, and export opportunities to minimize surplus production and associated losses.

Capacity building and training programs for farmers, focusing on post-harvest management techniques, quality control measures, and efficient packaging methods to reduce food loss along the supply chain is already underway but a more focused approach is needed so that these resources reach the farmers. Climate-resilient practices and technologies can also help to minimize crop losses and ensure food security. In the end, we need to ensure that the prime beneficiaries of all our efforts are the farmers. The prime goal is to see that the agri industry grows leaps and bounds within no time at all.