



(From left) RP Singh, chairman, UPPCB; Praveen Gupta, director, Balrampur Chini Mills; Chandrasekhhar Singh, agriculture expert; Mithilesh Kumar, general manager, Bank of Baroda, Varanasi; and Lanka Ramesh, assistant general manager, Canara Bank

‘East UP has unlimited potential for waste to wealth value chain’

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Uttar Pradesh (UP), one of India's leading agricultural states, has significant potential to harness its farm economy to achieve its "waste to wealth" road map and contribute to the larger green economy, said UP Pollution Control Board (UPPCB) chairman R P Singh.

Speaking in a panel discussion on "Scope of Agriculture & Allied Industries in Purvanchal and the Need for Environment-Friendly Industries" at *Business Standard's* maiden "Ubharta Purvanchal" conclave, Singh pointed out that a large amount of biomass produced by the state was earlier dismissed as agricultural waste or crop residue. "On average, a tonne of food grain produces 1.7 tonnes of farm residue, which has a huge economic value owing to the biofuel supply chain."

Biomass could be used in several forms, including pellets for industry, compressed biogas (CBG) and small bio-fuel-based power plants, Singh said. He also suggested forming farmer producer organisations (FPOs) to collect biomass from small landholdings and small cultivators at the village level.

Balrampur Chini Mills Director Praveen Gupta said the company, which operates 10 sugar mills in Uttar Pradesh, had a robust business model that economised on the use of resources, including energy and groundwater. "We are investing nearly ₹3,000 crore in a greenfield bioplastic plant in Uttar Pradesh, which will be commissioned by the end of this year," he said.

Balrampur Group's mills have a combined capacity of 80,000 tonnes crushed per day (TCD). The company also

operates five distilleries and produces ethanol at scale for blending with fossil fuels.

Stressing the importance of green fuel against the backdrop of the recent global oil crisis, Gupta said blending ethanol, a sugar byproduct, with fuel provided a viable way to cut carbon emissions and augment farm incomes.

However, he flagged the availability of farm labour as a challenge for the optimum growth of agriculture, and suggested greater farm mechanisation and use of modern technology. "There should be platforms modelled on ride-hailing apps for aggregating farm implements like sugar-

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cane harvesters, which could be hired on a rental basis."

Balrampur has also converted ash generated at its manufacturing units into potash granules, which return to the soil and help agriculture in the long run.

Chandrasekhhar Singh, a Padma Shri awardee farmer, said the real transformation in agriculture would happen only when farmers started thinking and acting like micro-entrepreneurs, aligned with industry, and adopted commercial crops. He also recommended forming FPOs exclusively for organic farming, saying this could create a win-win situation for all stakeholders.

He said his long experience showed that farmers were keen to move away from the wheat-rice cycle and experiment with new crops and sus-

tainable farming practices.

However, they were hesitant because of the lack of new markets and adequate government support. "Purvanchal is known for farmers with small landholdings. The way to address this is through collectives and cooperatives, but for that to happen, people must set aside their egos."

Mithilesh Kumar, general manager at Bank of Baroda, stressed the importance of agriculture in regional economic development, job creation and exports. He said agriculture was vital for the domestic economy, contributing 18 per cent to gross domestic product (GDP), nearly 13 per cent to exports, and accounting for 45-55 per cent of employment. "Bank of Baroda wants to become an agribusiness partner for farmers and support the agricultural value chain."

He said banks had earlier focused mainly on services like crop loans and Kisan Credit Cards (KCCs). But the focus had now shifted to assessing farmers' cash flow, which was more important for a composite development road map. "Today, allied agricultural activities are more important, while the government is also playing a proactive and supportive role in this context," he said, describing eastern Uttar Pradesh as a potential growth and development engine for the state.

Lanka Ramesh, assistant general manager at Canara Bank, drew attention to the relatively small landholdings of farmers in Uttar Pradesh, describing this as an impediment to deriving optimum benefit from the farm economy. "The use of modern technology such as drones and artificial intelligence in agriculture can mitigate the shortage of farm labour and boost agricultural growth," he said.