

An Analysis of Rythu Bandhu Scheme in Telangana State

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ABSTRACT

For both policymakers and the producers who work in this industry, agriculture is a crucial sector in the state of Telangana. This article attempts to understand the scheme in the state of Telangana. The Telangana economy is still heavily dependent on agriculture. The necessity for an agricultural investment program similar to the Telangana government's Rythubandhu scheme is discussed, along with the factors that prompted the government to enact this measure. The paper has focused on the state's goal of breaking the debt trap's vicious cycle through the scheme. In addition to ending the vicious cycle of rural debt, investment is the most reliable way to increase agricultural productivity and provide farmers with income. The "Agriculture Investment Support Scheme" (Rythu Bandhu) is a new program designed to meet the initial investment needs of farmers in order to prevent them from falling back into debt. With its Rythu Bandhu Scheme, Telangana state sets the standard for farmer empowerment. This is India's first farmer investment support program.

Keywords: Agriculture, Farmers, Investment, Rythu Bandhu, Suicides.

INTRODUCTION

Government was committed to improve the lot of farmers in the new state of Telangana and accordingly initiated and implemented several schemes for benefit of farmers including waiver of loans worth Rs. 17,000 crore, construction of irrigation projects, timely distribution of fertilizers and seeds. In addition, government distributed updated pattadar passbooks, introduced investment support scheme of Rs. 8,000 per acre in two installments and decided to provide Life insurance cover of Rs. 5 lakh¹.

It was a welcome home coming to many villagers who had left for other centres in search of greener pastures for a better living but came back home to collect cheques distributed as part of investment support programme of government for agriculture. The programme, christened Rythu Bandhu, from May 10, 2018 resulted in a festive atmosphere in villages that will be cherished not only by the resident farmers but their friends and relatives from neighbourhood who gave up agriculture but settled outside. They came back home on the fixed dates for taking delivery of cheques along with the pattadar passbooks cum title deeds².

The Rythu Bandhu Scheme aimed at providing investment support of Rs. 8,000 an acre at Rs. 4,000 an acre for each of the two crop seasons. For the first time, probably in the entire country, a state government had come forward to bear the cost of farm investment relieving the farmers from the tension of finding sources for the purchase of inputs like seeds, fertilizer, pesticides and expenses. The farmers were happy for two reasons: they were to get new passbooks after several decades with their names and survey numbers and secondly, money.

The Rythu Bandhu crop investment support scheme overall seems to be a winner as it brought money to every pattadar farmer, irrespective of his financial status. Every land owning farmer small, marginal and a big land lord whether he is cultivating the land himself or given it for lease, got Rs. 4,000 per acre. The government's largesse that will cost the exchequer about Rs. 12,000 crore per annum has also gone to middle classes for the first time unlike in other Welfare schemes if they owned a piece of agriculture land³.

Crop loan waiver often was criticized for adversely impacting loan repayment discipline and encouraging

borrowers to become defaulters in the hope of getting loan waiver. Unlike loan waiver scheme, Rythu Bandhu will not distort the credit market. It will in fact encourage agriculture land to be put to better use and increase its value. Government sources recalled that the loan waiver covered 34 lakh farmers and government spent Rs. 4,250 crore for each of four years to waive loans upto Rs. 1 lakh. Rythu Bandhu covered 57 lakh agricultural households. Of it, about 80.00 percent of households owned less than five acres of land each and about 68.00 percent owned less than 2.5 acres and only 0.28 percent owned more than 20 acres of land⁴.

The government programme would help the farmers to take up agricultural operations with ease and purchase their choices seeds, fertilizers and pesticides without relying on traders and money lenders. Earlier, the traders used to dictate terms to farmers. They can no longer do it because the farmers have money well before the start of the season and they can buy seed and other inputs on their own.

Objectives of the Study

1. To present the Scheme particulars in Telangana
2. To examine the recent trends of the scheme in Telangana
3. To evaluate its benefits for extensive agriculture
4. To offer suggestions for making the scheme better.

