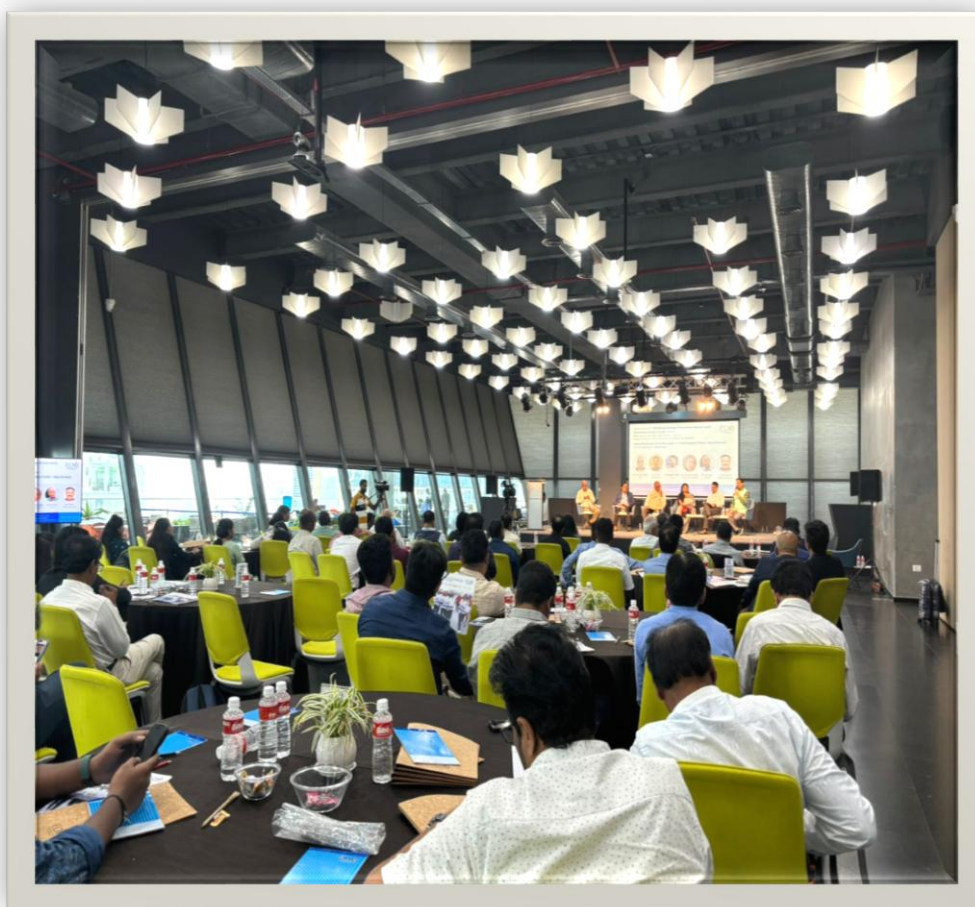




ECHOing Change: Promoting Decent Work Standards in Seed Supply Chain



Date: [Wednesday, January 29, 2025]

**Venue: [T-Hub, (MARVEL Events, Room – 5th Floor), Knowledge City,
Hyderabad]**

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1. Welcome Address

Speaker: Ms. UVL Ananda (Head of Corporate Communications & Public Affairs, East-West India)

- Extended a warm welcome to all attendees, panellists, and members of the executive committee.
- Highlighted the purpose of the event: to discuss pivotal issues in the seed industry, particularly child labour, decent wages, and sustainable practices.
- Encouraged a focus on solutions and a way forward rather than just challenges.
- Invited key guests to light the ceremonial lamp.



