

State to take MGNREGA benefits to small farms

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THE state Rural Development Department is drawing up proposals to focus on small and marginal farmers by using funds to pay for works on their land under MGNREGA, looking not only into farming but developing resources as well as possible alternatives like horticulture.

Rural Development Principal Secretary Rita Teotia said the initiative has been taken keeping in mind that the percentage of small and marginal farmers (with holdings of two acres land or less) among all agriculturalists has increased from 60 per cent to 85 per cent across the country.

She said this at a function to release the Indian version of State of the World 2011: Innovations that nourish the planet by the Worldwatch Institute.

According to Teotia, workers under MGNREGA would work on these small farms and the farm itself would be taken up as a project possibly for three years. Avenues like whether or not the land needs treatment, whether horticulture would be a better option for the farmer, and building water resources on the land itself where possible would be part of this initiative.

She said that though the initiative is still in nascent stage, it is expected to be implemented soon. Farmers belonging to the Below Poverty Line (BPL) category would be the first beneficiaries once the project takes off.

The focus of this year's MGNREGA is watershed development, because 70 per cent of the agricultural land remains rain-fed and local water sources are needed, she said.

Meanwhile, the function, hosted by the Center for Environment Education, saw panelists and audience discuss about the main focus of the book — agricultural innovations, mainly in Africa. The book focuses on how agriculture should be stressed on as a system and disapproves of the conventional techniques currently used — focus on grain seed technology and fertilisers.

One of the themes touched upon was small-scale innovations that have helped regions and the possibility of scaling them up.