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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Making India's Food System Climate-Proof Cannot Wait

 **THE HINDU**

27 August 2026 ·

ECONOMY

ENVIRONMENT

GS3

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Making India's Food System Climate-Proof Cannot Wait

 The Hindu

27 August 2026

GS3

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"India's food security system was designed to prevent famine and it succeeded. What is the equivalent design objective for a system facing an unstable monsoon rather than a shortage?"

✓ Every fact web-verified against primary sources

THE LIFT LINE

The system was built to make sure the harvest was big enough. The question now is whether it arrives at all, and when.

A NOTE ON THIS PIECE'S TITLE

The argument and the bylines are corroborated, and **Elisabeth Faure's affiliation as World Food Programme Representative and Country Director in India is independently confirmed**. The **exact masthead headline could not be independently verified**, because thehindu.com is not directly retrievable and the only day-specific index available is an aggregator that is known to re-title pieces. The title used above is descriptive of the argument rather than a claim about the newspaper's own wording.

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

Food security and agriculture are examined annually, and answers usually describe the PDS and MSP. This editorial supplies the critique: that the architecture's success mechanism is also its rigidity.

GS Paper 3: Issues of buffer stocks and food security; public distribution system; cropping patterns; agricultural subsidies and MSP.

GS Paper 2: Government policies and interventions; issues relating to poverty and hunger.

CONCEPT	MEANING	WHY IT IS TESTABLE
Buffer stock norms	Prescribed quantities of foodgrain the Government must hold at set dates	The instrument the authors want linked to forecasts
Decentralised procurement (DCP)	States procure, store and distribute on the Centre's behalf	The route to shorter supply chains and lower losses
Shree Anna	The Government's designation for millets	The nutritional and ecological alternative lacking procurement assurance

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Architecture

ELEMENT	INSTITUTION OR INSTRUMENT
Price assurance	Minimum Support Price, recommended by the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) , announced by the CCEA
Procurement	Food Corporation of India , and State agencies under decentralised procurement
Stocking	Buffer stock norms and the strategic reserve
Distribution	Public distribution system under the National Food Security Act, 2013 , covering up to 75 per cent of the rural and 50 per cent of the urban population
Portability	One Nation One Ration Card

MSP is announced for **23 crops**, but effective procurement is heavily concentrated in **rice and wheat**, which is the gap between formal coverage and operative incentive.

The Millet Context

2023 was the International Year of Millets, proposed by India and adopted by the United Nations. The Government designates millets as **Shree Anna**. Millets are **nutri-cereals**, tolerant of drought and poor soils, and require a fraction of the water rice does.

THE ANALYSIS

1. The system's strength is the source of its rigidity. Assured procurement of rice and wheat is what ended famine risk, and it is also what makes those crops the rational choice everywhere, including where the water is not there. This is not a design flaw; it is a design succeeding at the objective it was given, which is now the wrong objective in some regions.

2. Incentives beat advocacy, every time. Millet promotion has been extensive: an international year, a national designation, nutritional campaigns. Sowing decisions have not shifted proportionately, because a farmer choosing millet gives up guaranteed offtake at a known price and accepts a thin market. **Until procurement assurance moves, sowing will not.**

3. The groundwater argument is the sharpest one. Paddy in Punjab and Haryana is sustained by electricity-subsidised tubewell irrigation drawing down aquifers that will not recover on any policy-relevant timescale. The food security system is therefore purchasing present grain with future water, and the transaction is invisible because groundwater does not appear on any balance sheet.

4. Buffer stocks are managed against the calendar, not the forecast. Norms specify quantities at fixed dates. Yet the season's actual risk is partly forecastable, and this year demonstrated how sharply conditions can swing within weeks. Wiring **extended-range IMD forecasting** into stock and release decisions would let the system hold less in favourable years and more in adverse ones, which is both cheaper and safer than holding a constant against all outcomes.

5. The counter-argument deserves genuine weight. This system feeds over 80 crore people. Rice and wheat have deep markets, established milling and long storage life; millets and pulses do not, to the same degree. A transition that stumbles imposes its cost on the poorest consumers, who have no alternative supply. That is a reason for **sequencing and zoning**, not for inaction, but it is a real constraint on pace.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

PRELIMS-GRADE FACTS:

MSP is recommended by the CACP and announced by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs; declared for 23 crops.

National Food Security Act, 2013 covers up to 75 per cent of the rural and 50 per cent of the urban population.

Food Corporation of India established 1965 under the Food Corporations Act, 1964.

2023 was the International Year of Millets, proposed by India; millets are designated Shree Anna.

