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July 25,2006.

National Commission on Farmers,
Ministry of Agriculture,
Government of India,
New Delhi.

Dear Sir,

In view of my decade long professional experience in agro-processing as a former Director, CSIR Regional Research Laboratory, Trivandrum, I deem it a privilege to submit this note on the draft policy statement of the National Commission on Farmers which is presented for discussion at Trivandrum today as part of your State Level consultation process. Fully accepting the fact that the document is a noble presentation of all core issues afflicting our agriculture scene, more so as applied to the vast majority of the poor and marginal sections of the farming community, my major points are as listed below.

1. Agriculture in a tropical country such as ours is as diverse as it can be with varying totally from one agri-climatic region to another, in which the interests of the respective States vary very widely both from points of view of the local economy and also from livelihood security of their citizens. In other words, agriculture cannot and should not be treated as a “Single Box” commodity on all policy issues, be they IPRs, trade negotiations or aggregate measures of support. In other words, again, in all such decision-making processes, States must be the final arbiters. Such a methodology has not been implemented formally so far in any meaningful manner. The policy document is silent on this.
2. National policy on food security should not be confused with livelihood security issues which are essentially regional. Even after witnessing extremely large number of suicides by farmers in states such as AP, Maharashtra, Kerala and so on, nothing worthwhile has been done, with the Chief Minister of Maharashtra openly accepting total failure yesterday on the issue in Vidarbha. In other words, livelihood issues must be emphasised much more in the document than is the case, with all WTO trade negotiations being made subject to satisfactory resolution of Livelihood Security arising there from.
3. Role of increased public involvement in R&D, minimum support price, social mobilisation through cooperative farmers cooperative societies, etc are aptly given emphasis. Unfortunately, all these recommendations are diametrically opposite to the current programs of GOI. As a matter of fact, such policies only has landed the country to a “ship to mouth” strategy for wheat and “helpless

watch” attitude towards farmers suicides, leaving everything to the dictates of the market. In other words, the policy statement must include a summary critique of the contemporary agriculture milieu to forewarn the GOI of impending dangers.

4. Last but not the least, implications of the New IPR Regime and the pending Seeds Bill must be elaborated, more so since the cotton farmers are already thrown to the dictates of the Bt gene monopoly in all the four cotton growing states. There will be many more such cases in the foreseeable future even on items such as wheat, soybean, spices, and so on, if not on rice as well!

Thanking you,
Yours sincerely,

A.D.Damodaran.