The data has been collected from the secondary data is collected through electronic media, News, Journals, and other related articles.

DISTRIBUTION OF PATTADAR PASSBOOKS

The Rythu Bandhu was introduced after purifying land records and issuing new pattadar passbooks-cum-title deeds with 17 embedded security features to landholder. It would also facilitate hassle-free land transactions in rural areas by integrating the registration and mutation process. The government has introduced tamperproof pattadar passbooks with security features to weed out bogus ones.

After the impressive results under part A of Rythu Bandhu, the government readies itself for purification and updating of land records related to disputed lands, classified under part B of the scheme. There is no time schedule fixed for resolving the disputes under part B as several of these cases landed in courts. The government had distributed pattadar passbooks and cheques to eligible beneficiaries, barring the cases where inconsistencies with data are noticed.

The Rythu Bandhu Scheme had received applause from across the country and also made the farmers happy that their land details and holdings have been rectified and updated without spending a single rupee.

NO RYTHU BANDHU FOR TENANT FARMERS

The Rythu Bandhu Scheme is envisaged to extend financial assistance to all farmers who suffered losses and become financially weak in the combined state and it is not meant for tenant farmers. Because they have no legal right on land taken on lease, Government has no record of tenant farmers and no land owner ever recognized the tenant farmer formally. In such a scenario, how can the government extend financial assistance to people who have no right on the land.

Moreover a farmer is free to let out his land to other for a single crop or for multiple crops. At times, a farmer leases his or her land to more than one person and it will be difficult for the government to identify the tenant farmer. Thus the Rythu Bandhu Scheme will be confined only to farmers who are land owners⁵.

KIN OF NON-RESIDENT RYOTS TO GET RYTHU BANDHU CHEQUES

The Telangana government has decided to disburse investment support scheme (Rythu Bandhu) cheques drawn in the name of farmers living abroad, non-residents, to their family members living back home. However, the Mandal Agriculture Officers (MAOs) and Agriculture Extension Officers (AEOs) concerned

have to conduct an enquiry about such non-resident farmers having agricultural Patta land on their names to ascertain designated persons to receive the cheques drawn at Rs. 4000 per acre. The priority of persons to receive cheques on behalf of non-resident farmers would be in the order of spouse in case of married person, major children above 18 years age in case spouse is not there and either mother or father of the non-resident farmers in case they have no spouse or major children. The MAOs and AEOs have been directed to ascertain the relationship of the claimant family members to the non-resident farmers and upon satisfying themselves, they shall handover the cheques to the designated persons. These guidelines would apply to all non-resident farmers who live abroad and cannot present themselves to receive the cheques. These guidelines do not apply to ryots those residing elsewhere within the country. The non-resident farmers comprise only about 60,000. Land owned by Gulf migrants are included in the Land records data of the MAOs and AEOs, but such lands were cultivated by the family members of the Gulf migrants⁶.

RYTHU BANDHU GIVES A BOOST TO FARM MECHANIZATION

In a few years from now livestock is likely to cease to be a major component of agricultural economy... The changing trend has even poor tribal farmers going in for mechanization and the Rythu Bandhu Scheme (RBS) of investment support to farmers in the Telangana state has only given a boost to use of machinery.

While the non-tribal farmers started switching over to machinery for ploughing and related activities since about a decade, the tribal areas continued using bullocks for these tasks as the cattle population is excellent, and their use in farming has kept the investment slightly lower than that of other farmers.

The trend has undergone drastic change with the RBS hastening mechanization this season. The hard cash from RBS is being used by farmers to hire tractors which are why not as many manual ploughs can be seen preparing fields for the ensuing sowing season at this time of the year⁷.

DISPUTED LANDS NEXT ON AGENDA

Part A of the exercise forms part of extending investment support to 58 lakh farmers owning 1.43 crore acres of land across the state comprising 93.00 percent of land holdings. There will still be 6.5 lakh agricultural land records forming the remaining 7.00 percent that are locked in disputes including the huge extent of land for which there are no legal documents that are classified under part B. the process is not expected to be completed any time soon as lands under part B are in one dispute or the other, a majority of them legal in nature.

