

India's 2025-26 Record Food grain Target: Opportunities Amid Challenges

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ABSTRACT

Agriculture is the backbone of India's economy and food security, providing livelihoods to millions and supporting rural development. With a growing population, achieving record foodgrain production is critical to meet dietary needs and ensure economic stability. This article examines India's 2025-26 foodgrain target of 362.96 million tonnes, analyzing trends in production, seed and fertiliser availability, irrigation, mechanisation, and government policies such as MSP. Over the past few years, favourable monsoons, increased seed and fertiliser availability, and mechanisation have contributed to improved yields. However, challenges remain, including uneven distribution of resources, quality issues, limited access for small farmers, soil health concerns, and infrastructure constraints. Addressing these challenges is crucial for sustaining productivity and building a resilient agricultural sector.

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture remains the cornerstone of human survival, meeting our daily food needs and sustaining

livelihoods. Globally, it occupies nearly 2.4% of the geographical area and utilizes about 4% of water resources, yet it supports nearly 17%

of the world's human population and 15% of livestock (Khatkar *et al.*, 2016). In India, agriculture is not just a means of food production but also plays a crucial role in driving economic growth and rural development (Bose *et al.*, 2013). On a global scale, food from crops contributes nearly 78% of the average per capita energy requirement, while animal-based foods such as milk, eggs, fish, and meat provide the remaining 22% (Brevik *et al.*, 2013). Thus, meeting the dietary needs of a growing population depends heavily on enhancing agricultural productivity and sustainability (Singh *et al.*, 2019).

The global vision for the future is a world free from hunger and malnutrition, where food systems help improve living standards in ways that are economically viable, socially just, and environmentally sustainable. Despite significant progress in tackling hunger and poverty, challenges remain: around 795 million people still face hunger, while more than 2 billion suffer from micronutrient deficiencies or over-nourishment (FAO, 2017). Going forward, food security faces serious risks due to mounting pressure on natural resources and the impacts of climate change. These threats endanger the sustainability of food systems. The critical challenges to be addressed include uneven demographic growth, climate change, natural disasters, transboundary pests and diseases, and the rapid transformations in global food systems (FAO, 2017). Addressing these issues is essential for building a resilient agricultural sector and ensuring food and nutritional security for future generations.

Addressing these challenges is vital to build a resilient agricultural sector and to secure food and nutrition for the future. In this context, the Government of India has set a record foodgrain production target for 2025-26,

aiming to strengthen food security and rural incomes. This article highlights the key challenges and opportunities that lie ahead in achieving this ambitious goal.

Food Grain Production: Target Vs Actual

India's foodgrain output has often shown interesting trends when compared with official targets. In 2023-24, production fell slightly short of expectations due to uneven monsoon rains, but still managed to touch 329.7 million tonnes. The following year, however, output surpassed the set target, reaching a record 353.96 million tonnes in 2024-25. For 2025-26, the government has set an even more ambitious target of 362.96 million tonnes, encouraged by a favorable monsoon. This steady upward trajectory reflects both the resilience of farmers and the impact of supportive policies. The Figure 1 illustrates how actual production has kept pace and at times outperformed the planned goals.

In the agricultural year 2024–25, record production has been achieved in key crops including rice, wheat, maize, groundnut, and soybean. This record production is largely due to a favorable monsoon and ideal weather conditions. Timely and well-distributed rainfall across major crop growing states significantly improved soil moisture, promoting healthy crop development and creating optimal conditions for cultivation. As a result, there has been a considerable increase in kharif sowing area, along with higher yields in major kharif crops such as rice, maize, bajra, moong, soybean, and sugarcane. Furthermore, the improved soil moisture contributed to an expansion in cultivated area during the rabi and summer seasons. Also, the intermittent rainfall during rabi season further enhanced overall agricultural output.

