



Right to Food Campaign

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Government of India cuts ration entitlements by 50% of 81 crore people

Waiving off the subsidized price in no way covers even the cost of buying 5 kgs of ration from the open market

The Right to Food Campaign condemns the sheer insensitivity of the Central Government's policy decision which will result in **reducing** the ration entitlement of 81 crore people by 50%.

Under the National Food Security Act, 2013, (NFSA), all priority category ration cardholders are entitled to 5 kgs of grain per person and Antyodaya category ration cardholders to 35 kgs of grain. The NFSA caps the price for this grain at Rs. 3 per kg for rice and Rs. 2 per kg for wheat. In April 2020, on account of the unprecedented economic distress, the central government announced the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) under which an extra 5 kg of free foodgrains was provided to every ration cardholder in addition to the NFSA entitlement of 5 kg foodgrains at subsidised rates. **Therefore, ration cardholders were entitled to a 10 kg ration per person since April 2020 (5 kg under NFSA at a subsidized price and 5 kg free under PMGKAY).**

On 23rd December 2022, the Union government announced that it would **discontinue the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) from January 1, 2023. This means that from January onwards, the ration entitlement of people will be halved- they will be entitled to only 5 kgs ration per person (normal NFSA entitlement) instead of the current 10 kgs ration per person (NFSA+PMGKAY).** However, to mask the harshness of the announcement, the government also announced that for one year starting from January 2023 the food grains under National Food Security Act, 2013, (NFSA) will

be provided free of cost i.e. the subsidised price of Rs. 3 per kg and Rs. 2 per kg for rice and wheat will be waived off.

The government has termed this as a 'historic' decision even though in reality it in no way compensates for the huge reduction in the ration entitlement. The net saving per person as a result of the announcement of the NFSA ration being free will be only around Rs. 11 per month (4 kg of wheat X Rs. 2 and 1 kg of rice X Rs. 3) whereas in order to purchase the additional 5 kgs of grain which have now been discontinued (as PMGKAY has been discontinued), that person will have to spend between Rs. 150-175 as rice and wheat cost around Rs. 30-35 per kg in the market. A family of five will now be forced to spend Rs. 750-900 per month just in order to access the current level of ration entitlement. They will save only around Rs. 55 on account of the NFSA ration being made free. The halving of ration entitlement and a resulting huge rise in expenditure can in no way be termed 'historic'. This extremely regressive step is coming at a time when the government has once again started putting out advisories and announcing measures to control another potential wave of COVID.

NFSA and PMGKAY ensured a basic modicum of food security of 10 kgs per person which was a lifeline for the millions of daily wagers, unorganised sector workers, construction workers who lost their livelihoods during the pandemic and the cycle of COVID waves and lockdowns and whose economic status has not yet recovered to pre-pandemic levels. The decisions of the government will adversely impact millions of the poorest and most marginalised people in the country.

In the absence of official data on hunger and food insecurity, independent field surveys and other information clearly highlight a concerning situation in the country. The Hunger Watch surveys conducted by the Right to Food campaign for instance show that there has been a worsening in food security both in quantity and quality compared to the pre-covid period for many (41%). The survey findings showed that food grains under PMGKAY and NFSA to those who had ration cards were the only source of a minimum level of food security that was being provided since the pandemic by the government. This cushion was only limited to those who possessed ration cards under NFSA and left out millions of other equally vulnerable households who are being excluded from the public distribution system as the quotas and coverage have not been revised for more than 12 years despite the increase in

population. The Supreme Court in June 2021 had given comprehensive directions while disposing of the migrant workers' case including a direction to the Central government to undertake an exercise under Section 9 of the National Food Security Act, 2013 to re-determine the total number of persons to be covered in Rural and Urban areas of the State under the Public Distribution System of NFSA as the coverage is still based on 2011 census and does not take into account the increase in population since then. Despite the clear judgment and the further directions in 2022 that the revision in coverage be done on the basis of population projections as the government has indefinitely delayed the 2021 census, the government has not complied to date.

We demand that the government continue PMGKAY till such time at least that the pandemic continues and in fact, 10 kg per person should be made the base entitlement. When the NFSA was being debated, at that time as CM of Gujarat Mr. Modi highlighted how 5 kgs per person are wholly insufficient and pointed out- "I am also pained to note that the food security ordinance does not assure an individual of having two meals a day. I fail to understand how food security for the individual is being assured. The proposed entitlement of 5 kg per month per person implies a supply of only 165 gm per person per day. Persons involved in labor-intensive activities require about 2,500 calories per day, as per NIN 2009 recommendations. As 100 gm of food grain gives about 350 calories, 165 gm would provide only 500 calories per day, which is hardly 20 percent of his daily calorie requirements...This does not address even the calorific security, not to talk about nutritional security, which is the main objective of food security. This, I am sure you will agree, is totally unacceptable if providing adequate food security is the objective of the ordinance."

We therefore demand that ration entitlement be guaranteed at at-least 10 kg per person and further, the food basket be expanded to include millets and other nutritious commodities such as pulses and oil, after procuring these at the Minimum Support Price (MSP). Further, PDS needs to be universalised to give subsidised rations to everyone who demands it. To begin with, the quotas under the NFSA need to be immediately revised on the basis of the population projections for 2022 as also directed by the Supreme Court in the migrant workers' case.

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