

## **Khet Bachao Abhiyan: India's Battle to Reclaim Its Farmlands**

*(A Nationwide Campaign to Heal the Soil, Empower Farmers, and Secure the Future of Indian Agriculture)*

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### **Abstract**

India's agricultural soils are under mounting stress from decades of excessive chemical fertiliser use, rising input costs, and import-dependent supply chains. In response, the Union Government launched the Khet Bachao Abhiyan — a nationwide month-long campaign (1–30 June 2026) spearheaded by Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan — to promote balanced fertiliser use, soil health management, and scientific farming practices at the grassroots level. Backed by ICAR's field outreach, Krishi Vigyan Kendras, and dashboard-based monitoring, the campaign has already engaged over 7 lakh farmers directly and reached 2.71 crore citizens. This article examines the campaign's objectives, institutional architecture, and its potential to catalyse a lasting shift in India's farm culture.

### **Introduction**

India's fields have long been the backbone of its civilisation. From the fertile plains of the Gangetic belt to the black cotton soils of Vidarbha and the red laterite tracts of the Deccan, Indian farmland has fed billions for millennia. Yet today, those same fields are under siege — not from drought or flood alone, but from a quieter, more insidious enemy: the unchecked overuse of chemical fertilisers and pesticides that has been slowly poisoning the very soil that sustains us.

It is in this critical context that the Union Government launched the **Khet Bachao Abhiyan** — literally, the "Save the Field Campaign" — a month-long, nationwide initiative running from **1 June to 30 June 2026**, carrying the powerful clarion call: *"Save the Soil, Save Farming, Save Farmers."*

### **The Making of a Movement**

The Khet Bachao Abhiyan was formally launched by **Union Minister for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Shri Shivraj Singh Chouhan**, from Ramsiya village in the Raisen district of

Madhya Pradesh on 1 June 2026. But its roots lie in a directive from the Prime Minister himself, who had called upon the nation to urgently address the rampant and indiscriminate use of chemical fertilisers that is degrading India's agricultural land.

Minister Chouhan, in his address at the launch, set the tone unequivocally: *"The direction of the campaign is quite clear — save the farms, manage the costs, improve the soil, make farmers aware, and develop a new culture of agricultural management at the village level."*



What distinguishes this campaign from past government initiatives is its insistence on being a **mass movement** rather than a bureaucratic exercise. Chouhan explicitly rejected the traditional top-down administrative model, instead ordering a collaborative framework that directly connects local Panchayats with state and central government machinery, ICAR institutions, Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs), and agricultural universities.

## Why Now? The Crisis Beneath Our Feet

The urgency of Khet Bachao Abhiyan cannot be overstated. Indian agriculture is navigating a perfect storm of challenges that have been decades in the making.

**Soil Degradation at Alarming Scale:** Decades of excessive nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium application — far beyond what crops can absorb — have acidified soils, destroyed microbial communities, and depleted organic carbon content across vast swathes of farmland. The result is a paradox: farmers use more fertiliser every season, yet crop yields are plateauing or even declining

in several states.

**The Import Dependency Trap:** India's fertiliser situation is acutely vulnerable to global disruptions. The country imports nearly 70% of its urea requirements and virtually 100% of its potash. As the ongoing West Asia crisis has disrupted international shipping routes, input costs have spiked sharply. The Khet Bachao Abhiyan is thus not merely an environmental initiative — it is a matter of national food security and economic resilience.

**Mounting Farm Costs:** The economics of Indian farming have turned punishing. Rising input costs — fertilisers, pesticides, fuel — are squeezing already thin margins, pushing millions of small and marginal farmers deeper into debt. Reducing wasteful chemical use is a direct, actionable route to bringing down the cost of cultivation.

**Environmental Consequences:** Excess fertiliser use has downstream consequences far beyond the farm gate. Nitrate contamination of groundwater, eutrophication of water bodies, and greenhouse gas emissions from agricultural soils are increasingly serious environmental concerns that demand immediate action.

