

SLCM banks on 'Agri Reach' to curb post-harvest losses

TOMOJIT BASU

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If technology can curb crop storage losses, then agri-logistics company Sohan Lal Commodity Management (SLCM) believes it has right systems in place to validate that belief with its 'Agri Reach' platform.

"We have the capability to transform any infrastructure into a world-class facility without making any investment in infrastructure. It's like having the best software in order to make a machine more efficient," Sandeep Sabharwal, SLCM Group CEO, told *BusinessLine*.

The company managed 240 million tonnes (mt) of commodities including wheat, pulses, maize, cotton and more recently vegetables, over the last three years.

Sabharwal said that the company operated on a belief that while "noble intentions" such as increasing per hectare crop yields and irrigation coverage were welcome, food security in India can be better realised in the short-term by preventing damage to gathered crops.

"The focus of peer groups is

still on infrastructure creation. This is the e-commerce era, the Amazons and Flipkarts don't own their assets. Everything's outsourced in a marketplace where players have their specific expertise to add to the value chain," said Sabharwal.

Crop auditing

Agri Reach, which took eight years to develop, covers the gamut of inspection services for agri-produce by not only quality monitoring but also prescribing curative steps if crops were found to be damaged.

Weekly checks are carried out by SLCM auditors who are remotely tracked in specific geo-fenced regions and the information relayed instantly to the company headquarters.

"The warehouse owner does not have to invest crores to upgrade structures. We step in and take over and have the place running in 48 hours. Our investment is never more than ₹35,000," he added.

The Government's move away from mere storage creation to "scientific management" was a welcome step, said Sabharwal, but urged

State agencies outsourcing crop handling to third-parties to focus on delivered efficiency instead of the lowest bids for a tender.

"We may be 10 per cent more expensive than others, but we'll save 9.5 per cent of the crop. The savings need to be accounted for in the economics and administrative mindset," he stated.

SLCM, which counts Mayfield Fund, Nexus Venture Partners, Everstone Capital Ventures and ICICI Bank's EIF Fund among its investors, started post-harvest operations in Myanmar last year.

Myanmar operations

It has already handled 100,000 tonnes of crops, mainly pulses and rice, across four locations in Yangon and is now eyeing the African market.

"We have had a couple of high-level meetings with the Malawi Government and should be moving into that market later this year," he said, adding that its lending arm, called Kissandhan in India, would look to tie-up with entities there as it has with Yoma Bank in Myanmar.