

ix. Developing rural agro industrial complexes

India's success in climbing to the first position in milk production in the world is only because of the integrated attention given to production, processing, packaging and marketing. With this objective in view, rural-agro industrial complexes are coming up in different parts of the country. A similar approach for Assam is needed in perishable commodities particularly fruits and vegetables. In addition to food parks, agri-business centers and agri-clinics, establishment of such rural agro-industrial complexes based on science and technology would help to accelerate the pace of development of rural economy in Assam.

Broadly, such a complex established in a block, should cover all the components of the value chain [production-processing-packaging-marketing-consumption]. *Experience has shown that if all links in this chain are not attended to concurrently, the anticipated income gains will not be forthcoming.* The essential components of this programme are:

- i) An integrated nutrient and soil fertility enhancement programme
- ii) Use of improved farm implements and appropriate mechanization for improving labour productivity, reducing drudgery and ensuring timely farm operations.
- iii) Water harvesting and efficient and economic use through micro-irrigation and fustigation systems of delivery of water and nutrients.
- iv) Biotechnological applications like improved genetic strains, bio-fertilizers, and bio-pesticides and where appropriate, the cultivation of tissue culture propagated fruit trees.
- v) An information and communication programme to provide location-specific information relating to meteorological, management and marketing factors and to promote genetic, quality and trade literacy among the rural farm families.
- vi) Integrated pest management programme
- vii) Promotion of off-farm employment through introduction of appropriate technologies for adding economic value to primary products and through agri-business enterprises based on micro-credit.
- viii) Introduction of appropriate post-harvest processing, storage and marketing techniques, with priority attention to perishable farm commodities like fruits, vegetables, fish, milk and other animal products.

There should also be interdisciplinary spearhead teams to prepare business plans for the agro-industrial complexes. Nothing succeeds like success and hence the sites for the initial projects should have the substrate scientific, political, social and economical conditions essential for achieving the goals of this programme. Such technical teams may be guided by local Farmers' Advisory Groups, consisting of both men and women farmers [may be new generation FMCs may take this role]. A chart indicating the broad areas in developing Rural Agri Industries complexes is given in Exhibit-9.