One Nation One Ration Card provides portability of PDS entitlements.

Decentralised procurement allows States to procure, store and distribute on the Centre's behalf.

A normal monsoon is 96 to 104 per cent of the Long Period Average.

*MSP is announced for **23 crops** but **procurement at scale occurs mainly for rice and wheat.***

*Answers that treat MSP coverage as equivalent to procurement assurance miss the entire mechanism by which cropping patterns are locked in. Also note that MSP is a **policy instrument, not a statutory right.***

THE DEBATE

FOR (redesign for climate resilience): Procurement assurance concentrated on rice and wheat locks in water-intensive cropping where water is scarcest. Millet advocacy without procurement has not shifted sowing. Buffer norms ignore forecastable risk. The system is buying present grain with future groundwater.

AGAINST (stability is the value): The architecture feeds over 80 crore people and has ended famine risk. Rice and wheat have deep markets, established milling and long shelf life. Reorienting toward thinner markets risks a transition failure whose cost falls on the poorest, who have no fallback.

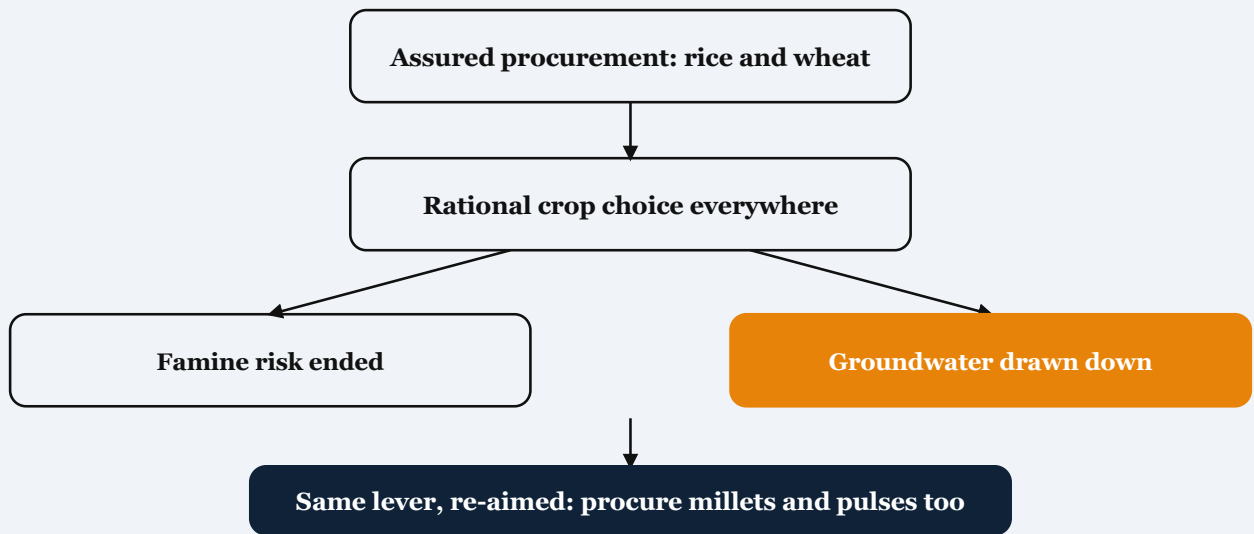
Balanced verdict: The disagreement is about **pace and method**, not direction, since both sides accept that groundwater depletion is unsustainable. The workable path builds on existing rails: extend **assured procurement to millets and pulses within defined agro-climatic zones**, so the farmer's price risk is covered exactly where the water argument is strongest; wire **extended-range forecasting** into buffer and release decisions; expand **decentralised procurement and storage** to shorten chains; and introduce millets into the PDS and school feeding at a pace **matched to procurement**, never ahead of it.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS

When a successful system produces a new problem, check whether the problem is a malfunction or the success continuing past its useful point. These require opposite responses.

A malfunction is repaired. A success that has outlived its objective must be **re-aimed**, which is politically much harder, because the mechanism causing the problem is the same one that delivers the benefit everyone still values. India's food procurement system is the second kind. Recognising that, rather than treating groundwater depletion as an unrelated failure of water policy, is what makes an answer coherent, and it explains why the reform has to work through procurement rather than around it.

DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS



One mechanism produces both outcomes. That is why the fix has to run through procurement rather than around it, and why advocacy alone has changed nothing.

TAKEAWAY BOX

The system was built to make sure the harvest was big enough. The question now is whether it arrives at all, and when.

