



Right to Food Campaign

Secretariat

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Welcome Central Government's decision to extend PMGKAY and reiterates the demands for increasing quota and universalisation of PDS.

The Right to Food Campaign welcomes the decision of the Central government to extend PMGKAY till March 2022. Under this scheme, all persons with a 'priority' or AAY ration card under the National Food Security Act (2013) are receiving an additional 5 kgs grain per person. This is a much needed measure to support 80 crore Indians listed under the NFSA, in coping with the economic distress caused due to the pandemic.

The announcement regarding extension of PMGKAY has once again ignored the exclusion of the large population from NFSA. At this point of time we would like to reiterate the demand of increasing quota and universalisation of PDS. The pandemic still exists and the uncertainty over livelihoods remains with unemployment at record levels. At a time like this, when foodgrain stocks are at a record high and people are facing the real possibility of hunger and starvation, the government should universalise the public distribution system (PDS) to ensure that anyone in need of ration would be supported irrespective of whether they possess a ration card. State governments must also be provided additional foodgrains at subsidised prices to expand benefits.

The pandemic also exposed the fragility of our social security system and the lack of resilience among the working class to cope with such economic shocks. Nearly 42 percent of India's population do not possess NFSA ration cards, including many vulnerable communities who are therefore unable to benefit from this PMGKAY scheme. To ensure that

nobody is excluded, it is essential to universalize the PDS and allow everyone who needs rations to access them. Immediate arrangements should be made to universalise the PDS and to include dal and edible oils as part of the monthly entitlements. This is even more imperative in the current context of rising inflation.

It is pertinent to mention that the Supreme Court in its judgment on June 29, 2021 in the suo motu case regarding the problems and miseries being faced by migrant workers (Suo Motu Writ Petition (Civil) No. 6 of 2020) had directed the Union government and state governments to provide foodgrains to migrant workers, including those without ration cards, till such time that the pandemic continues. Similarly, on 29th September 2020, the Supreme Court (IA 80140/ 2020, in Criminal Appeal No(S).135/ 2010) also ordered that all states should provide dry rations to all female and transgender sex workers identified by NACO and district authorities, without insisting on any identity proof or ration cards. In such a scenario, rather than stopping the additional food grains under PMGKAY, the government must enhance the allocation and in addition provide foodgrains to all economically vulnerable groups, including migrant workers, sex workers, homeless, transgender persons and unorganised sector workers.

Taking cognisance of the fact that state-wise quotas for issuance of ration cards under the NFSA have not been revised since the 2011 census despite the increase in population, the Supreme Court in its judgment in the migrant workers case, had directed the central government to re-determine the total number of persons to be covered in rural and urban areas in states for issuance of ration cards. The revision in coverage, as directed by the Supreme Court, would benefit more than 10 crore people across the country. Despite the passage of more than 4 months since the judgment, it is shocking to note that the central government has not taken any steps to revise the coverage under the Food Security Act. In reply to an application under the RTI Act, the Food Department has indicated that any revision will be done only after the publication of the census which will happen only in 2023-24.

It is unacceptable if even a single person dies of starvation in our country at a time when godowns are overflowing. With nearly 100 million tonnes of foodgrains in FCI godowns in August 2021 and 90 million tonnes in September 2021, estimates of available FCI stocks indicate that it is feasible to both universalise the PDS and simultaneously extend the PMGKAY for at least another 6 months. Instead, an estimated 600 million Indians without NFSA rations cards have not received any support from the central government, despite the pandemic.

The Right to Food Campaign immediately demands:

- Universalise the public distribution system to support all persons (except income tax payers) especially migrants workers, homeless, sex workers, trans people and all vulnerable communities even without ration cards
- Expansion of the PDS to provide millets and other nutritious commodities such as pulses and oil

We hope that you will immediately act upon these demands.

Sincerely,

Gangaram Paikra, Aysha, Kavita Srivastava, Dipa Sinha, Anuradha Talwar, Mukta Srivastava, Amrita Johri

(On behalf of the Right to Food campaign)