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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

She Farms, She Owns Nothing: Recognising the Woman Farmer

THE HINDU

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She Farms, She Owns Nothing: Recognising the Woman Farmer

 **The Hindu**

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GS1

GS2

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THE LIFT LINE

Indian agriculture increasingly runs on women's hands and rarely on women's names. A law that hands them a certificate, not just a hoe, changes who the state can finally see.

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

The Maharashtra Women Farmers Empowerment Bill, passed on July 2, 2026, is a textbook case that fuses society, gender and governance, and it gives you a concrete, current example for abstract questions on women's empowerment.

GS Paper 1: Society, the role of women, and the changing structure of rural India through the feminisation of agriculture.

GS Paper 2: Governance and welfare delivery: how eligibility criteria (land title) can silently exclude the majority of actual farmers, and how the state can redesign schemes to reach them.

Prelims relevance: The Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act 2005, the Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana under DAY-NRLM, PM-KISAN, PMFBY and the Kisan Credit Card, and the concept of operational landholdings. These names and their eligibility logic are examinable.

Mains relevance: This is the model example for the recognition-versus-ownership debate and for gender-responsive welfare design. It also supplies data (labour share versus land ownership) that strengthens any answer on rural women.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

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Women do most of the work in Indian agriculture but own almost none of the land. According to the Agriculture Census 2015-16, women are roughly 73 per cent of the rural agricultural workforce, yet only about 14 per cent are operational landholders and they own only about 11 per cent of agricultural land. Oxfam India puts it similarly: over 70 per cent of the farm workforce, under 13 per cent of the land. The Periodic Labour Force Survey 2023-24 shows that around 77 per cent of rural working women are engaged in agriculture, and nearly half of them work unpaid.

This is the “feminisation of agriculture”: a rising share of women in farm work, driven largely by men migrating out to non-farm jobs, leaving women to manage crops and livestock while remaining unrecorded, lower-paid and landless.

The problem is that almost every farm welfare scheme is keyed to land records. PM-KISAN, the Kisan Credit Card and crop insurance effectively require proof of land ownership, so a woman who does most of the farming but holds no title is invisible to the state. On July 2, 2026, the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly unanimously passed the Maharashtra Women Farmers Empowerment Bill, 2026, making Maharashtra the first state to legally recognise women as independent farmers. Its core instrument is a “Woman Farmer Certificate” that lets a woman access schemes, subsidies, crop insurance, concessional (<https://ujjiyari.com/terms/concessional/>) credit, extension services and procurement irrespective of land ownership. The Bill also creates a State Fund for Women Farmers.

THE CORE ARGUMENT / ISSUE

The central argument is that recognition must be delinked from ownership. As long as the state defines a “farmer” by land title, it will keep excluding the very people who till the land. A certificate that recognises the worker, not the owner, is a governance fix for a social reality.

The land-labour gap

The mismatch is stark and worth memorising.

INDICATOR	WOMEN'S SHARE	SOURCE
Rural agricultural workforce	About 73%	Agriculture Census 2015-16
Operational landholders	About 14%	Agriculture Census 2015-16
Agricultural land owned	About 11%	Agriculture Census 2015-16
Rural working women in agriculture	About 77%	PLFS 2023-24
Unpaid among them	Nearly half	PLFS 2023-24

Why ownership stays out of reach

The Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005 gave daughters equal coparcenary rights in ancestral property, including agricultural land, but weak implementation, social pressure to relinquish claims and patchy land records mean the law has not translated into ownership on the ground. So a recognition route, a certificate, becomes the pragmatic bridge.

The delivery redesign

The Maharashtra certificate targets the exact bottleneck: it decouples benefit from title. This is gender-responsive governance in action, and it connects to the older Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana, which already recognises women as “Kisan” regardless of land ownership and has trained lakhs of women farmers.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (ANALYTICAL FRAME)

Use the **eligibility-lens frame**: when a welfare scheme underperforms for a group, do not assume the group is hard to reach; check what the eligibility criterion silently excludes. Here, “must own land” quietly excludes the majority of women who farm. Changing the criterion, from ownership to a recognised working identity, reaches them without any new subsidy. This frame, audit the gate before you blame the gap, applies to tenancy, disability benefits and informal-sector welfare alike.

THE DIAGRAM IN WORDS

Men migrate out -> women do most farm work -> but hold no land title -> schemes keyed to land records exclude them -> Woman Farmer Certificate delinks benefit from ownership -> the state can finally see and serve the woman farmer

WAY FORWARD

- ① **Scale the certificate model.** Encourage other states to adopt recognition-based identification of farmers so welfare follows the tiller, not the title.
- ② **Push joint and individual land titling.** Combine recognition with real ownership reform, including effective enforcement of the 2005 succession law and joint-titling incentives.
- ③ **Fix the databases.** Build a verified women-farmer database (as the Maharashtra fund envisages) linked to PM-KISAN, KCC and PMFBY so recognition automatically unlocks benefits.
- ④ **Strengthen collectives.** Route credit and markets through women’s self-help groups and Farmer Producer Organisations to give landless women bargaining power.
- ⑤ **Budget for it.** Use gender-responsive budgeting to fund extension, credit and training tailored to women farmers, advancing SDG 5.

PYO LINKAGE AND PRACTICE

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UPSC has asked about the role of women and women's organisations, the feminisation of agriculture and rural distress, and about women's land and property rights (questions on women in agriculture and on gender and development appear across recent years). This editorial supplies both the concept and fresh data.

Practice question (Mains, GS1/GS2, 15 marks): "The Indian farmer is increasingly a woman, but Indian farm policy still assumes the farmer is a landowning man." In the light of recent state legislation, discuss the feminisation of agriculture and the case for delinking scheme access from land ownership. (250 words)

Sources: The Hindu (<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion>)

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