Part B will be a continuous process as it deals with disputes mostly legal in nature. While there are existing disputes, the scope for new disputes arising after the process is initiated could not be ruled out. Disputes can arise within the family with each member claiming their right on the land in question or cases might also be filed by outsiders⁸.

LIFE INSURANCE SCHEME

In addition to uninterrupted free power supply to agriculture and Rs. 8,000 per acre investment support every year, the Life Insurance cover is another step forward in the welfare of farming community. Although, providing Insurance cover against accidental death would have lessened the burden on the government, it was decided to cover any kind of death since only accidental death cover would not benefit the farming community much.

The Telangana government has announced the scheme aimed at providing Rs. 5 lakh insurance cover to farmers in addition to putting in place investment support scheme with an estimated expenditure of Rs. 12000 crore every year. The government has entered into a memorandum of understanding with the public sector undertaking Life Insurance Corporation of India as the sole insurer under the scheme.

Some 93.00 percent of the total farmers in Telangana area either small or marginal and the number of those having land holding of less than an acre is nearly 18 lakh. Such farmers have land holding as their sole livelihood and in the event of death of the farmer, his/her family is devastated. The state government has decided

to introduce insurance cover to farmers to overcome such a pathetic situation with life insurance cover of Rs. 5 lakh.

All farmers in the age group of 18 to 59 years as on August 15, 2018 to be provided Insurance cover. Age of the farmers would be calculated based on the date of birth entered in Aadhaar. It was for the first time in the country such mass-scale life insurance scheme was being introduced, although group insurance schemes with only few thousand, of beneficiaries were not new⁹.

In the event of death of an insured farmer, the nominee appointed by the farmer would be paid the claim of Rs. 5 lakh within 10 days of producing the farmer's death certificate by the family concerned. A premium of Rs. 2,271.50 would be paid by the state to each farmer, which would provide an insurance coverage of Rs. 5 lakh for natural and accidental death. A farmer may have land in different areas and may hold different accounts but a farmer would be eligible for only one life Insurance policy.

EIGHT SELECTED BANKS

Adequate cash reserves are made available in all the branches of eight designated banks which have been chosen for distribution of cheques. The names of the banks are: State Bank of India, Telangana Grameena Bank, Grameena Vikas Bank, Canara Bank, Indian Overseas Bank, Corporation Bank, Andhra Bank and Syndicate Bank. The cheques will be three months validity and farmers can encash these cheques at any of the eight banks that have been selected for the purpose.

GIVE UP RYTHU BANDHU MONEY

When the Telangana government conceptualized the Crop Investment Support Scheme and decided to give Rs. 4,000 per acre per season to every title deed holder irrespective of their economic status, many ministers, MLAs and other people's representatives in public life volunteered to give up the assistance to ease burden on the government.

Among those who returned the cheques to the government included celebrities, film actors, retired bureaucrats, MLAs, Ministers and people's representatives.

Interestingly, Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao apparently was not in favour of a campaign made to popularize 'Give it up' option on the lines of what the Narendra Modi government did with the LPG subsidy.

The chief Minister was of the view that it would be better if people who did not require government help willingly returned the amount on their own accord. But he did mention that the amount returned under the 'Give it up option' would go to Farmers Coordination Committee. The FCC would pool it into the market intervention fund to help farmers get minimum support price¹⁰.

Though there was no vigorous campaign, the 'give it up' provision was mentioned in the Gram Sabhas conducted while the land records were being corrected and a prescribed form was displayed in the meeting.

The government had reportedly asked the officials concerned not to insist on anyone to give up the benefit. The money of farmers who wanted to give up the benefit could be deposited to the accounts of farmer's coordination committees.

