

Unrest in Sri Lanka



Unrest in EU



IDEOLOGICALLY DRIVEN POLICIES FAIL IN AGRICULTURE.

Sri Lanka in 2021 and the EU in 2024 emphatically substantiate this.

Can we imagine a situation where the government introduces a policy that bans all allopathic medicines and allows the use of only ayurvedic medicines? There would surely be widespread protests in the country against such irrational policy!

Well, a similar thing happened in Sri Lanka in the year 2021 when the Sri Lankan Government banned the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides in agriculture. Subsequent violent protests by farmers forced the Government to backtrack and withdraw the controversial legislation within a span of seven months.

In agriculture, the “production method” cannot be thrust forcibly on the farmers.

It is now the EU's turn to learn this basic lesson the hard way!



The first failure in the EU



- In the year 2009, the EU introduced Directive 2009/128/EC to reduce use of synthetic pesticides in agricultural production. This directive was a total failure.
- According to FAOSTAT, the use of pesticides in the EU, in fact, increased by **13%** from **3.13 lakh tons** in 2009 to **3.54 lakh tons** in 2021.
- The growth occurred in spite of removal of many popular pesticides from the EU market and decrease in the cultivated area.

The second failure in the EU



- Undaunted by the first failure, the EU proposed 'Farm to Fork' strategy. As a part of this strategy, in the year 2022, the EU came out with several mandatory targets including a **50%** reduction in pesticide use, **20%** reduction in chemical fertilizers use and to bring **25%** farmland under organic agriculture.
- Farmers in the EU vehemently opposed this statutory directive to manage agricultural production with reduced use of agrochemicals. There were street protests in the capitals of many Member States of the EU.
- As a result of the widespread protests, when the bill to reduce the pesticide use by **50%** was introduced in the European Parliament (21st – 22nd November 2023) it was rejected/defeated.





Subsequently, the European Commission announced on 6th February 2024 that it would withdraw the controversial proposal to reduce the fertilizers and pesticides use. The fate of much hyped 'Farm to Fork' strategy is now uncertain.

Lessons from Sri Lanka and the EU

- Major agricultural policy decisions require consultations with farmers, comprehensive analysis of its costs in terms of potential reduction of crop yields, its economic and social implications on farmers' livelihood, national food supply and the entire social fabric.
- Top-down driven policies are invariably whimsical. They ignore the ground realities, restrict the choices of individual farmers and therefore meet with stiff opposition.
- It's clear that the decision to ban/reduce the pesticide use by Sri Lanka and the EU was based on ideology and wishful thinking rather than any scientific basis.
- **“One-size-fits-all”** approach does not work in agriculture which is vast and diverse. In agriculture, it requires an integrated and holistic approach to manage all the inherent risks and build resilience.

