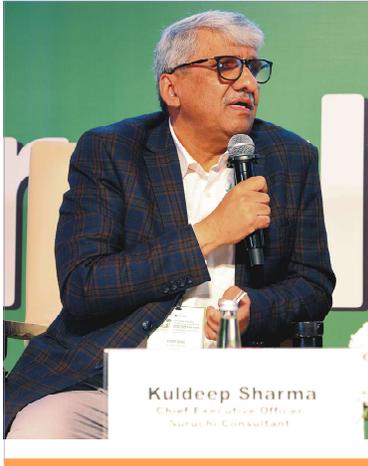


Farmers' Session

Farmer's session was organized, with **Shri K.S. Mani**, Chairman, MILMA as its Chief Guest. The session provided a platform for dairy farmers to voice their concerns and discuss key challenges affecting their livelihoods.



Shri Kuldeep Sharma, CEO, Suruchi Consultant, moderated the session with the following panellists:

Shri Harsh Kumar Bhanwala, Chairman, MCX; Shri Assem Singh Rawat, CEO, Hetha Organics; Shri B. Shivaswamy, MD, KMF; Shri Sanjay Kumar, Chairman,

Vaishal Patliputra Dugdh Utpadak Sakhari Sangh Ltd., Patna; Shri Ashok Chaudhary, Chairman, GCMF Ltd.; and Shri Dhiraj Kumar, DGM, The New India Assurance Co. Ltd.

The Farmers' Session underscored the vital role of dairy farmers in India's rural economy and emphasized the sector's strong growth potential amid increasing national attention. Recent developments—including international trade discussions, Union Budget announcements, and policy initiatives—have brought dairy to the forefront of public discourse. Farmers from across the country

participated, reflecting the sector's wide social and economic significance.

A key highlight was the Government's decision to increase the dairy sector's budget allocation by approximately 29%, demonstrating a renewed commitment to strengthening rural livelihoods. Dairy currently contributes nearly one-third of the country's agricultural GDP, making it one of the most important pillars of the farm economy. About Rs. 6,200 crore has been allocated specifically for dairy development, and importantly, no existing schemes have been discontinued, ensuring continuity in long-term programmes. In addition, Rs. 500 crore has been earmarked for dairy entrepreneurship development, signaling a strong push toward promoting self-reliant farmer-entrepreneurs.

Under the proposed "White Revolution 2.0", cooperative milk procurement is targeted to increase from approximately 6.5 crore litres per day in 2023–24 to 10 crore litres per day by 2028–29. Achieving this goal will require the creation of around 75,000 new cooperative societies, expanding the current network of about 166,000 societies nationwide. This expansion is expected to strengthen market access for farmers and enhance organized milk collection systems across rural India.

Past initiatives have already demonstrated the transformative impact of targeted support. The Dairy Entrepreneurship Development Scheme (2010–2020) involved an investment of about Rs. 1,900 crore and benefited approximately 4.21 lakh individuals, including 25% women and 10% Scheduled Caste and Scheduled





Tribe beneficiaries. Significant productivity improvements were reported: average milk yield from cows increased from about 10–11 litres per day to around 21 litres, while buffalo yield rose from roughly 5.5 litres to about 11 litres, mainly due to improved breeds, better nutrition, and scientific management.

The session emphasized the importance of digital integration and modern service delivery. With widespread smartphone use in rural areas, farmers can now access advisory services, markets, and institutional support more efficiently. Youth engagement emerged as a major focus, as younger generations seek scalable and profitable ventures. New initiatives aim to provide practical exposure through model dairy farms, after which interested participants can establish commercial units with 10–15 animals supported by bank financing. Unlike many agricultural products, milk enjoys a dependable market, with cooperative societies purchasing quantities ranging from 20 to 200 litres per day, ensuring stable income opportunities.

Successful cooperative structures were highlighted as powerful drivers of farmer prosperity. The three-tier system—village society, district union, and state federation—ensures that value addition benefits producers directly. In several regions, farmers receive annual bonuses in addition to procurement prices, effectively increasing incomes by 20–25%. Comprehensive services such as veterinary care, breeding support, insurance, training, and credit access contribute to higher productivity and improved living standards.

Technological innovations are also transforming the sector. Artificial-intelligence-based advisory platforms now provide round-the-clock guidance to livestock farmers, enabling quick solutions to farm-level problems without travel. Scientific breeding tools, including sex-sorted semen, are being promoted to improve genetic quality and milk output.

Entrepreneurial success stories further illustrated the sector's potential. One enterprise expanded from just two indigenous cows to more than 1,100 animals, achieving an annual turnover exceeding Rs.10 crore while maintaining lifelong care of livestock. Diversification is another emerging opportunity, with studies indicating that up to 30% of farmers' income in some regions comes from value-added by-products such as dung-based and urine-based products.

Regional experiences showed encouraging progress as well. In certain states, cooperative procurement has grown by over 12% in the current year, with a large share of profits—sometimes more than 90%—returned to farmers through higher prices, subsidies, and welfare measures.

Overall, the session concluded that India's dairy sector is poised for sustained expansion. With enhanced funding, entrepreneurship support, technological integration, youth participation, and strong cooperative frameworks, dairy farming can continue to serve as a dependable source of income, employment, and nutritional security for millions of rural households while driving inclusive economic growth.

