

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
ON THE OCCASION OF INAUGURATION OF THE PLATINUM
JUBILEE CONFERENCE OF ALL INDIA FOOD PROCESSORS'
ASSOCIATION**

New Delhi, December 20, 2018

1. I am glad to be here to inaugurate the Platinum Jubilee Conference of the All India Food Processors' Association. This Association is the apex body dedicated to the growth and development of the food industry in the country. Its very origins point to a visionary and pioneering spirit. In 1943, when the Association was founded, India was not yet independent. Those were turbulent times of colonialism, war and food shortages. The horrific Bengal Famine occurred in that year.
2. In such circumstances, the founders of the Association recognised the need for scientific management of the agro-food sector. They understood the importance of a modern food processing industry to protect the needs of both farmers and consumers – and to promote agricultural productivity.
3. Over the years, the Association has worked hard to achieve its goals. It has brought large and small food processing units on a common platform. It has synergised the efforts of all relevant stakeholders to establish integrated food chains and contributed to national well-being. These are commendable achievements. Indeed, the theme of this Platinum Jubilee Conference – “Food Sustains Life, Processing Sustains Food” – itself suggests the linking of the Association’s aspirations with wider society.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

4. A milestone anniversary is a moment of reflection and of looking back with pride. Much more than that, it is an occasion to recharge batteries. Your Association is only 25 years away from its centenary. What are the benchmarks it must set itself? After all, for agriculture and for the food industry, the potential of the coming 25 years – the challenges, the technologies and the opportunities – is much, much more than what it has been in the previous 75.
5. Thanks to the selfless perseverance of our farmers and thanks to technological and industrial advances in agriculture and agro-processing, India is not short of food today. When it comes to many agricultural commodities and even processed foods, we have a surplus. We command a growing slice of the global market. Now is the moment to scale up our ambitions – for wider economic benefit but most so for the prosperity of our farmers.
6. The road ahead has four lanes. First, we must fix missing links in the farm-to-fork value chain. The differential between what farmers get for their crops and prices that food consumers pay, both within the country and internationally, is substantial. It is important to reduce this. This will make for security of demand and supply and it will also ensure sustainability of farming as a profession. Without the farmer's willingness and motivation to labour all day in the field, the food processing industry will dry up. It will not have its basic ingredient – agricultural produce. The farmer is not just your supplier; he or she is your inseparable partner.
7. Second, and somewhat related to the first point, is the degree of food wastage in India. This is true for agricultural produce that just rots in the field or the mandi. It is also true for processed food or cooked food that goes waste. To be fair, this is a global problem. According to United Nations findings, food worth US\$ 1.2 trillion is simply thrown aside every year. That is an overwhelming statistic. It amounts to about half of India's GDP.

8. In India, food wastage poses not just economic questions but moral ones as well. We are a country with undeniable inequalities in income and consumption. Food wastage can easily be prevented by better and more rational food distribution. This will help us serve a greater section of our people. The issue of post-harvest waste is still more pressing. A few years ago, a report by the Central Institute of Post-Harvest Engineering and Technology had estimated the value of such waste at almost Rs 100,000 crore. This is a tragedy. A majority of our agriculturalists are engaged in subsistence farming. Their produce is a source of sustenance for them. If it is damaged or destroyed because of inadequate storage or logistics, the livelihood of innocent families is hurt.
9. The food processing industry has a major role to play here. It can help build the food value chain by being a bridge between the farmer and diverse and distant markets. It can enter into long-term contracts with farmers for specific commodities and items. And it can make investments and promote infrastructure in the form of cold chains, quick movement and management of food commodities, and technology that keeps food produce safe and edible for lengthy periods.
10. The government too is taking urgent steps in this regard. Over the past four years, it has approved 42 mega food parks, a third of which are already in operation. In parallel, 274 cold chain projects have been announced. 129 of them are already functional. Hundred per cent FDI is now allowed in retail and e-commerce of food products manufactured in India. The Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana has been launched to modernise processing facilities and check agro-wastage.
11. Programmes such as MUDRA and Start-up India are promoting small-scale enterprises, sometimes in the very household of a small farmer. These are adding value to food produce and giving a push to food processing at the micro-level. Such initiatives can only be successful if the food

processing industry – Big Food as it is called – becomes a facilitator and user. The ordinary farming family that starts bottling pickles or jams with the fruits it grows should ideally become a supplier to the food industry – and part of a national or even international value chain. We have done this with milk. There is no reason why we cannot replicate it with other food commodities and products.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

12. Such hopes can be furthered by technology that is becoming available. The third lane that your industry must travel on is paved with technology. Right-sized and biodegradable or even edible packaging can curb use of plastics, fight climate change and reduce pressure on landfills. Machines can turn food waste into animal feed or use it in, for example, mushroom culture. This can even be done with husk and straw, which is otherwise burnt and causes pollution. Solar-powered mini cold storage facilities can be economical to run and of utility to farmers with small holdings.
13. Ultimately the promotion and incorporation of such new and emerging technologies is part of the domain of the food processing industry.
14. The final point I wish to emphasise is that of processed food being compatible with modern health concerns, and meeting best-in-class safety standards. In India lifestyle diseases are a growing public health risk. Appropriate nutrients and edible items that retain the robustness and roughage of the traditional Indian diet need to be combined with packaging and preservation. This has to be done even in ready-to-eat foods.
15. And safety standards must be exacting enough to meet international specifications. This is critical to help your industry and your products reach new markets – especially in those countries where there is a growing fascination for Indian flavours; or where the Indian diaspora resides. In this regard, I

am confident that the 119 food testing labs that have been set up or upgraded by the Ministry of Food Processing, under the guidance of the Minister, will be kept busy by members of your Association.

16. As more food products are created, more food products will be tested, introduced and consumed. It is vital that a culture and consciousness of food safety is inculcated across the food value chain, from consumers to suppliers, and from large packaged food companies to neighbourhood mithai shops.
17. With those words, I once again congratulate your Association on completing 75 years. I look forward to a future of plenty – for the food industry, for consumers and, of course, for our farmers.

Thank you

Jai Hind!