World Cotton Day commemorated to promote safe use of pesticides and improve livelihoods

Islamabad – Since 2016, growth of the cotton production and cotton industry has seen a downward trend. This has not only adversely affected performance of the agriculture sector but has also slowed down the overall economic growth of the country and impacted small holder farmers livelihoods. Currently, the share of cotton has reduced to one percent of the GDP and 5.5 percent of the agriculture value addition.

There are several reasons for this decrease — lack of access to quality seeds with outdated agricultural practices and high costs of production. One particular important factor that has affected cotton production and its quality is indiscriminate use of pesticides. In Pakistan, 80% of the total pesticides sprayed are used on cotton crop. Cotton growers use more pesticides by increasing the number of sprays/dosage which they believe increases crop production, however, these poor preventive measures not only damages the crops but also puts farming communities, including women and children at risk.

The Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNFS&R) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) jointly organized an event to commemorate World Cotton Day with an underlying theme centered on “Promoting Rational and Safe Use of Pesticides”. This event aimed to raise awareness amongst the farming communities and private sector including pesticides companies about the need for rational and judicious use of pesticides and adoption of safe techniques in their handling, application and disposal. In the long term, it will reduce farmers’ dependency on pesticides, reduce costs of production and open avenues for the adoption of strategies such as Integrated Pest Management (IPM).

“Cotton is the lifeline of Pakistan’s economy. Cotton not only provides a source of income and livelihoods for rural communities but also constitutes a major share of rural economy. The Government of Pakistan is committed to reviving the cotton industry by facilitating improvements in manufacturing and marketing of cotton and cotton by-products,” said Sahibzada Muhammad Mehboob Sultan, Minister of National Food Security and Research.
Farmer’s Field Schools (FSS) and Women Open Schools (WOS) have proven to be a successful approach to disseminate relevant knowledge and technologies and led to improved practices uptake by small holder farmers.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is actively engaged with the Ministry of National Food Security and Research to contribute to efforts to ensure sustainable progress of cotton production in the country and of livelihoods of communities.

“FAO is working with small-scale farmers in Muzaffargarh, Rajanpur, Jhang, Dera Ismail Khan, Mitari, Jamshoro, Tando Allah Yar and Mirpur Khas areas through Farmer Field Schools (FFS). FFS build technical capacity towards achieving increased productivity and better returns while practicing rational and safe use of pesticides. Safe agricultural practices and technologies reduce economic and functional dependency of households on forms of non-decent work, and help provide options for better livelihoods. Women Open Schools (WOS) help rural women understand the importance of alternative and safe agricultural practices for their and their children health and safety.” Explained Ms. Minā Dowlatchahi, FAO Representative in Pakistan,

These interventions will greatly contribute to rational use of pesticides and build capacity of farming communities for more effective and safe use of pesticides, while improving the quality of the cotton being grown.

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