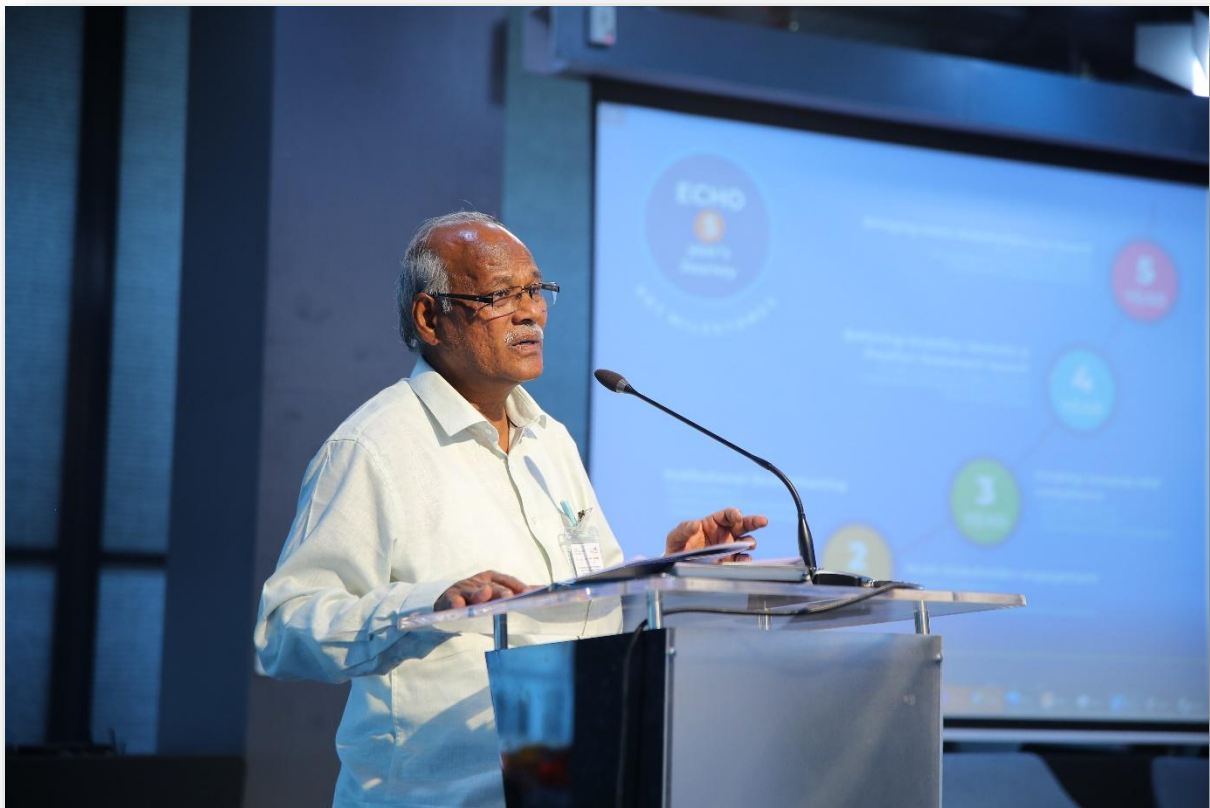
2. Presentation on ECHO's 5-Year Journey

Speaker: Dr. Davuluri Venkateswarlu (ECHO General Secretary)

- ECHO began as an informal initiative in the early 2000s to address child labour in hybrid cotton seed production and was named as CLEG (Child Labour Elimination Group) and later CCP (Child Care Program).

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- Formally structured in 2019 to strengthen its impact and organized field-level committees.
- Major milestones:
 - Year 1 & 2: Establishment of field structures and regional committees.
 - Year 3: Shifted focus to minimum wage compliance in corn and vegetable sectors.
 - Year 4: Launched position papers and a website.
 - Year 5: Expanding membership to more seed companies and CSOs.



- One of the key challenges is the decline in commitment from some seed companies despite increased global regulations and national guidelines, besides lack of coordination across the stakeholders in field-level implementation.

3. Plenary Discussion: "Role of Business – Promoting Decent Work Standards"

Moderator: [Ms. UVL Ananda, ECHO President]

Speakers:

- **Professor E. Haribabu** (Former Pro Vice Chancellor, University of Hyderabad)

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- **Mr. Ram Kaundinya** (Advisor, Federation of Seed Industry of India)
- **Mr. Venkatram Vasantavada** (MD Seedworks)
- **Mr. Rajendra Velagala** (MD, BASF | Nunhems)
- **Dr. Rupendra Singh** (Director, Bayer Bioscience Pvt. Ltd.)



