

## Editorial

The contribution of women to national development in the current context and its potential is of greater significance. Involvement of Indian women in national progress at all levels is an assured reality although the degree of involvement varies from time to time and region to region. The prosperity and growth of a nation depends on the status and development of its women, as they not only constitute nearly half of the population, but also positively influence the growth of the remaining half of the population. The crucial role of women in agriculture, allied occupations and household activities has, however, been grossly underestimated and undervalued. Women play a significant and crucial role in agricultural development and allied fields like dairy farming, mushroom production, pisciculture etc. Dairy farming is a major occupation of rural women in India. Dairy farming in India predominantly involves women taking primary responsibility for milking and animal care. Milking is a time-consuming activity, often done twice daily in the early mornings and evenings. Women must also feed, water, and clean the animals and manage their health. Despite their outsized contributions to the sector, women dairy farmers face significant challenges. They lack access to land, livestock, financial resources, and technology, hindering their productivity and income potential. They do not have the authority to decide on dairy extension services that can improve productivity and milk quality, marketing opportunities, financial services, and other considerations. They are often excluded from decision-making within households and dairy cooperatives, limiting their control over resources and income. Their work is often seen as an extension of domestic work, and the time poverty resulting from the long hours they spend on dairy farming leaves little time for leisure, education, or other activities. Despite bearing the heavily labour-intensive tasks of milking and caring for the animals, women dairy farmers in India do not own the cattle or the land. Since cattle and land are often used as collateral to access financing, women are inherently denied access to financing options. These challenges faced by women dairy farmers call for targeted gender-intentional initiatives that rectify these disparities, address their specific challenges, and foster an environment that acknowledges and values their significant contributions. Farm women handle most of the critical jobs and are considered to be the main actors in small-scale farming. Though women play a significant role in dairy farming, their control over livestock and its products is very minimal. The income from dairy animals does not remain in the hands of women and neither does the decision regarding sale and purchase. There is an urgent need to develop technologies which will help the respondents carry out their activities with ease since they are relatively unpleasing, backbreaking, monotonous and involve drudgery, physical exertion, which ultimately affects their physical and psychological wellbeing. Farm women have to be motivated to acquire more scientific knowledge for increasing livestock production through various extension techniques.

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