

Dissecting the National Commission for Women Farmers Act, 2026

By Rajan Kshirsagar, President, AIKS

Against the backdrop of declaring 2026 as the "Year of the Woman Farmer," the Modi government has introduced the "National Commission for the Entitlements and Welfare of Women Farmers Bill, 2026" in Parliament. This legislation is a masterclass in performative hypocrisy from a regime that has waged open economic warfare on the very foundation of Indian agriculture.

While doling out billions in tax breaks to corporate houses and fast-tracking imperialist trade deals that will eviscerate our farm sector, this government starves those who feed the nation. This bill is a smokescreen, a cynical PR exercise designed to salvage its image at the UN, nothing more.

Despite written assurances to enact a law guaranteeing MSP at C2+50%, the government has betrayed farmers yet again. It has thrown Indian agriculture to the wolves through the India-US deal, sacrificing crores of farmers on the altar of corporate greed. By pretending to champion women farmers, it hopes to deflect global criticism of its brutal suppression of the agrarian movement. A close examination reveals the bill for what it is: fundamentally flawed, deliberately exclusionary, and woefully inadequate.

The Ground Reality: Women Feed India, But India Refuses to See Them

Women now constitute over 42% of the agricultural workforce (PLFS 2024), and in several states, they form the majority of full-time agricultural workers. As male migration surges due to shrinking farm returns, women are left to manage farms, livestock, and household food systems single-handedly. Yet, this feminisation of agriculture remains stubbornly invisible in policy.

Despite their central contribution, women farmers face a cascade of structural disadvantages: no legal recognition as farmers, insecure land titles, and severely limited access to credit, insurance, technology, extension services, and markets. The absence of a dedicated statutory body has meant the fragmented, half-hearted implementation of whatever few rights women farmers possess.

The Definition is a Weapon of Exclusion

The bill's most glaring failure is its regressive definition of a "woman farmer." While Section 2(d) broadly includes tenants and sharecroppers under "farmer," Section 2(i) cynically defines a "woman farmer" by linking her identity to "cultivation in her own land or owned by her husband or a family member." This blatant contradiction is designed to exclude the most marginalized.

This definition erases the millions of rural women engaged in diverse agricultural activities beyond "cultivation" on owned land. The Bill shamefully fails to recognize:

- **Pastoralists:** Women rearing livestock on common lands.
- **Fisherfolk:** Women in fishing, fish vending, and aquaculture.
- **Landless Labourers & Sharecroppers:** Women who work the land but own none of it.

This violates the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants (UNDROP), which India officially supports, and which defines peasants broadly, regardless of land ownership.

The Land Ownership Lie

Linking farmer identity to land ownership is pernicious given the stark ground reality. Women form nearly two-thirds of the agricultural workforce, yet only 10.34% of agricultural land is under women's ownership, with a mere 8.3% of Indian women owning land alone. In eastern India, including Odisha, the figure is below 10%. The average size of women's land holdings is 0.93 hectares versus 1.18 for men. By making entitlements conditional on ownership, the bill forces women into dependency on informal lenders and ensures their systematic exclusion from every scheme, line of credit, and insurance policy.

The "Woman Farmer Certificate": A Bureaucratic Trap

The provision making a "Woman Farmer Certificate" a precondition for accessing benefits is a bureaucratic trap set to fail. It places the burden of proof on the most marginalized women—those who are overburdened, often illiterate, and completely disconnected from the very administrative machinery that is supposed to serve them. Global best practices, particularly successful models like Kerala's Kudumbashree, demonstrate that simplified, presumptive recognition is the only effective pathway for last-mile delivery. The Commission must establish a universal recognition framework wherein any woman holding a ration card in a rural area is *presumed* to be a woman farmer. The ration card is already a verified proof of residence and economic vulnerability. Linking farmer status to it would instantly recognize crores of women who toil on farms but own no land, shifting the burden of proof from the powerless woman to the state, where it rightfully belongs.

The Suicide Epidemic: A Damning Indictment

If the government were sincere about women farmers' "welfare," it would address the most tragic consequence of its failed policies: farmer suicides.

In Maharashtra's Yavatmal district alone, 22 farmers died by suicide in January 2026. Critically, 10 tenant farmers also died but are not recorded as farmer suicides because they lacked land documents, rendering their families ineligible for compensation. In 2025, Yavatmal recorded 446 cases. In Madhya Pradesh, the government confirmed 32,385 people died by suicide between December 2023 and January 2026—44 suicides every single day. Among them: 562 farmers, 667 agricultural labourers. Only two farmer suicides were officially attributed to crop loss—a statistical absurdity that reveals how the government manipulates categories to avoid paying compensation.

The Women Left Behind

The women from farmer suicide-affected families are the worst sufferers.

- **Archana Chinchore**, 30, from Nanded lost her husband Hausaji to suicide in August 2024. He was burdened by loans: ₹4 lakh from private financiers, ₹1 lakh from a bank. Heavy rains destroyed his crops. Now the debts are hers.
- **Seema Jadhav**, 32, mother of three from Degaon, lost her husband Dinesh on December 13, 2024. The bank refused a fresh loan; their turmeric crop was damaged.
- **Meena Dhere** from Beed, 32 with three children, was forced to leave two children with their grandmother to work in onion fields for ₹250 daily, just to clear the debts her husband Ashok accumulated before taking his life.