Key Discussion Points:

1. Commitment to Ethical Supply Chains:

- Industry must move beyond informal practices towards a professional, structured approach.
- Digital tools like blockchain and traceability systems can enhance accountability.

2. Challenges in Child Labour Elimination:

- Significant improvements, but post-COVID issues persist.
- Need for collaborative industry-wide efforts.

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3. Minimum Wage Compliance:

- Industry is gradually focusing towards fair wages' compliance in seed production and have initiated pilots.
- A pilot in vegetables sector was conducted under the WISH project in collaboration with the Netherlands government and a similar ECHO's initiative in the corn seed production farms.

4. Women's Empowerment in Agriculture:

- Growing recognition of role of women in seed production.
- Companies investing in training, education, and safety programs for female workers.

5. Sustainability & Industry Growth:

- India's agricultural exports aim to double.
- Need for sustainable seed production to meet global standards.
- **Professor E. Haribabu** emphasized ethical labour practices, industry responsibility, multi-stakeholder governance and need of advocacy for integrating labour rights into broader sustainability initiatives, aligning with global frameworks such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and ILO guidelines.
- **Mr. Ram Kaundinya (Advisor, FSII)** spoke about the role of sustainable supply chains in boosting agricultural exports. He noted that sustainable practices are increasingly being demanded by global markets, particularly in Europe and the US.
- **Mr. Rajendra Velagala (MD, BASF | Nunhems)** highlighted how ethical labour practices enhance industry credibility and government support. Shared insights from the agrochemical and crop protection industries, where structured policies have ensured responsible practices, emphasizing the long-term benefits of ethical business models.
- **Dr. Rupendra Singh (Director, Bayer Bioscience Pvt. Ltd.)** outlined Bayer's continued commitment to child labour eradication, including labour audits, digital assessments, and CSO collaboration. Emphasized minimum wage compliance, periodic audits, and sustained child labour prevention efforts even after exiting the cotton business.
- **Mr. Venkatram Vasantavada (MD and CEO of Seedworks International Pvt. Ltd. and Director, FSII)** emphasized the need for broader industry participation and grassroots mobilization. Raised concerns over declining commitment from some companies and called for policy reinforcement to ensure industry-wide adoption of best practices.

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4. Panel Discussion: "Decent Wages in the Seed Supply Chain – The Way Forward"

Moderator: Ms. Subadra Gupta (Vice President, ECHO and Head of Sustainability, Asia-Africa, Syngenta)

This session focused on the need for minimum wage compliance and implementation challenges.

Subhadra Gupta set the stage by highlighting that decent work is a fundamental agenda in the Sustainable Development Goals, directly impacting economic growth and social equity. She emphasized that the agricultural sector, which employs over 45% of India's workforce, faces persistent challenges related to low wages and poor working conditions. She noted the role of the European Due Diligence Law in compelling industries to perform risk audits and ensure fair compensation practices. Paying decent wages is not just an ethical requirement but a critical component of a sustainable and resilient business model.

Panelists:

- **Mr. Ram Kaundinya** (FSII)
- **Dr. Suresh** (Solidaridad)
- **Mr. Ranjit Prakash** (ILO Representative)
- **Dr. Davuluri** (ECHO)
- **Mr. Vikram** (BASF | Numhems)

Key Topics Discussed:

- **Defining Decent Work & Wages:**
 - ILO standards and global best practices.
 - The impact of the European Due Diligence Law on Indian agriculture.
- **Challenges in Minimum Wage Implementation:**
 - Economic vs. social barriers to wage compliance.
 - The need for digital tracking and third-party audits.
- **Role of Civil Society Organizations:**
 - CSOs play a critical role in mobilizing farmers and industry stakeholders.
 - CSOs emphasize on collaborative policy development that leads to a long-term impact.