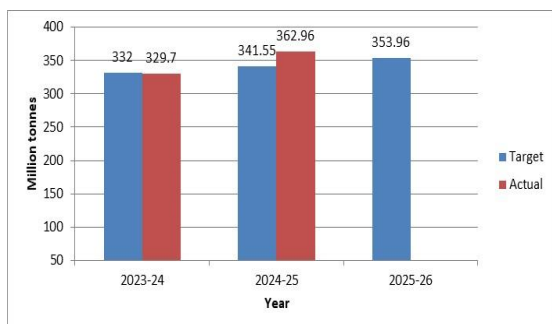


Figure 1: Food Grain Production: Target Vs Actual

India's foodgrain output in 2024-25 showed significant improvements compared to the previous year (Figure 2). Rice production reached a record 1491 LMT, a sharp rise from 1358 LMT in 2023-24. Similarly, wheat production climbed to 1175 LMT, compared to 1120 LMT the year before. Maize registered strong growth with 423 LMT, up from 380 LMT. Even Shree Anna (millets) increased to 180 LMT, compared to 160 LMT in 2023-24. However, some crops grew at a slower pace. Tur (pigeon pea) stood at 36 LMT, only slightly higher than 34 LMT in the previous year, while Gram rose modestly to 113 LMT from 108 LMT. Overall, the Figure 2 shows that 2024-25 outperformed 2023-24 across all major crops, reflecting the positive impact of good monsoons, better seed availability, and policy support.

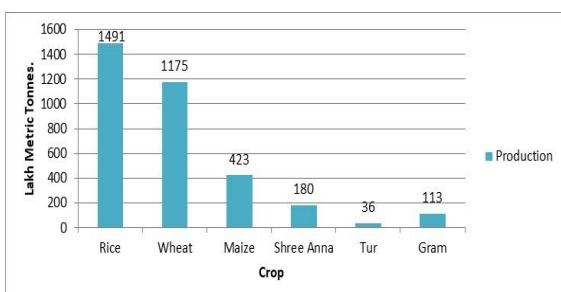


Figure 2: Food Grain Production during 2024-25

Fertiliser & Soil Health

Achieving record foodgrain production depends not only on favourable weather and better seeds but also on the judicious use of fertilisers. Balanced fertiliser application is

crucial for maintaining soil health and ensuring sustainable productivity. While nutrients like nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium are essential for higher yields, the overuse of urea has emerged as a serious concern, as it gradually reduces soil fertility, depletes micronutrients, and harms long-term productivity.

Government Initiatives

To address these challenges, the Government of India has taken several steps:

1. Promotion of Balanced Fertiliser Use through soil health cards, which provide farmers with crop-wise nutrient recommendations.
2. Neem-Coated Urea Policy to prevent diversion of urea for industrial purposes and improve nitrogen-use efficiency.
3. Subsidies and Production Incentives under the Nutrient-Based Subsidy (NBS) scheme to make DAP, MOP, and complex fertilisers affordable.
4. New Urea Production Plants revived under the "Make in India" initiative to reduce import dependence.
5. PM-PRANAM Scheme (2023) to encourage states to adopt alternative fertilisers and reduce chemical use.
6. Promotion of Organic and Bio-Fertilisers to complement chemical inputs and restore soil health.

The Figure 3 shows fertiliser use during the kharif season. Urea consumption rose from 17.4 mt in 2024-25 to 18.2 mt in 2025-26, while sales of phosphatic and potassic (P&K) fertilisers increased sharply from 13.7 mt to 15.3 mt. This indicates a rising demand for nutrients, highlighting both the progress and the pressure on fertiliser supply systems.

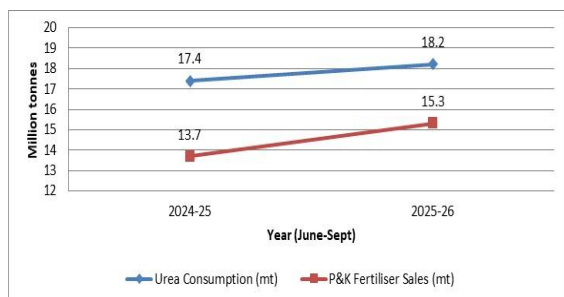


Figure 3: Food Grain Production during 2024-25

Despite these measures, significant hurdles remain. Fertiliser demand often outstrips supply, leading to periodic shortages, particularly of urea and DAP. High import dependence on phosphatic and potassic fertilisers makes India vulnerable to global price fluctuations. Moreover, imbalanced use of nutrients—with excessive nitrogen and inadequate phosphorus, potassium, and micronutrients—continues to affect soil health. Creating awareness among farmers about sustainable practices, expanding domestic production, and ensuring timely distribution of fertilisers will be critical in overcoming these challenges. Creating awareness among farmers about sustainable practices, expanding domestic production, and ensuring timely distribution of fertilisers will be critical in overcoming these challenges.