DHARANI WEBSITE-PATTADAR PASSBOOK RECORDS

Dharani Website, which is a gateway to all the updated and purified agricultural land revenue records in the state. "Dharani will account for each and every action of an individual and his/her trial will be found if any change is made in a particular Khata (account) number. The portal will record the history of every Khata number-whether any parcel of the land has been sold, to whom it is sold and the latest extent of the land in the account". The hall mark of Dharani is accountability and for that checks and balances have to be inbuilt into the software system for fixing accountability. It will have central storage which cannot be obliterated. Dharani

cannot be a simple system where everyone can access and manipulate without much difficulty¹¹.

SIGNIFICANT FEATURES OF THE PATTADAR PASSBOOK

1. Anti-Copying feature (personal details of the farmer to be attested on the photograph).
2. Hologram of the Government of Telangana.
3. A unique Q R Code-a dynamic code that will help in pulling up the profile and transactions of the Passbook holder when required.
4. Barcode with a unique transaction ID.

AADHAAR LINK TO PATTADAR PASSBOOKS CREATES PROBLEMS

The Revenue Department which has taken up the ambitious land record updation programme is apparently in a piquant situation in rectification of errors printed in the pattadar passbooks.

The department is finding it a difficult task to rectify errors, especially the mismatches in the photographs printed on the passbooks and those of the original land owner. Inquires revealed that a majority of these mismatches were reported after Aadhaar linkage had been made mandatory for the issuance of the new security feature oriented passbooks¹².

WRONG AADHAAR

Several farmers, who did not enroll themselves for issue of Aadhaar cards during several drives conducted by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), gave Aadhaar numbers of either their near and dear ones or close acquaintances in the applications filled for the new passbooks as it was made a pre-condition for the issuance of the passbook.

As a result, the software utilized for printing pattadar passbooks downloaded the photographs and details of the respective Aadhaar card holders from the UIDAI website resulting in the mismatch.

The department had therefore, decided to take up re-verification of the Aadhaar numbers related to the passbooks where mismatches were reported. In addition, it was also decided to take the cooperation of the UIDAI for issuing Aadhaar cards to farmers who missed out on enrolling their names¹³.

CLEANING LAND RECORDS

The Telangana government bridged the gap between land records and the ground reality with a herculean programme of updating and purifying the revenue records in just about hundred days. (15th September 2017 to 31st December 2017). The Programme deployed 1,523 teams in 10,823 villages in 568 mandals of 30 districts in Telangana (excluding Hyderabad and Secunderabad), verifying a mammoth total of 2,38,18,551 acres of land¹⁴.

FOCUS AREAS OF LAND RECORD PURIFICATION

1. Successions
2. Mutations
3. Partitions
4. Name, Extent & Survey Number Corrections
5. Exchange of Lands
6. Consolidation of Land Holdings
7. Updating Accounts

8. Terminating Duplicate Accounts
9. Inherited Land
10. Gifted Land
11. Non-agricultural Land
12. Government Land
13. Community Land
14. Forest Land
15. Acquired Land
16. Wakf/Endowment/Bhoodan Land.

SMOOTH LAND REGISTRATION

After completing rectification of land records, the state government has set eyes on bringing in 'revolutionary change' in the registration processes, avoiding the inconvenience caused to people in taking up land transactions. The new registration system came into force from June 2, 2018 coincided with the state formation day, according to new system the Mandal Revenue Officers will discharge duties of sub-registrar. The registration process would be simplified as the government launched the Dharni Website which will have details of all the lands. All that you need to do is to fix up time with the respective MRO for registering the land transaction and the documents will reach the doorstep of the beneficiaries through courier in four to five days. The new system would also ease the burden on the farmers to carry their pattadar passbooks to banks and mortgage them for obtaining loans. Several changes had been made in the new passbooks issued to farmers and bankers could verify the details of land owners online for sanctioning loans¹⁵.

DEAD LINE EXTENSION

The June 20 deadline set for completion of the land record updation programme would be extended by about a fortnight so that all eligible farmers were issued Aadhaar cards which would in turn become handy for the department in its efforts to rectify the errors.