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Key Insights from the Panelists:

- **Ram Kaundinya (FSII Advisor):**
Ram Kaundinya emphasized that businesses must set internal minimum wage compliance processes to ensure compliance across the business partners in the supply chain. He pointed out that many seed companies still do not meet minimum wage requirements due to a lack of awareness, enforcement, or business pressures. He stressed the need for strong industry platforms like ECHO to create awareness, set guidelines, and ensure uniform compliance and to publish a compendium of best practices. He also highlighted the importance of digital wage tracking tools to bring transparency and accountability.
- **Dr. Suresh Motwani (Solidaridad):**
Dr. Motwani underscored the role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in ensuring compliance with minimum wage laws. He highlighted how CSOs bridge gaps between farmers, industry players, and policymakers. He also shared examples of Solidaridad's initiatives in sustainable agriculture and wage monitoring, advocating for stronger industry collaboration to ensure fair pay.
- **Mr. Ranjit Prakash (National Coordinator, ILO):**
Mr. Prakash spoke about ILO's frameworks and best practices in setting adequate

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wages. He discussed the importance of tripartite collaboration between businesses, government agencies, and labor organizations. Drawing from ILO's experience, he recommended the establishment of independent wage monitoring mechanisms and encouraged seed companies to proactively align their wage policies with international labor standards. He expressed his keen interest in partnering with ECHO to conceptualize and implement relevant projects.

- **Dr. Davuluri (ECHO, General Secretary):**

Dr. Davuluri emphasized that wage disparities in the agricultural sector are deeply rooted in economic and social structures. He highlighted ECHO's research findings, which indicate that many farm workers receive wages below the legal minimum. He called for structured policy interventions, including mandatory wage clauses in grower agreements and increased accountability through digital wage tracking systems.

- **Vikram M.N (BASF):**

Vikram detailed BASF's involvement in the WISH project, a collaborative initiative aimed at ensuring fair wages in seed production. He shared the challenges faced during implementation, such as resistance from some stakeholders and the need for consistent auditing processes. He encouraged companies to adopt digital tracking tools and independent third-party audits to reinforce wage compliance.

Future Recommendations:

- Establishing structured wage assessment mechanisms by seed companies.
- Promoting gender-inclusive employment practices that include equal wages for women.
- Strengthening industry-wide commitment to wage compliance.
- Enhancing digital tools to ensure transparency and traceability/documentation in wage payments.
- Encouraging multi-stakeholder engagement for long-term solutions.

Subhadra concluded the session by sharing the outcomes and the action points from the WISH project that is being implemented in the identified locations in the states of Karnataka and Maharashtra. Besides briefing about WISH project, she highlighted the role of partners in the WISH project to set benchmarks for minimum wage compliance.

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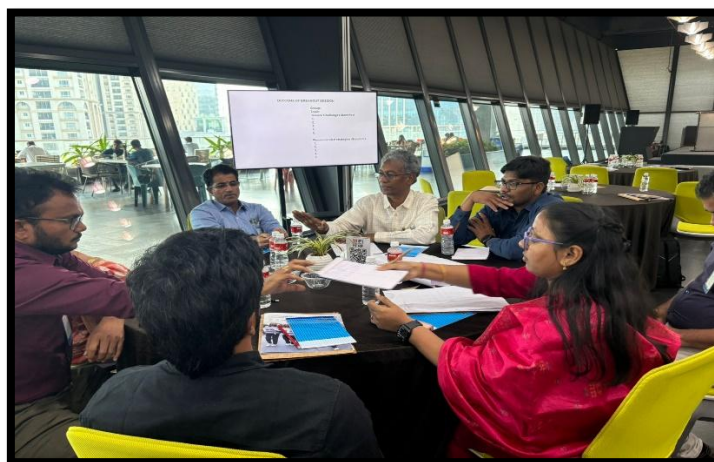


5. Group Discussions

After lunch, attendees engaged in a collaborative group discussion, forming four teams to address key challenges in addressing decent work issues within the seed supply chain. Each group focused on a specific theme, brainstorming solutions and presenting their findings to the audience. The discussions aimed to identify actionable steps for improving decent work standards across the industry.

Group A: Minimum Wages – Challenges and Solutions

- **Challenges:** Informal wage structures, lack of awareness, and inconsistent enforcement.
- **Solutions:** Standardizing minimum wage policies, promoting digital wage payments, and strengthening compliance monitoring.