## What the Campaign Seeks to Achieve

The Khet Bachao Abhiyan is built around several interconnected pillars:

**Balanced and Judicious Fertiliser Use:** At the heart of the campaign is the promotion of soil test-based nutrient management. Farmers are being educated to apply fertilisers based on the actual needs of their specific soil — not by habit or guesswork. The Soil Health Card scheme, already operational across the country, is being given fresh momentum under this campaign.

**Promotion of Natural and Organic Inputs:** The campaign actively encourages farmers to adopt organic alternatives — green manures, bio-fertilisers, vermicompost, and crop residue incorporation — as supplements or substitutes to chemical inputs. Integrated Nutrient Management (INM) demonstrations are being conducted in farmers' fields to show, practically, how balanced nutrition improves both yield and soil health.

**Awareness on Soil Health Cards:** Farmers are being guided on how to obtain and interpret their Soil Health Cards and translate the recommendations into actionable changes in their fertiliser and amendment practices.

**Identification of Counterfeit Inputs:** A particularly valuable component of the campaign is training farmers to identify spurious and counterfeit fertilisers, seeds, and pesticides — a menace that causes enormous losses to farming households every year while further damaging soil and crop health.

**Water Conservation and Crop Diversification:** The campaign also emphasises water-efficient practices, crop selection suited to local agro-climatic conditions, and alternative farming strategies for regions prone to low or erratic rainfall.

### ICAR's Role: Science Meets the Soil

A key institutional pillar of the Khet Bachao Abhiyan is the **Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)**, implemented under the Department of Agricultural Research and Education. ICAR's outreach achievements under the campaign have been remarkable.

As of mid-campaign, **12,979 awareness camps and seminars** have been conducted across the country, directly engaging approximately **7.17 lakh farmers** in scientific nutrient management and sustainable farming practices. Through digital and media outreach initiatives, the campaign has reached nearly **2.71 crore citizens** — a figure that underscores the scale and ambition of this initiative.



ICAR's network of Krishi Vigyan Kendras has been mobilised as the frontline of this campaign, with scientists and agricultural experts visiting villages to deliver practical, evidence-based demonstrations. The focus is on building farmers' confidence through real-world results — not pamphlets and platitudes.

### A New Administrative Architecture

One of the most significant innovations of Khet Bachao Abhiyan is its **dashboard-based monitoring system**. Minister Chouhan directed that a detailed roadmap be prepared for every district, clearly mapping which officer, scientist, institution, or team would visit which village on which date. District-level programmes are planned well in advance, ensuring accountability at every level.

Central and state governments, ICAR, agricultural universities, and local Panchayats are all part

of an integrated coordination network. The Minister himself has been personally active — reaching out to state Chief Ministers by phone and in writing, seeking their full cooperation in making the campaign a genuine national movement.

Farmers receive direct, personalised advice tailored to their local weather conditions, soil quality, water availability, and market scenarios — a significant departure from one-size-fits-all extension services of the past.

## **The Road Ahead: Building a New Farm Culture**

Khet Bachao Abhiyan is, at its core, an attempt to fundamentally shift India's agricultural culture — away from the chemical-intensive model that took root after the Green Revolution, towards a more ecologically intelligent and economically sustainable approach.

The campaign's slogan — *Save the Soil, Save Farming, Save Farmers* — captures a profound truth: these three goals are inseparable. Healthy soil is the foundation of viable farming, and viable farming is the foundation of farmer welfare. There can be no lasting solution to the agrarian crisis that ignores the health of the land itself.

As the campaign enters its final weeks, its impact is already being felt. Thousands of village-level meetings have broken down complex soil science into practical guidance that farmers can act on immediately. Young agricultural graduates deployed as field volunteers are building bridges between laboratory knowledge and lived farming experience.

Whether Khet Bachao Abhiyan succeeds in catalysing a lasting transformation will depend on what happens after 30 June — whether the awareness translates into behavioural change, whether state governments embed its lessons into their regular extension services, and whether the political will demonstrated at the launch is sustained through the next sowing season and beyond.

But for now, India's farmlands have a message from their government: *your soil matters, your future matters, and this nation is paying attention.*

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