

UPSC Syllabus Topic : GS Paper 3 Agriculture – Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies.

Increasing Fertiliser Subsidy Bill: Causes, Types, and Issues

Causes of Increasing Fertiliser Subsidy Bill:

1. Frozen Maximum Retail Prices:

- Despite rising import prices, maximum retail prices for fertilisers like Urea, DAP, and MOP have remained the same. This has led to increased subsidies.

2. Controlled and Decontrolled Fertilisers:

- Urea is a controlled fertiliser with a statutorily controlled price. Phosphatic & potassic (P&K) fertilisers have indicative maximum retail prices. Non-urea fertilisers (DAP, MOP) are decontrolled, and companies set their prices, but the government pays a fixed per-tonne subsidy to maintain reasonable pricing.

Importance of Fertiliser Subsidies:

1. Boost Agricultural Production:

- Ensures an adequate supply of fertilisers to boost agricultural production. Specific fertilisers, like DAP, are crucial for the cultivation of certain crops.

2. Cushioning Farmers from Price Rise:

- Shields farmers from global price shocks, as seen post the Russia-Ukraine war.

Issues with Fertiliser Subsidies:

1. High Burden on Exchequer:

- The fertiliser subsidy outgo has increased significantly, from Rs 81,000 crore in 2019-20 to Rs 2.5 lakh crore in 2022-23, putting a strain on the government's finances.

2. Environmental Cost:

- Incentivises the use of urea and DAP over other fertilisers, leading to a skewed Nitrogen : Phosphorus : Potassium (NPK) ratio. This adversely affects soil health and crop productivity.

3. Health Impacts:

- Overuse of fertilisers, particularly nitrate-containing ones, pollutes groundwater and streams, impacting health, especially in infants.

Recommendations for Addressing the Issues:

1. Bring Urea under Nutrient-Based Subsidy:

- Decontrol urea and link subsidies to the nutrient content, encouraging farmers to explore a variety of fertilisers.

2. Extend Subsidy on a Per-Hectare Basis:

- Allow farmers to purchase any fertiliser using subsidies on a per-hectare basis, promoting flexibility and choice.

3. Encourage Value-for-Money Products:

- Force companies to develop new, value-for-money fertiliser products tailored to specific crops, soils, and agro-climatic regions.

Addressing these recommendations can not only enhance agricultural productivity but also promote sustainable and environmentally friendly farming practices.

UPSC Syllabus Topic : GS Paper 3- Indian Economy- resource mobilization (taxation).

Deepfake Technology: Concerns, Judicial Views, Legal Provisions, and Global Practices

Deepfake Technology:

Deepfake technology involves the creation of realistic-looking but fabricated content using artificial intelligence, often in the form of manipulated videos or images.

Concerns Related to Deepfake Technology:

1. Political Concerns:

- Infiltration of deepfakes in politics, misleading election campaigns, and influencing political events globally.

2. Gender Vulnerability:

- Predominantly pornographic, with a significant impact on women, leading to harassment and psychological trauma.

3. Other Concerns:

- Threats of misinformation, privacy invasion, and challenges in distinguishing real from fake content, undermining trust in digital media.

Judicial View on Deepfakes in India:

1. The Delhi High Court expressed uncertainty about issuing directions on deepfake control, suggesting that the government is better suited for a balanced approach.
2. Challenges in controlling borderless internet technologies were noted during a PIL hearing.
3. The matter was postponed for further hearing, recognizing ongoing government actions to address deepfake issues.

Legal Provisions Against Deepfakes in India:

1. Information Technology Act, 2000:

- Sections 66E, 66D, 67, 67A, and 67B target privacy violations, impersonation, and obscene content related to deepfakes.

2. IT Rules:

- Prohibits hosting content that impersonates another person and mandates prompt removal of 'artificially morphed images' by social media platforms.

3. Indian Penal Code:

- Sections 509, 499, and 153 address cybercrimes associated with deepfakes.

4. Copyright Act of 1957:

- Applicable if deepfakes use copyrighted material without authorization.

5. Recent Initiative:

- The government is set to introduce a draft on AI regulation, open for public consultation.

Global Best Practices Against Deepfake:

1. United States:

- Executive orders on AI management and specific standards for labeling AI-generated content. Proposed bills aim to require labeling of deepfakes on online platforms.

2. China:

- Strict regulations restricting the use of deep synthesis technology, mandating explicit labeling of altered content.

3. European Union:

- Code of Practice on Disinformation requires flagging deepfake content. The Digital

Services Act and proposed EU AI Act further regulate digital platforms and deepfake providers.

Recommendations for Addressing Deepfakes:

1. Establish safety standards while leveraging AI benefits.
2. Develop a tailored regulatory framework for AI technology.
3. Use regulatory sandboxes for innovation.
4. Balance legal responses without impeding innovation or free speech.
5. Strengthen enforcement mechanisms for existing and new laws.
6. Focus on preventive measures and public awareness about deepfakes.

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