Seed Availability

Over the last four years, seed availability in India has consistently exceeded requirements, ensuring farmers have sufficient supplies. For instance, in the 2020–21 rabi season, the requirement was 22.5 mt and availability 23.2 mt; in 2021–22, 22.8 mt required versus 23.5 mt available; in 2022–23, 23.0 mt required and 23.7 mt available; and in 2023-24, 23.2 mt required against 24.0 mt available. For Rabi 2025–26, the requirement is 22.9 mt while availability is 25 mt, reflecting a healthy surplus. Despite this positive trend, the seed industry faces challenges such as uneven quality, limited access for small and remote farmers, storage and distribution inefficiencies,

and the high cost of hybrid seeds. Strengthening quality control, ensuring timely distribution, and raising farmer awareness remain key priorities for maximizing agricultural productivity.

Irrigation

Monsoon rainfall plays a critical role in India, as nearly 50% of the net sown area still depends on it. In 2023, the monsoon was 94% of the Long Period Average (LPA), leading to a slight dip in foodgrain output to 329.7 mt. In 2024, above-normal rainfall at 106% of LPA helped boost production to 353.96 mt. Over the past few years, irrigation coverage has remained around 55% of the gross cropped area, helping stabilize yields in areas with poor rainfall. Despite progress, challenges persist, including uneven distribution of rainfall, limited irrigation in drought-prone regions, over-reliance on groundwater, and inefficiencies in canal systems. Improving water-use efficiency and expanding irrigation infrastructure are crucial to mitigate monsoon-related risks and ensure stable agricultural output.

Mechanisation & Technology

Farm mechanisation is crucial for improving efficiency, reducing costs, and ensuring timely sowing and harvesting. Over the past few years, India's mechanisation level has gradually increased, reaching around 47%, though it still lags behind developed countries where it exceeds 90%. Tractor sales have been strong, with over 8.5 lakh tractors sold in 2023–24, making India the world's largest tractor market. Other machinery such as combine harvesters, seed drills, and power tillers have also seen steady growth. Despite this progress, challenges remain, including high costs of modern machinery, limited access for small and marginal farmers, lack of awareness and training on optimal use, and inadequate repair and maintenance

infrastructure. Expanding mechanisation through subsidies, custom hiring centers, and skill development is essential to enhance productivity and reduce labor dependency.

Government Policies & MSP

The Minimum Support Price (MSP) plays a key role in ensuring farmers' income security and guiding crop choices. Over the past few years, MSPs have steadily increased to keep pace with rising input costs. For the 2024–25 season, MSPs are ₹2,300/quintal for common paddy, ₹2,275/quintal for wheat, and ₹7,250/quintal for tur (pulses). Procurement under MSP for paddy and wheat consistently exceeds 100 mt annually, providing a safety net for millions of farmers. Despite these benefits, challenges persist, including limited coverage for some crops, regional disparities in procurement infrastructure, delays in payments, and lack of awareness among small farmers about MSP entitlements. Strengthening procurement systems, expanding MSP coverage, and improving market linkages are essential to enhance the effectiveness of these policies.

CONCLUSION

India's agricultural sector has demonstrated resilience through record foodgrain production and rising mechanisation, supported by government initiatives such as MSP and balanced fertiliser use. While trends over the past few years indicate progress, challenges such as uneven resource distribution, soil fertility management, limited access for smallholders, and climate variability persist. To achieve the 2025-26 foodgrain target sustainably, it is essential to expand irrigation coverage, promote balanced nutrient application, enhance mechanisation accessibility, strengthen MSP procurement

systems, and raise farmer awareness on best practices. These integrated efforts will ensure food security, improve rural incomes, and support long-term sustainability of Indian agriculture.

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