

## The Seed Capital of India

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*The government's agricultural extension services to farmers and other initiatives have boosted agricultural production and productivity in Andhra Pradesh.*

Andhra Pradesh is endowed with rich bioresources. There are 7 agro-climatic zones across the state, with 19 major food and commercial crops grown in different parts of the state. There are more than 5000 species of trees and out of these, 2000 species are flowering trees. About 40 percent of the land is utilized for agriculture and forests in the state cover 23 percent of the land. Agriculture is the lifeline of Andhra Pradesh economy. The sector contributes over a third of the state's GSDP and provides livelihood for over 70 percent of its population. It is one of the top three rice-producing states in the country and accounts for about 12 percent of the nation's rice production. The state has a strong base in horticulture, producing a variety of condiments, fruits and vegetables such as mangoes, citrus fruits, grapes, custard apples, bananas, pineapple, tomatoes and onions. In fact, Andhra Pradesh is the second largest producer of fruits in India and one of the largest vegetable producing states in the country.

Andhra Pradesh is a leading producer of a large number of cash crops such as tobacco, oil-seeds, cotton, sugarcane, cashew, mesta, turmeric and chillies. It is the "Seed State" of India, with its progressive farmers taking up production of seed for the government and private seed companies. Floriculture and the cultivation of aromatic and medicinal plants are also rapidly growing sectors. Andhra Pradesh is the second largest producer of silkworm cocoons in the country and sericulture is an important activity in the drought-prone Rayalaseema district. This is because of the relation between industry and

government.

The seed companies with the support from the government are making efforts to support the farming community. In agri-biotech, tissue culture for food crops and ornamental plants has been taken up in several parts of the state with considerable success. There are about half a dozen agri-biotech companies doing flourishing business in this sector in the state. Nuziveedu Seeds, one among the four-agri companies, which received the GEAC's approval for commercialization of Bt cottonseeds, has launched its Bt versions of cotton hybrid varieties in Andhra Pradesh. Besides Nuziveedu the other leading names in agri biotech space include Emergent Genetics, Fortune Biotech, MAHYCO, Prabhat Agri Biotech and Pro Agro Seeds.

The presence of International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) - a non-profit, non-political organization that does innovative agricultural research and capacity building for sustainable development with a wide array of partners across the globe – near Hyderabad, has boosted the companies confidence in carrying out research activities.

ICRISAT believes in the potential of biotechnology to enhance the speed, precision, efficiency and value addition in many aspects of its crop improvement efforts. This is especially true in addressing the complex traits that have remained intransigent to conventional breeding approaches. In addition, many of the crops under ICRISAT's mandate have had little attention paid to them especially in the biotechnology arena, and thus, it is critical that ICRISAT continues to focus efforts on these so that our clients and partners can reap the benefits of modern scientific solutions to their problems.

ICRISAT has earmarked an area of 200 acres for Agri-Science Park. It is a technology commercialization arm of the ICRISAT by which it commercializes technology to help farmers in the semi-arid tropics (SAT) through partnerships with the private and public sectors. It consists of the Agri-Biotech Park of Genome Valley, the Agri-Business Incubator, a Hybrid Seeds Consortium and the SAT Eco-Venture. About 27 private seed companies have joined hands with ICRISAT to form this consortium.

The state government has initiated steps to resolve the problems faced by the farm sector on a permanent basis and embarked upon many large irrigation projects that would ensure assured irrigation facilities to an additional 65 lakh acres. Besides the state government has also set up an Agriculture Technology Commission to achieve 4 percent growth in the Agriculture Sector. The steps taken by the government might bring in cheer among farmers and push the further growth of agriculture in the state.