

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
AT THE FIRST CONVOCATION OF NIFTEM**

Sonepat, February 10, 2018

1. I am happy to be here for the first convocation ceremony of the National Institute of Food Technology Entrepreneurship and Management or NIFTEM. My congratulations to those being awarded their graduate and postgraduate degrees, and particularly the medal winners. This is a milestone in your academic life. It owes much to your hard work, and to the support you have received from your professors and faculty members, as well as your parents and families. Indeed, in your success is their success.
2. Your formal education at this institution may have come to a conclusion, but your careers are about to take off. You are entering a world full of possibilities. And a world where the skills you have learnt here – that is food technology and entrepreneurship – have a great demand. You are especially fortunate, for what you have learnt can not only empower you to build a professional career – but can also change the lives of our farmers and help in the development of a prosperous country.
3. India has been an agrarian economy ever since our ancestors planted grains in the Indus Valley. Different crops and food items find mention in our cultural and intellectual legacies, from the Vedas to Ayurveda and yoga. Many varieties of nutritious grains and a wide range of pulses mark the Indian experience. So do food habits and recipes that change from state to state, if not from district to district. They symbolise the breadth and diversity of India – which is our great strength.
4. At the root of this strength are our farmers. Millions of them, both men and women, toil relentlessly and with great effort to grow food for us. They contribute to not just food security but actually national security. And they ensure that food reaches the tables of 1.3 billion of our fellow citizens, most of them fellow citizens whom an

individual farmer does not personally know and will never meet. The farmers who perform such a selfless task often do so for limited returns, and face the uncertainty of the monsoon and the market. Truly, farming in our country is not simply a job – it is a tapasya.

5. As a society and as a people we are obligated to make life better for our farmers and to free them from the fickleness of nature and of weather patterns – and, to the degree possible, of the unpredictability of demand and supply. This is the resolve of the government, and it has instituted policies and programmes to further this. Use of science and technology along the food chain is essential to these programmes. And this is where institutions such as NIFTEM and those who graduate from here will play a vital role.

Ladies and Gentlemen

6. The incorporation of technology in agriculture is not new in our country. Innovations were critical to our Green Revolution. Industrious farmers, including in the state we are in – Haryana – took advantage of these and increased productivity. The outcome is an India that is self-sufficient and self-reliant in food production. Today, our country is the world's largest producer of milk. It is the second largest producer of rice, wheat, fruits and vegetables, sugarcane and tea. The third largest producer of eggs. And the sixth largest producer of meat.
7. This achievement is a tribute to our farmers. It has also laid the foundations of an appreciable food industry. The Indian food and grocery market is the world's sixth largest and expected to touch US\$ 1 trillion by 2025. The food processing industry is spread across nearly 39,000 registered factories and over two million unregistered food processing units. One in eight Indians working in registered manufacturing facilities is employed in the food sector. Food items constitute over 11 per cent of the country's exports. To take this sector to the next level, the government has sanctioned 42 mega food parks and these are in different stages of being commissioned.

8. Yet, this is only the tip of the ice-berg – or should I say only the skin of the potato! In recent decades, the global food trade has undergone revolutionary changes. We have to bring the benefits of these changes – and the potential of this trade – to every khet and every kisaan. Our determined and committed farmers have produced food for our country; they have it in them to produce for the world. In the services sector, India has taken advantage of its enormous human talent and lower cost structures to build world-class industries. There is no reason why we cannot replicate this in agriculture and in food and agro-based industries. Indian farm products – whether rice, milk, fruits and vegetables, or even chillies – can flood supermarkets and feed households across the globe. This can help us create numerous employment opportunities for our young people - in cold storages and in preservation, in food processing and along the food supply chain.
9. Together with global demand, there is an explosion in the domestic market as well. As social habits change and as nuclear families emerge in larger numbers, more so in our cities, demand for packaged and ready-to-eat food products is rising in India. The challenge is to maintain quality, safety and labelling standards for food and ingredients that are up to global benchmarks. It is to make certain that packaged foods promote both convenience and health. And that they keep alive the nutritious grains and traditional food items that can be found in every state of India. It is for the food industry to innovate and find easy-to-use solutions to the epidemic of lifestyle diseases in our country. And we have to do all this while being conscious of building our own brands, especially for traditional and nutritive food items that have been the pride of India for centuries and can reach far greater consumers at home and abroad.
10. Your institution has emerged in such a social context. Those who graduate from NIFTEM will serve as focal points, linking the farmer to science and technology, to entrepreneurship and to the food processing industry. It is for you to build partnerships among

multiple stakeholders – industry, regulators, policymakers, consumers, financial and credit institutions. And of course our dear farmers.

11. If government programmes such as Mudra and Start-up India are to have a true impact, and if farmers and farmer families are to move up and become micro-entrepreneurs – or part of the value chain in a larger food industry – then it is graduates and young professionals such as those present here who will take this process forward. I am happy to learn that the Corporate Resource Division of NIFTEM facilitates placements and encourages both established food businesses and budding start-ups to interact with students. Graduates from this institution should strive to become job creators. Government schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana provide opportunities, including financial incentives, for qualified young individuals to set up food processing plants and in fact units with backward and forward linkages across the food processing value chain. Please make the most of such opportunities.
12. In our country, there is still a sizeable gap between the farm and the fork – or perhaps between the plough and the plate. This gap is not just a matter of prices or of technology. It is also a gap of justice – justice that we as a society must do to our fellow citizens who toil in far-flung farms. And institutions such as NIFTEM, as well as those who graduate from here, must help the government and the country in bridging this gap. With your skills, energy and sense of optimism, I am confident that you will succeed.
13. With those words, I wish you the very best for the future.

Thank you
Jai Hind!