

Declaration adopted at the meeting of Food Ministers, Trivandrum, 19-09-09

The meeting of the ministers and secretaries of State governments in India discussed the proposed version of the Food Security Bill. This declaration of the meeting represents certain consensus positions of States vis-à-vis the Bill.

First, the general vision of an ideal food security system in the country has to be one of universal access to adequate amount of food. The present policy of narrowly targeting of PDS has excluded large numbers of food-insecure persons from the ambit of the PDS.

Secondly, it was agreed that the present methodology of fixing the number of BPL households state-wise at the national level and then thrusting that number on to States is unacceptable. The surveys conducted by each State have shown much higher number of poor households than the national figure. Provisions for meeting the exigencies like natural calamities, economic recession and drought should be included. A revision of BPL lists according to the changing situations in each State should be allowed.

Thirdly, it was resolved that the achievement of food security is a national goal and the central government should take up a major role in leading the policy efforts. States should be allowed the flexibility to fix their own BPL lists, and it should be the duty of the centre to align its estimates with this figure and provide food grains accordingly. If domestic procurement is a constraint, imports should be relied up on.

Fourthly, the scale of issue of ration articles should not be reduced from the present allocation of 35 kg per household to 25 kg per household. The price of this allotment of 35 kg may be reduced from Rs 3 per kg to Rs 2 per kg. States should be allowed to subsidise the prices further, if required.

Fifthly, we cannot divorce the food policy from the larger agricultural policy of the country. A good food policy should also be associated with increasing public investment in agriculture and related activities like storage. The Bill should also make sure that the intervening role of the central government in ensuring adequate procurement at affordable prices is not compromised.

Sixthly, computerisation and bio-metric based e-PDS and e-governance for ensuring transparent, efficient and effective PDS in the country should be taken up as a central sector scheme funded by the centre.

Seventhly, all States should be provided with food grains @ 35 kg per household for APL households based on their requirement.

Finally, the meeting demanded that the draft of the Bill be published immediately and thrown open for larger discussions with the States. Only after that should any step in the direction of legislation even begin.