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#BLAgriSummit. Use of tech to steer agri sector in 2023

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Experts pitch for tech to address issues of small holdings, climate change

BY BL NEW DELHI BUREAU

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D Suresh Kumar, Director, Centre for Agricultural and Rural Development Studies, TN Agricultural University, KR Srivats, Senior Deputy Editor, businessline, Sathish Kanuganti, Molecular Breeding Lead, Rallis India and Sandeep Sabharwal, Group CEO, SCLM Group at a panel discussion on 'Technology and other issues impeding Agriculture | Photo Credit: BIJOY GHOSH

Technological adoption maybe taking wings in the agricultural sector, but more focus needs to be given in 2023 on the implementation at the ground level. Experts also believe the key will be how technologies combine the digital and physical aspects to solve the challenges in the agricultural ecosystem in the country.

The session on the theme 'Technology and Other Issues Impending Agriculture' at *businessline's* Agri & Commodity Summit 2023 saw the participation of key experts. This included Sandeep Sabharwal, Group CEO, SLCM Group; Sathish Kanuganti, Molecular Breeding Lead, Rallis India; and D Suresh Kumar, Director, Centre for Agricultural and Rural Development Studies, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University. The session was moderated by *businessline's* Senior Deputy Editor, KR Srivats.

Sabharwal pointed out that a lot of thought will need to go into what kind of technological innovations are adopted that will suffice and complement the physical movement of commodities. "I believe a cut copy of the UPI model or the e-commerce model cannot work in the agricultural sector. Commodities have a physical nature. They need to be consumed and transported physically. So a lot of thought needs to go into how the digital and physical aspects are married in terms of tech solutions for the agri sector," he added.

"So, the technologies are there. But it's how these technologies are implemented on the ground, what is the interface, and how the farmer understands the interface..that, I believe, is the missing piece. And that is why I believe 2023 will be a different year as people will reassess how technologies work on the physical structure and, therefore, phygital technologies will need to be adopted," he added.

Kanuganti, too, emphasised that while there is a lot of focus on research and technology, improvements will need to be done in terms of implementation. Talking about emerging technologies, he stated that gene-editing can prove to be a game-changer. "Genomics is playing a key role and it has helped in accelerated growth in agriculture. For instance, genomics-assisted breeding has already demonstrated in terms of development of superior varieties that are resistant to pests. In addition, use of artificial intelligence and machine learning for predictions related to pests and diseases, will also play a key role. IoT can support precision farming and remote sensing among others," Kanuganti added.

Suresh Kumar of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University pointed out the issue of small holdings. He said that factors such as further fragmentation of such holdings, coupled with climate variabilities, make it challenging for farmers to adopt new innovations and technologies. “ We need to look at novel approaches such as collective farming, contract farming and food processor organisations to empower the small and marginal farmers so that they have a bargaining power in the market when they sell their produce. The other critical challenge is water, which is a key resource for agricultural production and is closely associated with climate variability and changes,” he said. Kumar also pointed to the challenges of unsustainable cropping patterns

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