MSP recommended by CACP and announced by the CCEA for 23 crops, with procurement concentrated in rice and wheat; NFSA 2013 covering up to 75 per cent rural and 50 per cent urban; FCI established 1965 under the Food Corporations Act, 1964; 2023 International Year of Millets, proposed by India; millets designated Shree Anna; One Nation One Ration Card; decentralised procurement.

Is it defensible to sustain present food security through groundwater extraction that forecloses the food security of the next generation in the same region?

Connects to past UPSC Mains questions on MSP and procurement reform, on the PDS, on millets and nutritional security, and on groundwater depletion in north-western India.

“India’s food security architecture buys present grain with future water.” Critically examine and suggest a transition path.

Source: Making India's Food System Climate-Proof Cannot Wait — Ujjayari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

● KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

Writing in The Hindu, Elisabeth Faure of the World Food Programme India and Purvi Mehta argue that India's Green Revolution-era food security architecture was built to guarantee production adequacy and now requires retrofitting for climate resilience across procurement, storage and distribution, through wider MSP procurement of water-efficient millets and pulses, integration of IMD forecasts into buffer-stock policy, and treating climate risk as a foundational design principle of the food system rather than an external shock to be absorbed.



SUPPORTING

- Assured procurement of rice and wheat at minimum support prices was the instrument that ended famine risk, and the same instrument now locks cropping patterns into the two most water-intensive cereals precisely in the regions where groundwater is most depleted.
- Buffer stock policy operates on fixed seasonal norms rather than on forecast conditions, so the system holds the same quantities regardless of whether the coming season is expected to be favourable or adverse, which is a costly way to manage a risk that is partly predictable.
- Millets and pulses are more drought-tolerant and less water-intensive than rice and wheat, but without comparable procurement assurance a farmer switching to them carries the price risk personally, which is why nutritional and ecological advocacy for millets has not changed sowing decisions at scale.



COUNTER

The counter-view is that the existing system's stability is precisely its value, and that reorienting procurement toward crops with thinner markets, shorter shelf life in some cases and no established distribution channel risks destabilising a food security architecture that currently feeds over 80 crore people under the National Food Security Act. On this reading, incremental diversification is prudent and wholesale redesign is not, because the cost of a failed transition falls on the poorest consumers.



WAY FORWARD

The transition should be built on the existing rails rather than against them: extend assured procurement to millets and pulses in defined agro-climatic zones so the farmer's price risk is covered, integrate extended-range IMD forecasting into buffer-stock and release decisions,

expand decentralised procurement and storage to cut transport and losses, and introduce millets into the public distribution system and school feeding at a pace matched to procurement.


MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK
QUESTION

India's food security architecture was designed for production adequacy. Examine the case for redesigning procurement, storage and distribution around climate resilience. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

India's food security system was designed in response to a specific historical problem, the risk of famine, and it solved that problem. Writing in The Hindu, the argument is that the system now faces a different problem, an unstable climate, and that its design has not been revisited to match.

BODY

The Green Revolution architecture rests on a coherent chain: high-yielding varieties of rice and wheat, assured irrigation, subsidised fertiliser and power, minimum support prices with assured procurement by the Food Corporation of India, buffer stocks, and distribution through the public distribution system under the National Food Security Act, 2013, which covers up to 75 per cent of the rural and 50 per cent of the urban population. Each element reinforced the others and the combination ended famine risk.

The same combination now produces the problem the authors identify. Assured procurement concentrated on rice and wheat makes those crops the rational choice regardless of local water availability, which is why paddy is grown at scale in Punjab and Haryana where groundwater tables are falling steeply. Millets and pulses are more drought-tolerant and require substantially less water, but a farmer who switches carries the price risk alone, since procurement assurance does not extend to them at comparable scale. Advocacy for millets, including the International Year of Millets in 2023 and the rebranding of millets as Shree Anna, has raised awareness without changing the incentive that determines sowing.

The second argument concerns buffer stocks, which operate on fixed seasonal norms rather than on forecast conditions. Given that the monsoon can swing from a 35.4 per cent deficit at end-June to a 1 per cent surplus by end-July, as it did this season, holding fixed quantities regardless of forecast is an expensive way to manage a partly predictable risk.

Note the qualification: that swing is a monthly figure, not a season-to-date one. Cumulative seasonal rainfall remained below the Long Period Average, and the IMD forecast for August and September was below normal, so the July recovery did not settle the season.

CONCLUSION

A balanced answer should take the counter-argument seriously: this system feeds over 80 crore people, and the cost of a botched transition falls on the poorest. The defensible path is therefore to build the transition on the existing rails, extending procurement assurance to millets and pulses in defined zones and wiring forecasts into stock decisions, rather than dismantling what works.

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