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IISWC hosts workshop on 'Soil, Water & Agriculture: Present Status & Future Prospects'



By OUR STAFF REPORTER DEHRADUN, 5 Sep: The Indian Institute of Soil and Water Conservation (ICAR-IISWC), here, celebrated Himalayan Day by organising a one-day workshop, titled Soil, Water, and Agriculture in the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR): Present Status and Future Prospects", today. The event brought together distinguished experts and participants from various central and state government organisations and NGOs based in Dehradun, including ISRO-IIRS, UCOST, FRI, BSI, GSI, HESCO, and the Central University of Himachal Pradesh. The experts deliberated on key challenges and solutions for the conservation and sustainable development of the Indian Himalayan region.

The programme commenced with a video message from Chief

Minister Pushkar Singh Dhama. In his address, he outlined various methods to preserve the Himalayas and announced the celebration of Bugyal Sahaj Diwas to raise awareness of the importance of Himalayan bugyals (alpine meadows).

Dr RK Singh, Head of the Hydrology and Engineering Division at ICAR-IISWC, welcomed the delegates and provided an overview of the workshop. Dr Singh emphasised that "soil is the soul, water is life, and agriculture is the lifeline" of the region. Dr PR Ojasvi, Principal Scientist at ICAR-IISWC, highlighted the importance of Springshed management for rejuvenating seasonal and dried springs.

The workshop was chaired by Dr M Madhu, Director of the Institute. In his inaugural address,

Dr Madhu stressed the critical role of the Himalayan and mountain ecosystems in enriching the Indo-Gangetic Plains, the most fertile agricultural land in India. He expressed concern over the increasing occurrences of cloudbursts, thunderstorms, and landslides in the Himalayas, exacerbated by indiscriminate human activities.

Padma Bhushan awardee Dr Anil Joshi, Founder of HESCO, was the chief guest at the programme. He expressed concern over the widespread use of chemicals in Indian agriculture, which has led to toxic soils and carcinogenic food production. He emphasised the crucial yet often underappreciated role of water in our lives and urged a new approach to Himalayan conservation, especially given its rich cultural heritage in India.

Padma Shri awardee Prem Chand Sharma advocated for the development of organic farming, coupled with modern technologies, to make agriculture more profitable. He also stressed the importance of addressing the pressing issue of migration from the hills, which can only be curbed by making farming more lucrative and sustainable.

Experts from various organisations, including Dr DP Uniyal from UCOST, Dehradun, Dr Manoj Kayasth, Director of GSI, Dr SK Singh, Additional Director of BSI, Dr Suresh Kumar, Group Director of ISRO-IIRS, Dr Hitendra Padalia, Head of IIRS, Prof Deepak Pant from the Central University of Himachal Pradesh, and Dr Parmanand Kumar, Scientist at ICFRE, actively participated in the deliberations.

In the technical session of the

workshop, six presentations were made on various aspects of Himalayan ecology, including biodiversity, soil erosion, springshed management, and water resource augmentation.

The key takeaway from the workshop was the need to strike a balance between economic development and the preservation of the IHR's ecology. Resource inventory and careful planning are critical for the successful implementation of conservation technologies. The experts stressed that the Himalayas must be protected not only by those residing in the region but by all citizens of India, given their immense importance to the nation. The Himalayas play a crucial role in shaping India's economy, providing ecosystem services, and regulating climatic systems, particularly through the monsoon rainfall cycle.