

INDIA-UAE COOPERATION TO SOW REGIONAL FOOD SECURITY

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'India brings to the table an incredible wealth of food sector experience and the ability to operationalise the world's largest food supply chains' | Photo Credit: Getty Images/iStockphoto

The United Arab Emirates (UAE), whose food security has been built on imports from global markets, is now focusing on the twin objectives of food access and readiness to confront supply chain crises. India, the world's second-largest food producer, is an essential partner in the UAE's ambition to strengthen food security. The India-UAE food security partnership stands to benefit from multiple points of convergence.

India has built its status as a global agri-export powerhouse using its vast tracts of arable land, a highly favourable climate, and a large and growing food production and processing sector. Along with serving global markets with its diversified agri-produce, India has, in recent years, acted as a humanitarian provider of food to developing countries, demonstrating awareness of its evolving role in advancing regional and global food security. India has also made major budgetary outlays towards setting up massive food parks, with due emphasis on modern supply chain management spanning farm gate to retail outlet. These investments, complemented by how India has placed its food sector to benefit from bilateral trade agreements, reflect the country's strong and sustained intent to make the most of its agri-capabilities in the global food marketplace.

In parallel, India runs the Public Distribution System, the world's largest food subsidy programme, providing nearly 800 million citizens with subsidised grains, providing its people with the reassurance of daily, affordable meals. Equally laudable is India's 'Prime Minister's Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nutrition (POSHAN) Abhiyaan', the world's largest nutrition programme for children and women. As a part of its G-20 presidency, India is promoting the consumption and farming of millets — nutritious, drought-resistant, sustainable, crops — that demonstrate the resilience focus that India offers to the global food security dialogue. In the realm of food security, India's G-20 presidency seeks to address the three Cs, of "Covid, Conflict, and Climate" (to borrow from India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's address last year), issues pernicious to food security in India and across the globe.

Seen together, India brings to the table an incredible wealth of food sector experience and the ability to operationalise the world's largest food supply chains — formidable capabilities that are strengthening the India-UAE food security partnership in a variety of ways. During the I2U2

(India, Israel, the United Arab Emirates and the United States) summit in July last year, the UAE committed \$2 billion in investment towards constructing food parks in India (in Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat), while the signing of a food security corridor on the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)'s sidelines (with logistics partner DP World) has taken forward India's envisioned presence on the global food value chain, beyond the UAE.

The corridor could potentially commence a route for foods made and processed in India, beginning their outbound journey on the Indian coast of the Arabian Sea, passing through the UAE, and towards major international markets. With its ability to establish high volume trade of foods, the corridor stands to emerge as a world-class template of successful agri-trade for India, while also unlocking greater productivity, efficiency and growth for its millions of workers and employees.

For the UAE, the benefits go beyond maintaining and diversifying its food reserves, and trade linkages could enable the Emirates to leverage its strategically placed location between Asia and Europe to serve as India's food export gateway to West Asia and the Africa region, and further beyond. Given the food corridor's incredible commercial potential, several UAE-based companies have expressed interest in constructing a supporting logistics and infrastructure pipeline to accelerate trade and reinforce the food corridor.

The Dubai Multi Commodities Centre, the UAE's largest free trade zone, launched Agriota, an agri-trading and commodity platform to link Indian farmers to food companies in the UAE. Agriota gives millions of Indian farmers the opportunity to directly reach out to the entirety of the UAE's food ecosystem (processing companies, traders, wholesalers) and stock their products in Emirati stores. Alongside this initiative, a consortium of UAE-based entities are investing up to \$7 billion in mega food parks, contract farming and the sourcing of agro-commodities in India. The initiative will include mega food parks, logistics and warehouse hubs, and fruits and vegetable hubs.

There is much that India stands to gain from the UAE's private sector projects spanning its agricultural and food processing sector. Those projects will generate lakhs of non-farm agri-jobs, while enabling farmers to discover better prices for their products. Bolstered by the UAE's infrastructural capabilities, India's agricultural products will have more resilient and diversified pathways to the global marketplace.

India's G-20 presidency offers an opportune moment for both India and the UAE to showcase viable strategies and frameworks that can forge the basis of food security in the Global South. As it sets the global developmental agenda, India can look to leverage and strengthen trade pathways with the UAE to forge a sustainable, inclusive, efficient, and resilient future of food.

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