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SEHAT Mission: ICMR-ICAR Converge for Agri-Nutrition-Health Integration

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WHY IN NEWS

On **May 11, 2026**, Union Health Minister **Shri J P Nadda** and Agriculture Minister **Shri Shivraj Singh Chouhan** jointly launched the **SEHAT Mission – Science Excellence for Health through Agricultural Transformation** – a first-of-its-kind convergence platform between the **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)** and the **Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)**. The mission targets India’s persistent “**hidden hunger**” paradox and rising agriculture-linked non-communicable diseases.

WHY SUCH A MISSION?

India simultaneously runs three nutritional realities:

BURDEN	INDICATOR	SOURCE
Hidden hunger	70%+ children iron-deficient	NFHS-5 (2019-21)
Undernutrition	35.5% under-5 stunting	NFHS-5
Over-nutrition	24% adult women overweight	NFHS-5
Pesticide / occupational health	Agri-worker NCD prevalence rising	ICAR-NIANP studies

Despite India being self-sufficient in cereals, **diet diversity is poor**, micronutrient adequacy is low, and **agricultural workers themselves bear health costs** from pesticide and heat exposure. The SEHAT Mission is a structural response to this paradox.

WHAT THE MISSION DOES

Five priority areas

- Biofortified crops** – breeding and adoption of zinc, iron, vitamin-A rich varieties
- Integrated farming for dietary diversity** – crop-livestock-fish-horticulture systems mapped to household nutrition

- 3 **Occupational health of agricultural workers** – pesticide exposure, heat stress, ergonomics
- 4 **Agri-NCD prevention** – linking diet, pesticide residues, and metabolic disease
- 5 **One Health surveillance** – zoonotic disease tracking across humans, livestock, environment

Operational architecture

- Shared laboratories between ICAR institutes and ICMR institutes
- Joint cohorts and longitudinal nutrition studies
- Common indices on diet diversity and nutritional adequacy
- Pilot blocks in **aspirational districts**

THE TWO APEX BODIES

FEATURE	ICMR	ICAR
Founded	1911 (as IRFA); ICMR since 1949	1929
HQ	New Delhi	New Delhi
Parent	Department of Health Research, MoHFW	DARE, MoA&FW
Apex role	Biomedical and public health research	Agricultural research, education, extension
Network	27 permanent institutes (NIV Pune, NIN Hyderabad, NIRRH, NICED, etc.)	113 institutes + 73 SAUs + 731 KVKs

The **convergence** is methodologically novel: ICMR brings cohort-study and epidemiology rigour; ICAR brings crop-breeding and farm-system rigour.

ANCHORING NATIONAL PROGRAMMES

- **POSHAN Abhiyaan (2018)** – nutrition convergence under MWCD; SEHAT supplies the agricultural pipeline
- **National Food Security Act, 2013** – right to food; PDS coverage; SEHAT complements with diet quality
- **One Health Mission (approved 2024)** – SEHAT contributes the agri-and-NCD pillar
- **Mission Saksham Anganwadi & POSHAN 2.0** – delivery vehicle for biofortified outputs
- **PM-AASHA** – procurement for pulses and oilseeds, the nutrition-relevant crops

BIOFORTIFIED VARIETIES – THE CROP PIPELINE

CROP	VARIETY	TRAIT
Wheat	HD-2967, HI-1633	Zinc, iron
Rice	CR Dhan-310, DRR Dhan-49	Protein, zinc
Pearl millet	ICTP-8203 Fe10, HHB-299	Iron
Finger millet (ragi)	CFMV-1, CFMV-2	Calcium
Maize	Pusa HQPM-1 Improved	Lysine, tryptophan
Sweet potato	Bhu Sona	Beta-carotene (Vitamin A)

India has, over the past decade since 2015, released over **70 biofortified varieties** – but uptake remains pocketed.

CRITICAL REFLECTION

Strengths

- First **institutional bridge** between Health and Agriculture ministries
- Aligns with the **WHO Triple Billion target** and **SDG 2 (Zero Hunger)** and **SDG 3 (Good Health)**
- Brings agricultural workers – so far a neglected occupational category – into routine NCD surveillance

Limitations

- Mission has no fresh fund allocation announced as of the launch; risk of being absorbed into existing budgets
- Convergence at the secretariat level is easier than at the **state department** level, where lines stay siloed
- Dietary diversity demands purchasing power, not just supply

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 2 – Social Justice and Governance

- Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections
- Health and nutrition policy
- Inter-ministerial convergence
- Issues relating to development of social sectors

GS Paper 3 – Agriculture and Science & Technology

- Agriculture and farmers' welfare
- Food technology, biofortification
- Public health
- Government policies and interventions

Mains Angles

- 1 The hidden hunger paradox in India calls for an agri-nutrition pivot. Critically evaluate the SEHAT Mission as a response.
- 2 Discuss the One Health approach with reference to recent Indian initiatives.
- 3 Agricultural workers in India face a neglected occupational health burden. Comment.

Launched May 11, 2026 – “Science Excellence for Health through Agricultural Transformation.” Joint ICMR-ICAR convergence on biofortification, dietary diversity, agri occupational health, agri-NCDs, and One Health.

Indian Council of Medical Research; 1911 (as IRFA), ICMR since 1949; under Department of Health Research, MoHFW. **DG ICMR** is also Secretary, DHR.

Indian Council of Agricultural Research; 1929; under Department of Agricultural Research and Education (DARE), MoA&FW.

Approved by Cabinet 2024; pandemic preparedness through integrated human-animal-environment surveillance.

Nutrition convergence mission under MWCD; now POSHAN 2.0.

Under-5 stunting 35.5%; child anaemia 67.1%; overweight women 24%.

National Institute of Nutrition; 1918; an ICMR institute; anchors RDA (Recommended Dietary Allowance) for India.

70+ released in India since 2015 (HarvestPlus collaboration with ICAR).

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