

CRUCIAL CONVERSATION

MEETING OF TRADITION WITH TRANSFORMATION



"The intersection of climate change, sustainable agriculture, and profitability is at the heart of the agritech movement. Startups need to integrate sustainability into their core business models, ensuring that profit does not come at the expense of the environment. The future of agritech lies in creating businesses that balance profitability with social and environmental responsibility," says Mr Vinod Rai, Founder and Vice-Chairman, Aavishkaar Group. In an exclusive interaction with Agriculture Today, Mr Rai discusses the role of agritech and how Aavishkar Group is looking at agri space.

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As the Chair of the Agritech Pavilion, what can we expect from this edition of Startup Mahakumbh?

At Startup Mahakumbh, the Agritech Pavilion represents the meeting of tradition with transformation. This is the area where the wisdom of the farmers meets the youthful exuberance of startup entrepreneurs and their technology prowess to build a narrative where Indian farmers would deliver on the promise of Global Food security and enhance their own livelihood and contribution to the National GDP from Agriculture. This is the narrative of Viksit Bharat 2047 so beautifully espoused by our Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi.

This year, the Agritech Pavilion is the largest pavilion at Mahakumbh and is twice as large as last year, with more than 100+ startups showcasing. The startups are showcasing advanced technology, innovative strategies, global thinking from Production thought processes, supply chain inefficiencies, resource mismanagement, and technology advancements. This edition promises to spotlight solutions that blend scalability with sustainability, embarking on a new era where technology catalyzes social and environmental impact. You would see new-age technology, IoT devices, new-age drones, cutting-edge biotechnology solutions, and at the same time, farmers' participation and enthusiasm around on-ground progress at the pavilion.

At the Agritech Pavilion, farmers would rub shoulders with startup founders, Scientists, angel investors, Venture funds, Investment bankers, and farmer-producer companies to discuss a farmer-centered world market. For us, Startup Mahakumbh 2025 represents a movement that's building a community, sparking collaboration, and inspiring startups to reimagine the future of Indian agriculture.

How do you see this platform shaping the future of agritech startups in India?

India's agritech ecosystem is at a crucial inflection point. Startup Mahakumbh is not just a showcase—it's a catalyst for

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systemic change. By bringing together farmers through Farmer Producer Companies with entrepreneurs, investors, government stakeholders, and corporates, this platform creates an environment where collaboration surpasses competition.

We see this pavilion being led by Farmers who are entrepreneurs working closely with global startups from agritech powerhouse countries such as Israel, the Netherlands, and the USA to integrate our farmers' wisdom in the solution to the Global Food Security challenge while also addressing global sustainability issues. We would like the Agritech Pavilion to represent the Indian tradition of sustainable growth with a global outlook.

We are very confident that this showcase of startup and farmer wisdom would enhance global flows of capital into the Agritech domain, along with mentorship and stronger global market linkages. This would inspire startups to build from India and for the world, doing so with the Indian farmer at the center, delivering inclusive growth a reality.

What are the current trends in agritech investments, and what key factors do investors look for in agritech startups today?

Indian Agriculture represents one of the largest potential addressable markets but is plagued with inefficiencies around input supply, productivity, post-harvest storage and high-quality processing and finance as the key challenges. It is obvious that technology would play a critical role in alleviating these challenges and it is also obvious that the farmer would be at the centre of these technological innovations. A lot of work is happening around supply chain optimization, pre-

cision agriculture, weather technology, processing technologies, biotechnology, and sustainable food systems, including soil carbon credits and areas such as animal husbandry, poultry and alternate protein.

Indian investors are looking at agritech as potential global companies that would not only build scale but also bring about new innovations in business models that would integrate smallholder farmers in the global supply chain as equal participants with strong economics for them.

How do you see emerging technologies like AI, IoT, and blockchain transforming smallholder farming in India? What challenges need to be addressed for wider adoption?

Emerging technologies like the ones mentioned are being used to predict weather patterns, optimize irrigation, and provide real-time data on soil health. This creates a connected ecosystem where sensors monitor crop conditions and alert farmers about pests or diseases. Blockchain can ensure transparency and traceability in the supply chain, helping farmers get a fair price for their produce.

We believe improved connectivity, better business models for affordability and improved margins and more work on awareness would help wider spread of these technologies backed by large long term investments. We see long term patient capital through Impact investment, a deeper Indian capital pool with strong government backing from institutions such as NABARD and State Bank of India alongside aggressive venture capital and private equity has the potential to take these cutting-edge technological ideas deeper into India.

What policy changes or government initiatives do you believe could further accelerate agritech innovation and investment in India?

The Indian government has already made significant strides in supporting the agritech ecosystem, from initiatives

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like PM-KISAN to the National Mission on Agricultural Extension & Technology. Moreover, thanks to strategic initiatives by the government and institutions like NABARD through its AgriSURE Fund, established with a corpus of Rs. 750 crore, exemplifies this commitment by supporting innovative, technology-driven startups in agriculture and allied areas.

Complementing this, the government's Agriculture Accelerator Fund has been instrumental in nurturing agri-entrepreneurs, providing financial assistance at both the idea and seed stages, thereby fostering innovation across various agricultural domains. These initiatives, among others, underscore a well-coordinated effort to foster innovation and sustainability in Indian agriculture, creating a conducive environment for agritech startups to thrive and contribute significantly to the sector's evolution.

With growing concerns about climate change and sustainable agriculture, how can agritech startups drive responsible farming practices while ensuring profitability?

The intersection of climate change, sustainable agriculture, and profitability is at the heart of the agritech movement. Startups need to integrate sustainability into their core business models, ensuring that profit does not come at the expense of the environment. The future of agritech lies in creating businesses that balance profitability with social and environmental responsibility. Responsible farming practices are not only viable but necessary for long-term business growth. We see emerging work around Soil Carbon green credits, Small Holder Farmer biosequestration projects integrating major impact goals into global business models helping us to alleviate farmer concerns, climate concerns and building long-term business models.

What is your vision for the Indian agritech sector over the next five years? How do you see Aavishkaar Group contributing to this evolution?

I envision a scenario where technol-



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ogy is embedded at every level of farming, from the input stage and precision tools for farmers to AI-driven analytics for large-scale operations. I see Indian agriculture as one of the potential solu-

tions for global food security concerns. We genuinely see multiple Indian agritech startups becoming unicorns and tapping the IPO markets over the next 5 years.

Aavishkaar Group will continue to play a catalytic role in this transformation. We will remain committed to investing in impact-driven agritech startups that are tackling the most pressing challenges in agriculture—be it through data science, renewable energy solutions, or innovative farming techniques. Our focus will always be on nurturing entrepreneurs with the larger vision of transforming agriculture for the greater good. In the coming years, we will work closely with farmers, innovators, policymakers, and global thought leaders to ensure that India is at the forefront of the agritech revolution. Our role will be to provide capital, mentorship, and market access, enabling local and global ecosystems so that these businesses can scale and deliver the lasting impact that India needs.