

World Bank to fund \$250-m farm plan

By Chandrika Mago/TNN

Modipuram (UP): As farmers dotting the UP landscape begin to soak in simple new technologies, which save them water and diesel and improve productivity, the World Bank has agreed to fund a \$250-million project, which will help them and hopefully get the country closer to the second green revolution PM Manmohan Singh wants.

Conservation agriculture, says Indian Council of Agricultural Research chief Mangala Rai, will be part of the six-year National Agriculture Innovation Project just agreed to. Expecting to finalise the details in February, Rai says \$56 million will be set aside for basic and strategic research in a project, which will dovetail research and link the entire chain from production to processing, product development and consumption, including health. Through this, they will also look at livelihood security for farmers in specific situations and areas such as inland aquaculture and meat

production. For the first time, they will be stepping beyond the farming system. Other institutes, the private sector and non-governmental organisations may be roped in.

They just need to look at the farmers around them to know how important it is becoming to conserve every input as much as possible without losing yield. Some of the bigger farmers across UP, Punjab, Haryana and other states are now taking to techniques, which are saving them thousands of rupees in an effort that has seen national and international organisations come together.

In UP's Matiala, Kallogarhi and Lalpur villages fields show up the uses of zero tillage, laser land levelling, crop residue management and raised-bed planting. Modest sounding stuff, which essentially translates into planting efficiently to save water, diesel and time while managing the waste left from the previous crop to improve soil health. Most of these need machines.

Levelling land can even give between 3-6% area more

for plantation. Estimates are that levelling 2 million hectares under the rice-wheat system could save 1.5 million hectare-meter of irrigation water, upto 200 million litres of diesel, improve crop yields amounting to \$500 million in three years. So far, this young technology covers 8,000 acres.

Saranjit Singh, whose family owns 50 acres in Matiala, says these techniques ease their job in preparing the hard ground. They save on tractor costs. Levelling ensures that if it took four hours to water a field, it now takes three. All in all, a saving of about Rs 2,000 an acre. Rishipal Singh, a Lalpur farmer, has been enthused by his raised beds into planting strawberry for the first time.

Matiala's Pradeep Singh has had problems but is happy with diesel savings. If he had to use four drums, he now has to use two. Scientists tell you how he initially shied away from the new techniques. Today, he tells you it is the mindset which is stopping others from following them.