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Maharashtra Recognises Women as Independent Farmers

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Maharashtra Recognises Women as Independent Farmers

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WHY IN NEWS

*On July 2, 2026, the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly unanimously passed the Maharashtra Women Farmers Empowerment Bill, 2026, making Maharashtra the first Indian state to grant women legal recognition as independent farmers, **decoupling** (<https://ujyari.com/vocab/decoupling/>) their access to farm-welfare schemes from land ownership.*

A LANDMARK FOR WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

The Maharashtra Women Farmers Empowerment Bill, 2026, piloted by Minister Pankaja Munde, was passed unanimously by the state Legislative Assembly on July 2, 2026. Its core achievement is legal and administrative: it severs the long-standing link between a woman's access to agricultural welfare and her ownership of land.

Across India, most farm-welfare schemes, from subsidies to crop insurance to institutional credit, are anchored to land records in which the landholder is overwhelmingly a man. Because women rarely hold land in their own name, they are routinely excluded from benefits despite performing the bulk of farm labour. The Maharashtra Bill attacks this structural exclusion at its root.

What the Bill Does

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PROVISION	EFFECT
Women Farmer Certificate	A formal certificate recognising a woman as a farmer, unlocking access to farm-welfare schemes regardless of land title
Expanded definition of “farmer”	Includes landless labourers, tenants, livestock rearers and women doing at least one season of farm work
Maharashtra State Women Farmers Fund	A dedicated fund to finance schemes and support for women farmers
Scheme access	Subsidies, crop insurance, concessional (https://ujiyari.com/terms/concessional/) loans, procurement and warehousing, all now reachable through the certificate

By issuing recognition on the basis of work performed rather than land owned, the Bill reframes who counts as a “farmer” in the eyes of the state.

THE FEMINISATION OF AGRICULTURE

The Bill responds to a well-documented structural reality often called the feminisation of agriculture: as men migrate to non-farm and urban work, women take on a growing share of on-farm labour while remaining locked out of ownership and formal recognition.

INDICATOR	APPROXIMATE FIGURE
Share of farm labour performed by women	65 to 75 per cent
Share of agricultural land owned by women	Less than 14 per cent

This gap between labour contribution and legal recognition is the central injustice the Bill targets. Without a land title, a woman who sows, weeds, harvests and tends livestock has, until now, been invisible to the welfare architecture built around her work.

Why It Matters Beyond Maharashtra

- **A first-mover template:** As the first state to legislate independent recognition, Maharashtra offers a model other states and, potentially, central schemes can adapt.
- **Rights-based, not charity-based:** The certificate treats welfare access as an entitlement (<https://ujiyari.com/vocab/entitlement/>) flowing from work, aligning with a rights-based view of economic citizenship.

- **Inclusion of the invisible workforce:** Landless labourers, tenants and allied-activity workers (dairy, fisheries, horticulture) gain a route into formal recognition for the first time.

ANALYSIS AND WAY FORWARD

The Bill is a significant advance in gender-responsive welfare design, converting a woman's farm labour into a documented, benefit-bearing status. Its strength lies in decoupling recognition from ownership, a reform that could meaningfully widen access to credit, insurance and procurement for millions of women.

The decisive test, as always, will be implementation. The value of a Women Farmer Certificate depends on frictionless issuance: transparent eligibility, low documentation burden and protection against gatekeeping at the local level. The Maharashtra State Women Farmers Fund must be adequately and predictably financed, not left as a symbolic line item. There is also a coordination challenge: welfare schemes are anchored in land and revenue records maintained across departments, and the certificate must be genuinely honoured by banks, insurers and procurement agencies, not merely issued on paper. If Maharashtra can operationalise the certificate cleanly, it sets a powerful precedent for recognising women's economic agency in agriculture nationwide.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 2: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors; welfare schemes for vulnerable sections and mechanisms for their protection and betterment; issues relating to development and management of social sector resources; role of the state legislature.

GS Paper 1: Role of women and women's organisations; social empowerment; the changing nature of the rural economy and the feminisation of agriculture.

Prelims pointers:

- Maharashtra is the first Indian state to grant women legal recognition as independent farmers (Bill passed July 2, 2026).
- The Bill introduces the Women Farmer Certificate and the Maharashtra State Women Farmers Fund.
- It expands the definition of "farmer" to include landless labourers, tenants, livestock rearers and seasonal women farm workers.
- Women perform an estimated 65 to 75 per cent of farm labour but own less than 14 per cent of agricultural land.

Mains question: "Decoupling access to farm welfare from land ownership is the most direct route to addressing the feminisation of agriculture." Discuss with reference to the Maharashtra Women Farmers Empowerment Bill, 2026. (15 marks, 250 words)

FACTS CORNER

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Maharashtra Women Farmers Empowerment Bill, 2026: Passed unanimously by the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly on July 2, 2026; piloted by Minister Pankaja Munde.

First in India: Maharashtra becomes the first state to grant women legal recognition as independent farmers.

Women Farmer Certificate: Unlocks subsidies, crop insurance, concessional loans, procurement and warehousing, independent of land ownership.

Expanded “farmer” definition: Covers landless labourers, tenants, livestock rearers and women doing at least one season of farm work.

Dedicated fund: Creates the Maharashtra State Women Farmers Fund.

Feminisation of agriculture: Women perform an estimated 65 to 75 per cent of farm labour but own less than 14 per cent of agricultural land.

Core reform: Decouples welfare-scheme access from land title, addressing structural exclusion.

Sources: Deccan Herald (<https://www.deccanherald.com/>), ANI News (<https://www.aninews.in/>), Web India 123 (<http://news.webindia123.com/>), Prokerala (<https://www.prokerala.com/>)

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