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Group B: Novel Methods for Creating Awareness about Decent Work Standards

- **Challenges:** Lack of structured awareness programs, limited engagement from farmers and workers.
- **Solutions:** Community engagement, leveraging digital platforms, integrating awareness programs in farmer training, and collaboration with media to promote ethical labor practices.



Group C: Field-Level Monitoring and Reporting – Challenges and Solutions

- **Challenges:** Difficulty in age verification for child labor, lack of transparency in procurement prices, non-compliance with health and safety standards, and harassment of female workers.
- **Solutions:** Implementing digital record-keeping for age verification, enforcing transparent procurement pricing, ensuring companies provide proper safety gear, and raising awareness about workplace harassment policies.



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Group D: CSR as an Extended Program to Complement Decent Work Standards

- **Challenges:** Informal employment, low wages, poor working conditions, and limited access to social security.
- **Solutions:** Training programs, child labor eradication, women empowerment initiatives, enhanced health and safety measures, and promoting sustainable agriculture through farmer organizations.



6. Conclusion & Way Forward

- Called for increased participation from all industry players and expansion of ECHO membership.
- Emphasized the importance of continued collaboration and accountability (industry associations, ILO, government bodies, CSOs, academia etc.,).
- Urged companies to integrate decent work standards into core business models.
- Strengthening field-level monitoring and compliance mechanisms.
- Hosting follow-up discussions and policy dialogues.
- Focused approach on occupational health and safety in seed supply chain.
- Bringing more publications from ECHO (Knowledge papers, Position statements, Best practices compendium, etc.,)

End of Proceedings

Prepared by: [U Janatha]

Date: [Wednesday, January 29, 2025]

Proceedings of the ECHO Forum Event



AGENDA

ECHOing Change: Promoting Decent Work Standards in Seed Supply Chain

Date: 29th January, 2025

Time: 10 am to 3:00 pm

Venue: THub (MARVEL Events Room- 5th Floor), Knowledge City, Hyderabad

Topic	From	To	Speaker/ Facilitator
Registration	9:00 am	10:00 am	ECHO Secretariat
Welcome, Lighting lamp ceremony and Introduction	10:00 am	10:05 am	Ms. UVL Ananda, ECHO President
ECHO's Journey of 5 years – Unveiling Brochure	10:05 am	10:15 am	Dr. Davuluri Venkateswarlu, ECHO General Secretary (Inviting all guests)
Plenary Session: Role of Business in Promoting Decent Work Standards Moderator: Ms. UVL Ananda, ECHO President	10:15 am	11:15 am	Speakers: Prof E. Hari Babu, Former Pro Vice-Chancellor, University of Hyderabad Mr Ram Kaundinya (Advisor, FSII) Mr Venkatram Vasantavada (MD, Seedworks) Mr Rajendra Velagala (MD, BASF Nunhems) Dr Rupendra Singh (Director, Bayer Biosciences Pvt Ltd) UNICEF
Tea Break	11:15 am	11:30 am	ECHO Secretariat
Panel Discussion: Decent wages in Seed Supply Chain – Way forward			
Speaker-1	11:30 am	11:40 am	Mr Ram Kaundinya (FSII)
Speaker-2	11:40 am	11:50 am	Dr Suresh (Solidaridad)
Speaker-3	11:50 am	12:00 pm	Mr Ranjit Prakash (ILO)
Speaker-4	12:00 pm	12:10 pm	Dr Davuluri (ECHO)
Speaker-5	12:10 pm	12:20 pm	Mr Vikram (BASF Nunhems)
Moderator remarks and Q & A session	12:20 pm	12:40 pm	MS. Subhadra Gupta, ECHO Vice President
Break	12:40 pm	12:50 pm	ECHO Secretariat
Breakout sessions (4 groups)	12:50 pm	2:00 pm	Discussion, Sharing and Summing up

