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Sustainable Agriculture in India: The Growing Importance of Biofertilizers and Biological Inputs

*Harsh Saini[1], Harsh Yadav[2], Dolly Saini[3] and Amit[1]
[1]Researcher, M.Sc. Horticulture, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Rohilkhand University Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, India
[2]Territory Manager, IPL Biologicals Limited, MBA Agribusiness, Sam Higginbottom University of Agriculture, Technology and Sciences, Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, India
[3]Ph.D. Scholar, Horticulture, Guru Jambheshwar University, Moradabad, UP, India
*Corresponding Author's email: harshaa3615@gmail.com

Agriculture plays a central role in India's economy and rural livelihoods. For many years, chemical fertilizers and pesticides have helped increase agricultural production and support food availability. However, continuous and excessive use of these inputs has also resulted in declining soil fertility, nutrient imbalance, environmental pollution, and increasing cultivation costs. Soil organic matter has decreased in many agricultural regions, while climate-related problems such as irregular rainfall, drought, and rising temperatures are creating additional pressure on farming systems. In his recent May 2026 address, Narendra Modi highlighted the importance of sustainable and self-reliant agriculture. He encouraged farmers to reduce chemical fertilizer consumption, adopt natural farming practices, and use renewable energy-based technologies such as solar irrigation pumps. He also emphasized reducing dependence on imported fertilizers and promoting indigenous agricultural systems to strengthen long-term agricultural sustainability and rural development.

Sustainable Agriculture and Resource Management

Sustainable agriculture focuses on maintaining productivity while protecting soil, water, biodiversity, and environmental quality. The objective is to ensure that agricultural production remains economically viable and environmentally responsible over the long term. Practices such as crop diversification, efficient irrigation, integrated nutrient management, and conservation-based farming are increasingly being promoted across India. Government initiatives including the Soil Health Card Scheme, PM-KUSUM, Bhartiya Prakritik Krishi Paddhati, PM-RKVY, and Krishonnati Yojana are supporting this transition. These programs encourage balanced fertilizer use, renewable energy adoption, improved soil management, and climate-resilient agricultural practices.

Biofertilizers and Integrated Nutrient Management

Biofertilizers are microbial formulations containing beneficial microorganisms that improve nutrient availability and support plant growth through natural biological processes. Commonly used biofertilizers include **Rhizobium**, **Azospirillum**, **Azotobacter**, **Phosphate Solubilizing Bacteria (PSB)**, and **Arbuscular Mycorrhizal Fungi (AMF)**. These microorganisms improve rhizospheric activity, nutrient uptake, root development, and soil biological health. The use of biofertilizers along with organic amendments such as vermicompost, farmyard manure, compost, and neem-based products forms an important part of Integrated Nutrient Management (INM). Research studies in vegetable and horticultural crops have shown that integrated use of microbial inoculants and organic inputs can improve crop growth, yield, nutrient-use efficiency, and soil fertility while reducing excessive dependence on chemical fertilizers.

Biological Agri-Inputs and Modern Farming Systems

Biological agri-inputs are increasingly becoming important in sustainable crop production systems.Farmers using biological products together with organic nutrient sources have observed improvements in soil structure, crop vigor, and fertilizer-use efficiency. In several vegetable-growing regions, the adoption of biofertilizers and organic inputs has contributed to better crop quality and improved sustainability of farming systems.

Climate Change and Future Agricultural Sustainability

Climate change is affecting agriculture through increasing temperatures, unpredictable rainfall, and water scarcity. Sustainable agricultural practices such as drip irrigation, mulching, biological pest management, and integrated nutrient management can help improve resilience against environmental stress while conserving natural resources. There is also growing emphasis on crop diversification, particularly toward pulses and oilseeds, to improve nutritional security and reduce import dependence. Renewable energy-based technologies such as solar-powered irrigation systems are further supporting energy-efficient and environmentally sustainable farming.

Conclusion

The future of agriculture depends on balancing productivity with environmental conservation and soil restoration. Excessive reliance on chemical fertilizers may provide short-term gains, but long-term agricultural sustainability requires biologically balanced and resource-efficient farming systems. Biofertilizers, organic amendments, and biological agri-inputs are emerging as important tools for improving soil health, nutrient-use efficiency, and climate resilience. Their integration into modern farming practices can support sustainable agricultural development, improve farmer profitability, and strengthen long-term food and nutritional security.