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# Topic wise content



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## AgriStack

Notes for civil services preparation



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## AgriStack

- The Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare has entered into an MoU with Microsoft Corporation to start a pilot project in 100 villages to create a 'Unified Farmer Service Interface' through its cloud computing services.

## AgriStack

- The AgriStack is a collection of technologies and digital databases proposed by the Central Government focusing on India's farmers and the agricultural sector.
- The central government has claimed that these new databases are being built to primarily tackle issues such as poor access to credit and wastage in the agricultural supply chain.
- Under AgriStack, the government aims to provide 'required data sets' of farmers' personal information to Microsoft to develop a farmer interface for 'smart and well-organized agriculture'.
- The digital repository will aid precise targeting of subsidies, services and policies, the officials added.
- Under the programme, each farmer of the country will get what is being called an FID, or a farmers' ID, linked to land records to uniquely identify them. India has 140 million operational farm-land holdings.
- Alongside, the government is also developing a unified farmer service platform that will help digitise agricultural services delivery by the public and private sectors.

## Issues with the move

- Agriculture has become the latest sector getting a boost of 'techno solutionism' by the government.
- But it has, since then, also become the latest sector to enter the whole debate about data privacy and surveillance.
- Since the signing of the MoUs, several concerns related to sharing farmers' data with private companies the major one being Microsoft whose owner Bill Gates is said to be the largest private farmland owner in the US.
- In all the MoUs, there are provisions under which the agriculture ministry will enter into a data sharing agreement with the private companies of the likes of Amazon, Microsoft and Patanjali.
- The development has raised serious concerns about information asymmetry, data privacy and consent, profiling of farmers, mismanaged land records and corporatization of agriculture.
- The formation of 'Agristack' also implies commercialization of agriculture extension activities as they will shift into a digital and private sphere.

## Why such concerns?

- The project was being implemented in the absence of a data protection legislation.

- It might end up being an exercise where private data processing entities may know more about a farmer's land than the farmer himself.
- Without safeguards, private entities would be able to exploit farmers' data to whatever extent they wish to.
- This information asymmetry, tilted towards the technology companies, might further exploit farmers, especially small and marginal ones.

What are some major threats?

- One of the biggest worries is the threat of financial exploitation.
- We have already seen how microfinance firms have wreaked financial havoc in rural hinterlands.
- Now, once Fintech companies are able to collect granular data about the farmers' operations, they may offer them usurious rates of interest precisely when they would be in the direst need for credit.
- With this, the risk of commodifying agriculture and farmer data ran high.

