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## **FARMERS PROTEST IN INDIA: THE DEMAND FOR A LEGAL MSP - A JUSTIFIABLE PURSUIT?**

In recent times, India has been a hotspot for widespread farmers' protests, with the central issue being the demand for the implementation of a legal Minimum Support Price (MSP) for agricultural produce. This movement has brought to the fore the longstanding grievances of the agricultural sector, prompting a nationwide debate on the sustainability of farming practices and the well-being of its primary stakeholders - the farmers. But is the demand for a legal MSP justifiable? Let's delve into this complex issue from various perspectives.

### **The Essence of MSP**

MSP is an agricultural product price set by the government to purchase directly from the farmer. This is not only to safeguard the farmer from any sharp fall in the market prices but also to ensure agricultural sustainability. The concept of MSP has been around for decades; however, it lacks a legal framework that obligates the government or private entities to purchase at these prices, leading to its central role in the protests.

### **The Farmers' Perspective**

For farmers, the demand for a legal MSP is rooted in the quest for security and predictability. Agriculture is inherently risky, with farmers facing uncertainties like unpredictable weather, fluctuating market prices, and often, exploitative middlemen practices. A legal MSP would mean guaranteed prices for their crops, providing them with a safety net against these uncertainties. It's not just about profitability; it's about survival for many small-scale and marginal farmers who make up a significant portion of India's farming community.

### **Economic Implications**

Critics of the demand for a legal MSP argue on economic grounds, suggesting that it might lead to market distortions. Guaranteeing a price above the market rate could lead to surplus production of certain crops, inefficiencies, and strain on government finances due to procurement and storage

challenges. Moreover, there is a concern that a legal MSP might deter private sector investment in agriculture, affecting innovation and competitiveness in the long run.

### **Environmental Concerns**

An often overlooked aspect of the MSP debate is its environmental impact. A guaranteed price for certain crops has historically led to the overproduction of water-intensive crops like rice and wheat, particularly in regions not ecologically suited for their cultivation. This practice has led to alarming levels of groundwater depletion and soil degradation. A legal MSP, if not implemented with environmental safeguards, could exacerbate these issues.

### **Social Justice and Food Security**

From a social justice perspective, a legal MSP aligns with the principles of equity and food security. A significant portion of India's population still depends on agriculture for their livelihood. Ensuring farmers' financial stability is crucial not only for the rural economy but also for national food security. A legal MSP could be a step towards rectifying the historical injustices faced by farmers, ensuring they receive a fair share of the value chain.

### **A Balanced Approach**

The demand for a legal MSP is justified when considering the vulnerabilities and uncertainties faced by farmers. However, implementing this policy requires a nuanced approach. It's essential to balance economic efficiency, environmental sustainability, and social equity. The policy should be flexible, incorporating mechanisms to adjust MSPs based on market dynamics, environmental considerations, and crop diversification needs.

Additionally, the government could consider a tiered MSP system, focusing on sustainability and nutritional value rather than just yield. Complementing MSP with investments in agricultural infrastructure, research, and extension services can also enhance productivity and reduce dependence on price supports.

### **The Road Ahead**

The farmers' protests in India have highlighted a crucial issue that goes beyond the agricultural sector, touching upon economic policies, social justice, and environmental sustainability. The demand for a legal MSP is not just about ensuring fair prices for farmers; it's about recognizing and addressing the broader challenges facing India's agricultural sector. While the implementation of a legal MSP is complex and fraught with challenges, it represents a critical step towards a more equitable and sustainable future for Indian agriculture.

In conclusion, the demand for a legal MSP by Indian farmers is justifiable, reflecting their search for dignity, stability, and recognition in a sector that forms the backbone of the country's economy. However, the path to achieving this demand must be paved with careful consideration of its wider implications, ensuring that the solution doesn't give rise to new problems. A comprehensive, inclusive, and forward-thinking approach is necessary to ensure that the agriculture sector can thrive, contributing to the well-being of not just farmers but the entire nation.