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Don't replace subsidised food with cash: Swaminathan

New Delhi, Aug 18 (IANS)

Eminent agriculture scientist and a member of the Sonia Gandhi-led National Advisory Council (NAC), M.S. Swaminathan, has cautioned against the government's plan to replace subsidised food with cash under the proposed National Food Security Act (NFSA).

"The government's plan to replace subsidised ration with cash under the public distribution system (PDS) is faulty. It will lead to low procurement and less production subsequently. This will be bad for Indian agriculture," Swaminathan said while delivering the D.S. Borker memorial lecture Wednesday.

Though the NAC has communicated its recommendations to the government, proposing covering around 75 percent of the population under the draft NFSA, the food ministry is still struggling to work out the details of the right to food legislation.

The main reservations relate to subsidy involved and availability of grains. The government is planning to give cash in place of subsidised grains to the poor to cut distribution losses.

Swaminathan stressed that any food security must entail legal entitlements right from the conception to the cremation stage of a citizen. He also asked the government to expand the food basket under the PDS and include nutritional grains like maize, ragi and bajra.

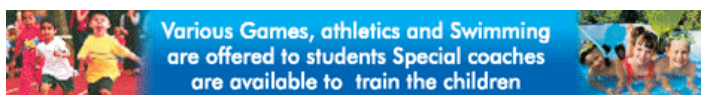
The agri-scientist said while trying to improve the PDS, the government should also address the shortage of storage space for foodgrains which results in wastage.

Presenting his Vision 2047 for the country, Swaminathan further said that a marriage of intellect and labour was required today to boost agriculture. He pointed out that the share of agriculture to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has come down drastically from 50 percent in 1947 to around 17 percent at present.

Swaminathan also spoke about revamping of the Panchayati Raj Institutions to empower the villagers and strengthen community-level water and food security. He suggested training local youth as managers of climate risk and as hunger fighters.

Appreciating the national policy for farmers, he said young people were not taking up agriculture and it would have to be made profitable for small land-holders to attract the youth.

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