

Press Release

Islamabad, the April 5th, 2021: The National Assembly Special Committee on Agricultural Products deliberated on the design of the 'Kamyab Kisaan' program to promote youth engagement and employment in agriculture sector ; took up the calling attention notice regarding relief for the drought and calamity affected regions across the country and discussed the forward for structural transformation of the agriculture sector.

The Speaker National Assembly Mr Asad Qaiser directed the sub-Committee to furnish concrete budget proposal for agriculture sector and urged the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of National Food Security and Research, Zarai Taraqiati Bank, and members of the committee to devise a mechanism for extending relief to the drought affected regions within two weeks.

The mover of the Calling Attention Notice MNA Ihan Ullah Tiwana briefed that the Committee that farmers in Thal areas produce rain fed organic chickpeas which account for 80% of Pakistan's chickpea production. The region was consistently hit by natural calamities (drought affected) and duly notified by the provincial government. The calamities have affected the farmer crops and earnings resulting in loan default by the farmers in these areas. He proposed that the accrued mark up should waived by ZTBL and that the COVID-19 could be used to partially repay the smallholder farmers' outstanding principal loan amount in the Calamity Affected Mouzas and Villages as declared by the Provincial Government. He also underlined the need for establishment of a state of the art research center to assist the farmers to develop climate resistant varieties and raise their incomes through high density plantation and vertical farming. The Committee endorsed the proposals and recommended immediate action and relief.

Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Youth Affairs Usman Dar briefed the Committee on upcoming program for youth in agriculture and appreciated the support of the Committee for all out support. He stated that low cost loans for agricultural equipments, inputs, capacity building and business development services constituted critical elements of the 'Kamyab Kisan Program'. The Speaker informed the Committee that 'Kamyab Kisan' program was one of the proposed policy instruments of the Special Committee on Agricultural Products and he urged the members of the National Assembly to assist in effective execution of the program on the ground.

The Federal Minister for aviation regretted that the voice of the farmers and pro agriculture politicians was weak, and subsequently the sector was ignored in successive budget programs and relief packages. He stated that the support extended to the sector was not commensurate with the sector's contributions. Endorsing his views, the members of the committee highlighted that practically little relief and priority was given to agriculture sector in the policy planning, and that the sector was successively ignored. It was stated that inordinate delays in decision making pertaining to incentives for the farmers took a heavy toll on declining productivity. They stated that expensive wheat import was preferred over incentives to the domestic farmers to raise agro productivity of Pakistan. The members underlined the need to expand the mandate of the Zarai Taraqiati Bank tailored to the welfare of the farmers. The committee was urged to play a lead role to prevent decline of the agriculture sector and exploitation of the poor farmers.

The Federal Minister for Finance Mr Hamad Azhar stated that agricultural revitalization was top priority of the Prime Minister and assured that the Ministry of Finance would work closely with the committee to turn around the agriculture sector. He stated that the reported sale of urea for this year was highest in the last 10 years and that wheat and sugarcane growers have comparatively received better prices under the current government. Referring to the hike in price of DAP, he clarified that DAP was imported, and the rise in international prices caused an upward surge in the prices of DAP. The Speaker urged the Committee to come up with proposals and mechanism for subsidy on DAP.

WASIM GOHAR
(Secretary Committee)