SEVERAL MISTAKES

The government initiated cleansing of land records which no other state in the country has attempted so far. But several beneficiaries reportedly complained to the officials concerned about alleged wrong entry of their details in the new pattadar passbooks. The farmers were inconvenienced due to technical mistakes and human errors. For eg. Mistakes like-amount difference in printed cheques, names of land owners were removed, records showing more than actual extent, lands including non-agriculture, and those under prohibition of Transfers Act, beneficiaries not showing Aadhaar or inclusion of decreased or existed in all categories. The Dharani website, which would maintain land records, would be designed on the basis of information available. The passbooks that have already been distributed but had entry errors must be replaced with new ones.

Currently the Rythu Bandhu Scheme covers only pattadar holders. There are more than 11 lakh tenant farmers, more than two lakh acres under podu cultivation by Adivasis, and lakhs of farmers cultivating under sadobainama none of whom are covered under the scheme.

The government had decided to issue passbooks to 57.33 lakh farmers across the state of which, 4.6 lakh farmers did not link their accounts with Aadhaar numbers. It was accordingly decided to distribute cheques and passbooks to 52.72 lakh accounts which were linked with Aadhaar accounts.

STATUS OF RYTHU BANDHU SCHEME

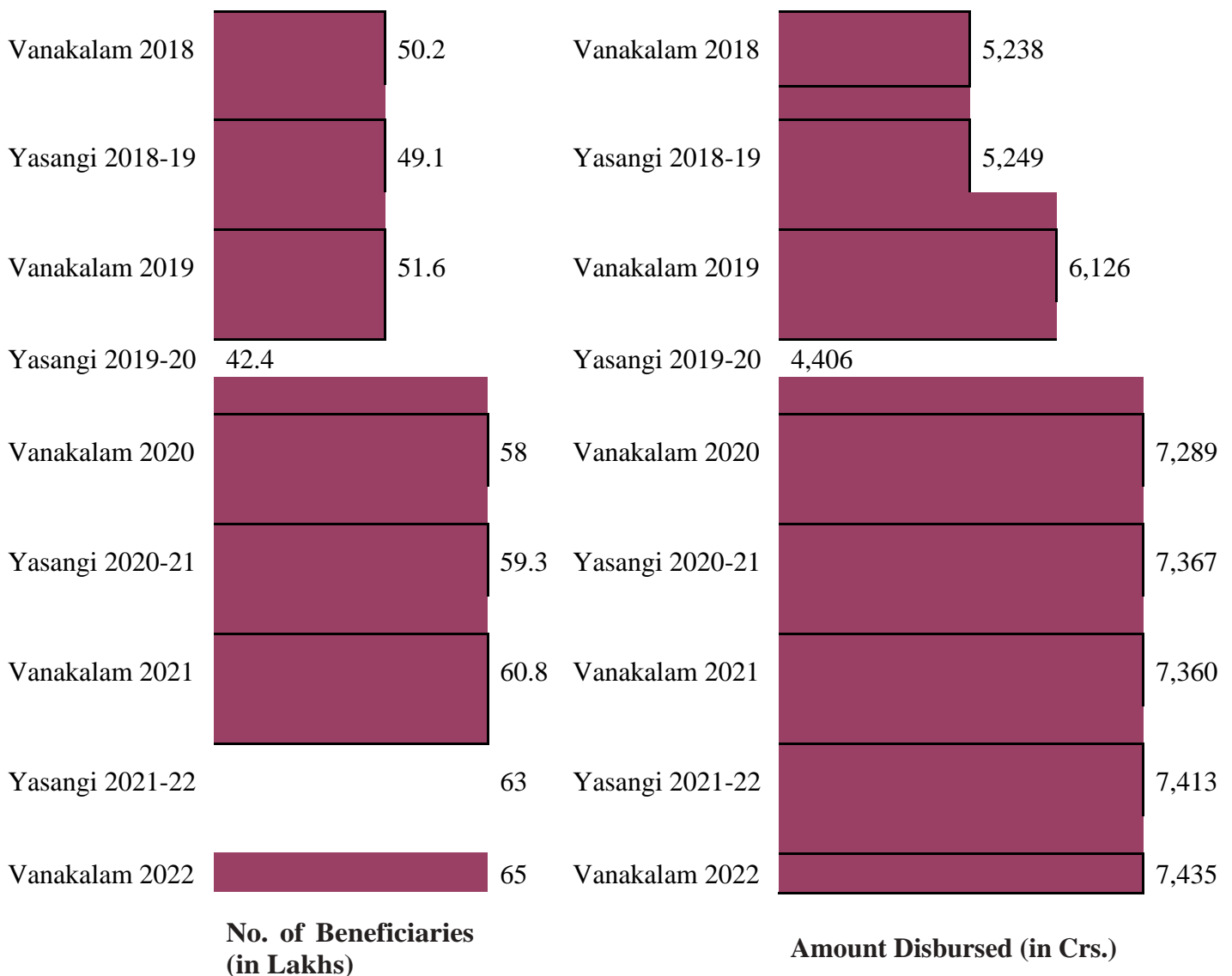
Approximately 65 lakh farmers, of which 73.63% are marginal farmers (less than 2.47 acres) and 17.70% are

