

Poultry for Protein Security in Viksit Bharat

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Let me state a simple fact: Protein is the foundation of progress. Sounds like a sweeping, non-scientific statement? Fiction rather than fact? An undeniable truth is: protein has played an indispensable role in the biological existence of humans, and the cultural, economic and physical development of human societies. Historically, meat and other protein-rich foods have been associated with health and wealth. High protein consumption is a marker of social status and linked to national or racial superiority. Protein provides healthy nutrition to pregnant mothers, fuels learning in children, productivity in adults, and hence resilience in communities and nations. And poultry represents the most accessible, affordable, and scalable source of animal protein for our people. Therefore, Poultry Scientists are the custodians of essential nutrition, as also the creators of health, wealth and prosperity of communities.

Viksit Bharat (Developed India) by 2047 represents India's transformative ambition to achieve developed nation status by the 100th anniversary of its independence, a national aspiration to foster a self-reliant and prosperous economy, characterised by comprehensive advancements across multiple societal and economic dimensions. The foundational framework

for this vision rests upon four strategic sets of people: Yuva (Youth), Garib (Poor), Mahila (Women), and Kisan (Farmers), emphasising inclusive growth as a core principle. The overarching goals of Viksit Bharat 2047 extend beyond mere economic expansion to encompass social equity, global competitiveness, environmental sustainability, technology, and transparent governance.

As India marches confidently toward its grand vision of Viksit Bharat by 2047, the pursuit of nutritional security is not merely a policy goal, it is a moral and national imperative. Protein malnutrition is a pervasive and silent crisis across India, affecting millions. Over 80% of the population fails to meet their daily protein requirements, with a staggering 73% identified as protein deficient. The average Indian consumes only 0.6 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight daily, significantly below the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) recommendation of 0.8 to 1 gram per kilogram. This deficiency has adverse consequences, including stunted growth and impaired cognitive development in children, and reduced muscle mass, weakened immunity, and decreased productivity in adults. With over 35% children stunted and over 18% wasted, could Viksit Bharat be truly termed Viksit amidst such chronic malnutrition?

Poultry is a solution to this nutritional challenge. Poultry products are among the most affordable and readily available sources of high-quality protein containing all essential amino acids not found in many plant-based foods, along with vital vitamins, minerals, and beneficial fats. Their versatility and ease of preparation make them suitable for diverse dietary preferences across various income groups. The critical role of poultry in improving public health and human capital is evident. Increasing the per capita consumption of poultry products,

which currently lags significantly behind recommended levels, can directly address widespread protein deficiency. Per capita egg availability has risen to 106 eggs per year; though impressive it is still below the recommendation of the National Institution of Nutrition which advises a consumption of 180 eggs per person per year. The per capita annual consumption of poultry meat stands at about 3.4 kg which is considerably below the recommended 11 kg. Promoting poultry consumption through targeted awareness campaigns and integrating eggs and chicken into nutrition programs can significantly improve nutritional outcomes, especially for vulnerable populations like children.

Investment in a healthier, more productive citizenry is foundational to achieving the broader economic and social development goals of Viksit Bharat. India's policy, industry, and innovation ecosystem should come together to transform poultry into a pillar of our protein-secure, Viksit Bharat. Poultry science is way ahead of other disciplines: focusing on efficiency, health, and genetics etc. ensures a consistent supply of safe, affordable, and nutrient-dense foods, making it an indispensable tool for achieving global nutrition security.

Poultry stands out in the agriculture sector as it stands on its own feet. Being low on the political and governance agenda has been a blessing as it has spurred entrepreneurship and the resultant competitive spirit. The Indian poultry market, consisting mainly of broilers and eggs was worth approximately Rs. 3,00,000 crore in the year gone by. The growth rates during the last few years for eggs and poultry meat are averaging between 6% to 9% annually. The largely organised and integrated structure of the industry has given it an inherent resilience. The sector's dependence upon the government to bail it out is much less compared to many other sectors



of the economy. Innovativeness and entrepreneurship of the industry rather than any hand holding by the government has been its identity.

From the year 2000 onwards till the current year, food grains production, the primary focus of our agriculture and the resultant infusion of government investment, has registered a growth of 56%, whereas during the same period poultry has grown nearly 500%. India has also emerged as one of the fastest growing poultry markets in the world. This surely is a pointer that the support of subsidies may not necessarily spur growth or even long term financial security. More important is the effectiveness of the policy framework, the operational eco-system and space for the sector to grow. Poultry has organised and integrated itself into an industry; and hence has grown from a primary farming activity into a business enterprise.

Our unorganised and backyard poultry sector too is a potent tool for subsidiary income generation for landless/ marginal farmers besides providing nutritional security to the rural poor. More importantly, it has managed to integrate into the larger production and supply chain; even the relatively sophisticated transition from live birds to chilled and frozen products. In quite a few standalone models, backyard poultry is the source of high value free range eggs and organically produced chicken. This transition has propelled India into a prominent position on the global stage: 2nd largest egg producer globally,

with an impressive 149.11 billion eggs produced during 2024-25 at the annual growth rate of 4.4%. About 85% of these eggs are the output of commercial poultry, a progressive evolution of a traditional backyard activity to an industrial one. In meat production, India holds the 5th position worldwide, with an output of over 10.50 million tonnes in 2024-25, poultry at 5.18 million tonnes contributing nearly

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half of the total meat production. Over the past decade, the sector has demonstrated robust expansion, growing at a healthy rate of 8-10% annually, contributing 1% to GDP, 14% to Livestock GDP and employing about 4 million persons. Such robust growth positions India not just as a major producer but as a potential global leader in poultry, directly supporting Viksit Bharat's overarching goal of enhancing

global competitiveness and establishing India as a key global economic player by 2047.

A worrying trend I witness these days is science succumbing, with alarming frequency, to sentiments, beliefs, ideologies, pressures, politics etc. Why doesn't science encourage informed choices and decisions? Why can't science and traditional knowledge go hand in hand? Science should guide politics and policy not vice-versa. Please introspect.

I wish to quote from my article published in the November edition of Indian Poultry Review titled Poultry: Powerhouse of Protein, Provider of Nutritional Security, "A vast multitude of women and children in the low, and even middle, income countries are severely impacted adversely by abysmally low consumption of Animal Source Foods (ASF). A perspective inclusive of these concerns is either missing or under-represented in scientific analyses. The discussions on the relationship between ASF production systems and climate change generally tend to degenerate into ideology driven heated slugfest. What is also missing is an understanding of how low the consumption of ASF is among the poor, particularly in low and middle income countries, where the typical diets are starch dominant. For example, mean annual per capita meat consumption in the bottom four meat-consuming countries Sudan, India, Bangladesh, and Ethiopia is less than one-thirtieth of that in the top four Brazil, Uruguay, Australia, and USA.

Considering the global power that we are emerging as, this is one club we would not like to be a member of."

Viksit Bharat, besides being wealthy, should be truly healthy; a Human Resource we could be proud of.

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