Assessment of Government of India's Special Scheme for Release of Pulses to States/UTs at Discounted Rate to be Utilized for Various Welfare Schemes during September 2018 to August 2019

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I. Background

Pulses – An important source of protein in Indian diet

Pulses have been an essential part of the human diet for centuries (FAO, 2019). However, pulses have lately been recognised not only as a nutritious food for the diet but also a very good crop for a sustainable agriculture which can contribute to the achievement of various goals of SDG 2030. Given its important role in the diet, in 2013, the United Nations General Assembly declared 2016 as the International Year of Pulses (IYP). IYP contributed significantly in bringing to light the crucial roles that pulses play in healthy diets, sustainable food production and, above all, in food security.

Pulses are also economical and therefore considered as 'protein for the poor' against animal protein which is costly to afford. Pulses comprise 20 to 25 per cent protein by weight, which is double the protein content of wheat and three times that of rice which makes it an important source of vegetarian protein. Besides being rich in protein, pulses contain a wide range of nutrients, including carbohydrates, dietary fiber, unsaturated fat, vitamins, minerals, amino acids, iron and zinc as well as non-nutrients, such as antioxidants and phytoestrogens. Pulses contribute to reduced colon cancer and s disease, increased satiety, and lowered Body Mass Index and obesity risk (Boye, Zare, and Pletch 2010; McCrory et al. 2010; Jukanti et al. 2012).

In India, there has been a declining trend in the protein consumption.[1] In rural India, the average protein intake has gone down from 63.5 grams per capita per day in 1983 to 57 grams in 2004-05 and further to 56.5 grams in 2011-12. Similarly, in urban areas, the per capita per day consumption of protein has declined from 58.1 grams in 1983 to 55.7 grams in 2011-12. Despite the declining trends of protein intake, both in rural and urban areas, per capita consumption was higher than the daily minimum protein consumption requirement as per the RDA level. However, this is not true with the poorest 30 per cent of the population. Their per capita per day protein consumption is lower than the RDA norms. Their per capita per day protein consumption is 47.5 gram against 48 gram norms in rural areas and 47.2 grams against 50 grams norms in urban areas[2]. One of the reasons for protein deficiency could be vegetarianism of the Indian population. India being home

[1] https://mospi.gov.in/web/mospi/documentinfo/-/document_library/VRN9YwVcuChC/view_file/232094
[2] ib.id.

of the world's 70 per cent vegetarians, pulses add a significant value to Indian diet and is a natural preference. India's higher dependence on this plant-based protein source makes it world's largest consumer, producer, and importer of the pulses.

2015-16 Pulses crisis and Government's Initiatives

The production of pulses in India was consistently lower than national requirements between 2000-2016 (MoSPI and WFP, 2019). As a result, it has shown high price volatility and its availability throughout the year, especially among the poor, remained a challenge. India witnessed a worst pulses crisis during 2015-16. Between 2011-12 and 2015-16, the demand for pulses outgrew domestic supply considerably, forcing the Indian government to increasingly depend on imported pulses. The precarious situation was made even more alarming in 2015-16 by two back-to-back failed monsoons[3]. As a result, the pulses prices in the Indian market shot up to nearly three times.

Government of India took drastic measures to improve the availability of the pulses in Indian market and stabilize its prices. These measures included increase in import of pulses from foreign countries; taking action against hoarders; raising the buffer stock from 0.8 million tonnes to 2 million tonnes. Besides, it also took many steps to increase the domestic pulses production by sharply increasing the MSP of Kharif pulses for the 2016-17 crop year to encourage farmers to grow pulses. The National Food Security Mission (NFSM) was extended in all 638 districts of 29 states and its allocations were also increased to boost pulses production.

These initiatives led to an all-time high production of pulses and its availability within an year. Government of India under Price Support Scheme (PSS) made record procurement of 4.5 million MT of pulses during Kharif 2017 and Rabi 2018 marketing season. Besides, despite record production, India imported 6.6 million tonnes of pulses due to existing commitments leading to a massive domestic supply glut, and a sharp and sustained fall in pulse prices in Indian market. This also led to a severe storage issue of pulses.