Press Release

Distribution of Smartphones among Farmers a Revolutionary Step- Dr. Ayesha Ghous Pasha
PITB's Digital Platform Records 663,596 Visits-Dr. Umar Saif

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The distribution of AgTech Smartphones among farmers is a revolutionary step of the Punjab Government, which will benefit and strengthen the economy through growth in agri products. This was stated by Dr. Ayesha Ghous Pasha Provincial Finance Minister while addressing the launch of smartphone apps developed by Punjab Information Technology Board (PITB) for Punjab Agriculture Department here today.

She added that 24/7 PITB's helpline would respond and resolve all kind of problems and would guide the farmers on regular basis.

Addressing the event the Chairman PITB Dr. Umar Saif said that launching a technology-enabled platform to give small (mostly landless) farmers loans, subsidies, location-targeted advice on yield growth, pesticides, fertilizer, seeds using smartphones has proved that AgTech revolution has reached Pakistan. Out of the 16,911 farmers given smartphones and apps in the initial phase, 14,523 (85%) use our apps every day — 77.39% in Urdu, 13.92% in Punjabi and 8.69% in Saraiki. Our apps have been used 663,596 times to date, he informed.

Dr. Saif added that 40 lakh farmers have been registered so far in the Punjab Province under PITB's developed centralized system for managing the database, helping raise efficiency and accountability of the scheme for the Punjab Agriculture Department's initiated interest-free loan scheme for small farmers. The scheme provides loans to farmers possessing land less than 12.5 acres and has a flexible repayment option while data of the owners of 5 crore 70 lakh rural land has been digitalized. The Agriculture e-Credit Scheme has improved liquidity in the agriculture sector, timely availability of crop inputs, an increase in yield and higher profit margins, he said.

He added that the platform would reduce the chances of middleman's exploitation, corruption, delays and would ensure required assistance and advice to the farmers in real time. The information gathered in the system includes demographics, contact details, crops, landholding patterns, livestock, irrigation system and mechanization. This initiative has resulted in appropriate allocation of schemes to the right farmers, ease in broadcasting message to larger mass and the creation of a centralized database.

The distribution of mobile phones with 10 agriculture-related applications to enhance their capacity and to disburse loans directly to the farmers through mobile valet by automating all processes involved in loan allocation also aims to consolidate recipients' information for transparent and efficient implementation of these interventions. In the conventional method for loan processing, an applicant would have needed to visit the PLRA and bank more than 10 times to secure the loan, but with the help of this system, the number of visits has been reduced to only three. More than 55 million households are directly or indirectly tied to this sector.

The salient features of 10 mobile applications include **Onboarding/Tutorial** to welcome the newly-registered farmers and verify their credentials, **Weather Alerts** to show the forecasts based on the latitude and longitude of the farmer's location for 5 days, **Crop Calendar** to provide crop specific advisories, educate farmers about new technologies, methods and techniques related to various crops, **Video on Demand** to primarily serve the needs of farmers whose mobile literacy is low, **Expert Opinion** to talk to an expert, **Crop Yield Calculator** to allow farmers to calculate the approximate cost of seeding, fertilizer and pesticide usage and crop yield based on their land size and crop type, **Mandi app** to connect farmers with potential buyers and to use EasyPaisa Mobile Wallets for payments, **Supply Chain Tracking** to help farmers to browse, compare and buy various farm supplies such as fertilizers, seeds and pesticide from their mobile phones, **Agriculture Subsidy** to enable farmers to redeem subsidies given through various types of tokens (e.g. Potash Fertilizer Subsidy) through this app and **Hyperspectral Imagery** to capture satellite imagery of land and check the health of the crop, soil moisture, pest information and then using the above mentioned parameters to recommend remedial measures.