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Punjab

Swaminathan for promotion of alternate land use in Punjab

Tuesday, May 10, 2011, 14:46

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New Delhi: Expressing concern over negative water balance in vast tract of irrigated areas of Punjab due to indiscriminate use of pesticides and fertiliser, agri expert M S Swaminathan has suggested alternate land use in the "cradle of the green revolution".

"There is over-exploitation of the aquifer and nearly 70 per cent of the irrigated area in Punjab is showing a negative water balance," Swaminathan considered as "father of the green revolution" told agency on return from the northern state described as "granary of the country."

Nearly 80,000 hectare of crop land in the South West region of Punjab are affected by water logging and salination, Swaminathan added.

"Deficiency of nitrogen, phosphorous and zinc are affecting 66, 48 and 22 per cent of the Punjab soils respectively," the noted farm scientist said.

Suggesting remedies, Swaminathan said the urgent task is the promotion of appropriate changes in land use.

Over 2.7 million hectare are under rice now leading to the unsustainable exploitation of the ground water, Swaminathan said.

"Our immediate aim should be to find alternative land use of about a million hectare now under rice," he said adding this will be possible only if farmers can get income similar to that they are earning from rice.

A possible substitute will be maize or arhar (pigeon pea), he said.

Quality protein maize will fetch a premium price from the poultry industry.

"Arhar being a legume will also enrich soil fertility," he said.

Other high value but low water requiring crops like oilseeds can be promoted, Swaminathan said adding at the same time there could be diversified basmati rice production in over a million hectare land.

Swaminathan favoured setting up of a National Research and Training centre for sustainable agriculture at Punjab Agriculture university for initiating a land and water care movement in the state in association with the farming community.

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