small farmers (2.48 - 4.94 acres), received investment support under the Rythu Bandhu scheme during the rainy season of 2022. Merely 0.1% of the total beneficiaries are large farmers 51 (>24.78 acres). 148 lakh acres were covered by this program in Vanakalam 2022–2023, and Rs. 7,435 crores were distributed. In total, during the last nine seasons (2018–19 to 2022–23) in the State, beneficiaries have received payments totaling Rs. 65,192 crores.

Of the 65 lakh beneficiaries in Vanakalam 2022, 53% are in the BC category, 13% are in the SC and ST categories, and roughly 21% are in the "Others" category.

The Rythu Bandhu Scheme has been allocated 54%8 of the total budget for the Agriculture and Allied Activities sector in the current fiscal year 2022–2023.

Status of Rythu Bandhu Scheme from Vanakalam 2018-19 to Vanakalam 2022-23



Source: Department of Agriculture

Amount Disbursed: In 2018-19, an amount of Rs.10,486 crore was disbursed under this scheme. By 2022-23, the total amount disbursed increased to 14,743 crores. The total amount disbursed has been increased by 40.60% from the year 2018-19 to 2022-23. In the 5 years since launch of the scheme, 65,192 crores have been disbursed to beneficiaries.

Beneficiaries per Land Category: Since inception of the scheme, a total of 1,211 lakh acres have been covered. The coverage of Marginal farmers (Farmers with less than 2.47 acres) has been increased

substantially with a CAGR 8.53% from Vanakalam 2020-21 to Vanakalam 2022-23. Thus, the government is successful in achieving the objective of helping maximum number of small and marginal farmers in the State.

SUGGESTIONS

1. It would be better to restrict this program to marginal and small farmers.
2. This scheme is going to exempt land lards.
3. Avoid applying to be a government official.
4. This plan does not apply to bureaucrats or political leaders.
5. Uncultivated land, hilly regions, and barren areas are to be excluded
6. Those employed by the government above the poverty line are exempt

CONCLUSIONS

When farmers were desisting from farm activities due to no encouragement, the Telangana government has made farming as a festival by providing them with Rythu Bandhu Scheme, 24x7 power supply, taking measures for providing irrigation sources to one crore acres through irrigation projects.

The country's first-of -its kind Rythu Bandhu, farmers Investment Support Scheme. No other state has produced a scheme like Rythu Bandhu in 70 years of independence. Everyone normally talked about indebting the farmers by giving a loan or subsidy.

The government not only for conceiving the Rythu Bandhu Life Insurance Scheme but also creating infrastructure and recruiting a young force of 2000 new agriculture extension officers to implement it.

Telangana state hogged national attention following the purification of land records in a short span of 100 days. Facilitating the scheme, this has benefited over 58 lakh farmers across the state. The state government has introduced tamperproof pattadar passbooks with security features to weed out bogus ones.

The State government's programme for providing investment support to farmers, has received accolades from the World Bank for effective measures in the implementation of the scheme to reduce overall cost reduction for farmers.

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