Why India's Dairy Needs a National Fodder Grid?

*During the Farmers' Session of the 52nd Dairy Industry Conference, a forward-looking idea emerged that could reshape the long-term sustainability of India's dairy sector — the creation of a National Fodder Grid. Reflecting on the deliberations, **Shri Kuldeep Sharma, CEO of Suruchi Consultants and Chief Editor of Dairynews7x7.com, articulated this concept in his blog, drawing inspiration from an analogy shared by Shri K.S. Mani, Chairman of MILMA.** The excerpts of his blog is as follows:*

Just as surplus electricity flows seamlessly to deficit states through the National Power Grid, fodder too could move efficiently from surplus regions to deficit ones through a coordinated national system.

The discussion was framed around Kerala's pursuit of milk self-reliance — a goal complicated by structural

constraints. Dairy farming in Kerala faces limited land availability, fragmented holdings, high livestock density, humid climate, and intense competition for agricultural land. Despite these challenges, the state's dairy farmers are among the most educated, institutionally organised, and technology-ready in the country. Yet local fodder production remains insufficient, forcing Kerala to import an estimated 60–70% of its requirement from other states. This highlights a critical reality: even efficient dairy systems cannot function without assured access to quality feed resources.

India today stands as the world's largest milk producer, with output approaching 247 million tonnes annually. The sector contributes more than 5.5% to national GDP and supports nearly eight crore rural households, making it a cornerstone of livelihoods,



nutrition, and inclusive growth. However, beneath this success lies a persistent structural weakness — fodder availability.

Fodder crops occupy barely 4% of India's gross cropped area, while scientific estimates suggest that 10–11% is necessary to sustain current livestock populations and productivity levels. This mismatch has resulted in chronic deficits: approximately 30–35% in green fodder, 20–25% in dry fodder, and 10–15% in concentrate feed. As milk yields rise and dairy farming intensifies, demand for quality feed is increasing faster than supply, raising production costs, reducing profitability, and increasing vulnerability to climate shocks.

Historically, India recognised the importance of livestock nutrition. Post-Independence programmes promoted pasture development, fodder farms, and research initiatives. Institutions such as the Indian Grassland and Fodder Research Institute in Jhansi provided scientific advances in fodder varieties, silage technologies, and grassland management. However, during the White Revolution, policy focus shifted primarily to milk production, procurement networks, and cooperative institutions. While milk movement became nationally organised, fodder planning remained largely a farm-level responsibility.

Subsequent initiatives, including the National Fodder Mission and the National Livestock Mission, brought fodder into policy discussions but not as a central pillar. Today, fodder-related interventions exist across multiple schemes and state programmes, yet they operate in isolation without a unified national architecture.

Importantly, India's fodder crisis is geographically uneven. Irrigated states such as Punjab, Haryana, western Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and parts of Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka often produce surplus fodder due to high cropping intensity and abundant crop residues. In contrast, Kerala, West Bengal, the North-Eastern states, and many coastal and hilly regions face chronic shortages because of land constraints and agro-climatic limitations. Thus, India's problem is not absolute scarcity but spatial mismatch between production and demand.

Expanding fodder cultivation alone is not a feasible solution. Farmers must prioritise food security crops and commercial crops that ensure stable incomes. Increasing fodder area from roughly nine million hectares to more than twenty million hectares would be economically and politically difficult. Therefore, expecting individual

farmers or states to achieve fodder self-sufficiency is unrealistic. A system-level solution is required.

A National Fodder Grid would address this imbalance through coordinated movement of fodder across regions. Supply-side nodes could be anchored by Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs), cooperatives, and large producers, many of which are supported by the National Dairy Development Board. These organisations already aggregate fodder, produce silage and bales, and supply them across districts. On the demand side, dairy cooperatives, commercial farms, and producer groups in deficit regions would consolidate requirements, enabling advance planning and long-term procurement contracts.

Supporting infrastructure would include silage plants, baling units, storage facilities, and rail-linked logistics corridors. A digital fodder exchange platform could facilitate price discovery, quality differentiation, and transparent transactions, reducing volatility for both producers and buyers.

The principal obstacle is transportation cost. Fodder is bulky and low in value relative to its weight, making long-distance movement expensive and often commercially unviable. In the initial phase, targeted public support for transport could help establish supply chains and build market confidence until economies of scale emerge.

Cooperative innovation demonstrates that organised fodder systems can work. The Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation, known for the Amul brand, has taken significant steps to ensure year-round fodder availability in its milk sheds. In collaboration with the Indian Space Research Organisation, satellite-based assessment of fodder acreage has improved planning and risk management. The cooperative is also developing large fodder and silage production hubs to provide assured supply while reducing on-farm storage constraints.

A National Fodder Grid does not require a new subsidy-heavy programme. Rather, it calls for a coordinated institutional mechanism to map surpluses and deficits, align existing schemes, facilitate inter-state movement, and establish quality standards. India successfully built milk sheds during the last century; the next reform frontier is building interconnected fodder sheds.

Treating fodder as a national strategic resource — rather than a local agricultural by-product — is essential for sustaining dairy growth, stabilising farmer incomes, and securing the long-term future of India's dairy sector.