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Topics/Groups: A. Minimum Wages - Challenges & Opportunities/Solutions (Chairperson: Mr BRK Reddy, Sai Surya Agrotech) B. Novel Methods of Creating awareness about decent work standards (Chairperson: Mr HariKrishna, Mahyco)			Facilitators: Mr Saikat De, BASF Nunhems Mr Mathew, Bayer Mr Madhav, ECHO Mr Pushparaj, Syngenta Dr Davuluri, ECHO Mr Pramod Kulkarni, ECHO
C. Field-level Monitoring and Reporting – Challenges and benchmarks for decent work standards (Chairperson: Mr Bhaskar, MV Foundation) D. CSR as an extended program to complement decent works standards implementation (Chairperson: Mr Subramanya, Namdhari)			
Vote of thanks	2:00 pm	2:05 pm	Mr Saikat De, BASF Nunhems
Group Picture	2:05 pm	2:10 pm	
Lunch	2:10 pm onwards		ECHO Secretariat

Proceedings of the ECHO Forum Event

ECHOing Change: Promoting Decent Work Standards in Seed Supply Chain

29th JAN, 2025 – THUB, HYDERABAD

BREAK-OUT SESSIONS – 4 GROUPS – MEMBERS IN EACH GROUP

Group A Minimum Wages - Challenges & Opportunities/Solutions (Chairperson: Mr BRK Reddy, Sai Surya Agrotech)	Group B Novel Methods of Creating awareness about decent work standards (Chairperson: Mr HariKrishna, Mahyco)
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Mr T. Ramanjaneya (Sneha NGO – WISH Project Partner)2. Prof. Farida Siddiqui (Head, Dept of Economics, Maulana Azad University)3. Mr Bhaskar Danala (Vegetables Production Head, Bayer)4. Mr Shashi Kumar (Vegetables Seed APAC Procurement Manager, Syngenta)5. Mr Ramesh Basette (Manager – Corn, Seedworks)6. PSR Ghobinath (India Seed Production Head, BASF)7. Mr Ravi Raj (GLOCAL)8. Mr Gopi Krishna Maddi (Advanta)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Mr Rajendra (MV Foundation)2. Ms Prashanthi Devi (Sustainability Manager, Olam)3. Mr Surya Peddineedi (Coordinator HSE – Vegetable Seeds, Bayer)4. Mr Lakshman (AVP- Supply Chain, Seedworks)5. Mr Sunil Gat (Parent Seed Lead, Seedworks)6. Mr Prashant Kumar (Manager, Production Operations and Customer Coordination, Namdhari Seeds)7. Mr.Satyanarayana Murthy (DGM Production- Field Crops, Indoamerican Seeds)8. Ms. N.Udayalakshmi (Pre-Commercial Lead, Bayer Asia)
Group C Field-level Monitoring and Reporting – Challenges and benchmarks for decent work standards (Chairperson: Mr Bhaskar, MV Foundation)	Group D CSR as an extended program to complement decent works standards implementation (Chairperson: Mr Subramanya, Namdhari)
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Ms Riddhi Gupta (Sustainability Manager, Godrej Industries Limited Chemicals)2. Ms. Manisha Sapakale (Manager- Project Coordinator-WISH Project)3. Dr. S. Abdul Thaha (Asst. Director, Centre for the Study of Social Inclusion, Maulana Azad National Urdu University)4. Mr Subba Narasa Raju (DGM- Supply Chain, Seedworks)5. Mr.Manjunathswamy KK (General Manager, Supply Chain-Vegetables), Indoamerican Hybrid Seeds)6. Mr Jacob (GLOCAL)7. Mr Chaitanya Kumar (Advanta)8. Mr. Raghunath Sarvala (Syngenta)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Ms. Prashanthi (Manager, Project Coordination, PRDIS)2. Mr. Madhusudan Rao (President, Karunya NGO)3. Mr Anakala Srinivasulu (Corn Operations Lead, Syngenta)4. Dr Raja Sekhar (Cotton Effectiveness Lead, Seedworks)5. Ms. Renitha (CSR Manager, Advanta Seeds)6. Mr Sridhar (GLOCAL)7. Mr Virupakshappa (Advanta)8. Mr Surender Reddy (Sai Surya Agrotech)