A mere pension scheme of a few hundred rupees is an insult to a farmer's life. On this, the Bill is silent.

The Trade Deal Betrayal

Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan claims the India-US trade deal "fully safeguards India's agricultural interests." The All India Kisan Sabha rightly terms it a "betrayal." Allowing a zero per cent import tariff on U.S. goods is a surrender to U.S. imperialism.

The threat to cotton, soybean, maize, and wheat farmers is existential. The U.S. has only 18.8 lakh farmers (2024) versus India's 14.65 crore operational holdings. Flooding our markets with subsidised U.S. products will devastate the Indian peasantry. Even the Solvent Extractors' Association warns that enhanced access for US-origin DDGS could impact domestic feed and maize markets. Dairy farmer leaders warn that dairy imports will be a "huge blow to livestock farmers."

The Water Lie: Rural Thirst Amidst a Data Centre Flood

This government's cruelty towards rural women is nakedly exposed in its water policy—a policy of deliberate water apartheid. Under the Jal Jeevan Mission, the government has formally reduced the assured safe drinking water supply for rural people from the earlier norm of 70 litres per capita per day (LPCD) to a bare minimum of 55 LPCD. This is not a technical adjustment; it is a confession of failure.

Yet, on the other side of this same government's ledger, the red carpet is rolled out for global data giants. In the Union Budget 2026, the government proposed a 20-year tax holiday until 2047 for foreign companies providing cloud services from Indian data centres. Global hyperscalers have committed approximately \$40 billion in investments. The government trumpets these figures while concealing the water cost of this digital gold rush. In 2025 alone, data centres in India consumed approximately 1,500 billion litres of water. A single 100 MW facility can consume around 2.5 billion litres of water annually—the daily domestic water needs of an entire town of 70,000 people.

The Dismantling of Rural Public Health Infrastructure

While pretending to care for women farmers, the government has dismantled rural public health infrastructure. The IMA warns that the rural healthcare system is collapsing, with only 600 PHCs catering to over 12,000 gram panchayats. Severe shortages of qualified medical professionals leave villagers dependent on unqualified practitioners. For women farmers burdened with work, debt, and family, the collapse of rural healthcare is a death sentence.

The Kudumbashree Model: A Blueprint This Government Ignores

While this government delivers hollow bills, Kerala's Kudumbashree—one of the world's largest women's empowerment initiatives with over 48 lakh members—offers a proven model this Bill wilfully ignores. Its achievements include 2.23 lakh Neighbourhood Groups with bank linkages worth Rs 8,948 crore, over 1 lakh micro-enterprise groups, and 13,879 Joint Liability Groups in vegetable farming. The Radhakrishna Committee identified Kudumbashree as among the most sustainable SHG programmes due to its federated three-tier structure and mission mode operation. Yet this government ignores this success while drafting women farmers' legislation.

Financial Provisions: Putting Money Where the Mouth Is

The Bill mentions a Fund under Section 8 but provides no financial commitment. The AIKS's demand for Rs 50,000 crore annually is modest when compared to corporate tax breaks and must be made mandatory. The Union Budget 2026-27 allocates ₹1.63 lakh crore to agriculture. Within this, a dedicated, irreducible fund of Rs 50,000 crore for women farmers is the bare minimum.

Conclusion: A Hollow Gesture

The Bill as drafted is a hollow gesture—a cynical attempt by an anti-farmer government to whitewash its crimes. While 42% of the agricultural workforce are women, while only 10.34% own land, while 44 farmers die by suicide every single day in Madhya Pradesh alone, while women like Archana, Seema, and Meena are left to pick up the pieces—this government offers a bill that refuses to even define them as farmers.

Without incorporating following amendments the bill will be just a hollow claim

- 1. Universalizing the Kudumbashree model in all over India,**
- 2. Mandating minimum Rs 50,000 crore annually with 90% central funding,**
- 3. Expand the definition to include all women in agriculture,**
- 4. Reversing the disastrous trade deal with USA and other FTA**
- 5. Building robust rural public health infrastructure and free medical care, and**
- 6. providing Rs 25 lakh ex-gratia plus monthly pension to suicide victims' families**

7. Establish legal provisions for rightful access to fuel fodder & safe drinking water (with enhancement of 120 ltr per person per day)

8. Regulate Microfinance to restrict predatory recovery and provisions for Interest subvention

9. Enhance the judicial reach to upgrade equal property rights the government could transform this legislation into genuine empowerment.

Without these amendments, the Bill remains exactly what it is: crocodile tears shed to save face at the UN while farmers suffer, suicides mount, agriculture is sold to corporate interests, and the women who feed this nation are erased from policy and memory.

The choice is clear. The farmers of this country and history itself are watching. Definatly whenever the toiling women has raised fiest the histtory has changed. This International year shall definately rise the women farmers in India for the change.

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