

Young professionals in US bring Agri-issues under spotlight



[editor](#) · 08:58, 5 Oct 2007 · 15688 views · 3 min read



More than 3000 young professional NRIs in 58 locations across US and other countries including India, participated in a global vigil for farmers. *"The tragic farmers' suicides are, finally, an extreme symptom of a much deeper rural distress - the result of a decade-long onslaught on the livelihoods of millions. The crisis now goes way beyond the families ravaged by the suicides"* says senior journalist P Sainath, who was also awarded the 2007 Magsaysay Award. Just in Vidarbha, 836 farmers had committed suicide in 2007. Undoubtedly it is a wake-up call after years of neglect the farmers have been facing.

Remarkably, these vigils drew thousands from urban India and NRI community who are typically very distant from the realities confronting rural India, and they spoke out in a strong voice: *"Thousands of suicides, hundred millions in distress – the farmers' crisis is unacceptable!"*

"I strongly believe that this new energy in the Agri campaign among students and Young Professionals will certainly help farmers' cause to some level" said Somu Kumar, a young professional settled in US.

Policies which are deepening the crisis for farmers were in the spotlight, in response to the call for this coordinated global vigil by Association for India's Development (AID).

In New Delhi, 2 days of street plays Connaught Place, Dilli Haat and other popular locations were followed by a Photo Exhibition. Delhi events were joined by farmers from Mehndiganj village in Varanasi (UP), Vidarbha, Tamil Nadu and AP.

The vigil at Hyderabad saw the participation of about 40 organizations. "We are all with you!" was the simple message to the farmers from a large crowd of IT professionals and students.

18 districts in India witnessed considerable mobilization of young professionals voicing support for farmers' causes.

In the US, candlelight vigils were held in 39 locations including cities such as Seattle, San Diego, Bay Area, New York and Washington DC, as well as university campuses such as such as Cornell, Texas, Maryland, and West Virginia.

The government policies in the past fifteen years have consistently removed support structures for Indian farmers while promoting unsustainable, high-input agriculture which farmers, especially in dry areas, cannot afford to practice.

There is a need for strengthening the minimum support price system to cover the real cost of production, waiver of debt and proactive support to low-input sustainable agriculture especially in rain-fed areas.

Developed countries like US have heavily subsidized their agriculture. It is estimated that nearly 25,000 cotton growers in America receive \$3.2 billion subsidy per year, which affects the cotton prices world over.

If the American government can act for its farmers, why is the Indian government allowing our farmers to kill themselves?

Bobby Ramakant



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Published: 5 October 2007 | © 2026 Assam Times