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NARVOS NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR REGENERATIVE VEG OIL SECTOR

Scaling Regenerative Agriculture in India's Building Markets, incentives and policy and Re-launch of NARVOS

Under the project "Promotion of Regenerative Agriculture Practices for a Food
Secure and Climate Resilient Future in the EU-India Partnership"

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Table ofContents

S. No	Description	Page no.
1 1.1	About SOPA	3 3 3 4
2 3	SOPA 2025	4
3.1	Background of the Session	5
3.2	Opening Remarks	6
3.3	Industry Perspective	7
3.4	Consumer-Centric Approach	8
3.5	Role of NGOs	8
3.6	Traceability and storytelling	9
3.7	Consumer centric approach	10
4	Government Support	
	NARVOS Booth at SOPA	
	Conclusion	



1. About SOPA Soyabean Processor Association of India (SOPA) is national level body representing the soybean processors, farmers, exporters and brokers in India working towards the aim to strengthen soybean as a viable crop. SOPA encourages the development and promotion of soy-based products in the interest of farmers and processors. It represents soybean processors, farmers, exporters and brokers in India working towards the aim to strengthen soybean as a viable crop. The main objective of SOPA is to encourage the development and promotion of Soy-based products in the interest of the farmers as well as the processors.

1.1 SOPA 2025

SOPA 2025, the annual conclave on soy value chain, oilseeds and edible oils, was held on 8th and 9th October, 2025 in Indore, Madhya Pradesh. This provides a platform where there is presence of traders, government representatives, soyabean farmers, oil extracting companies etc. It provides opportunities to inform the stakeholders about the regenerative practices in the vegetable oil sector and NARVOS (National Alliance for Regenerative Vegetable Oil Sector).

At SOPA 2025, a panel discussion was organised on “Scaling Regenerative Agriculture in India’s Soybean Sector: Building Markets, Incentives, and Policy Convergence”, as well as the forum was utilised as an opportunity to reintroduce and relaunch NARVOS (National Alliance for Regenerative Vegetable Oil Sector) in the Indore circle. The session was deliberately designed to build visibility and engagement around this renewed platform. The objectives of the panel discussion were:

- i. To explore the business case and market demand for regeneratively grown soybean and its co-products.
- ii. To identify enabling policy and institutional frameworks that support regenerative transitions in the soybean sector.
- iii. To facilitate cross-sector dialogue between processors, governments, NGOs, and farmer institutions on scaling solutions and shared incentives.

2. Background of the Session

India's oilseed sector, especially soybean, is at a critical juncture. On one hand, falling global prices and cheap imports challenge domestic farmer viability. On the other hand, regenerative agriculture offers a pathway for climate resilience, improved soil health, and sustainable incomes. This panel brought together demand-side actors, farmer institutions, government bodies, and civil society to explore how regenerative approaches can be embedded in India's soybean value chain. It examined strategies for market incentives, traceable sourcing, carbon and biodiversity co-benefits, and policy measures to ensure scalability. The discussion aimed to build convergence across stakeholders to position Indian soybean as sustainable, inclusive, and competitive globally.

3. Opening Remarks

The panel discussion was moderated by Mr. Rijit Sengupta (CEO, Centre for Responsible Business). He started by emphasising the centrality of sustainability in modern trade agreements, stressing that Indian trade and export professionals must recognise the evolving global landscape. Sustainability is no longer an optional add-on, it is integrated into negotiation, policy, and market access strategies. Sustainability is becoming increasingly integrated into trade policymaking. Indian exporters and manufacturers need to wake up to this reality. He noted that the session had an additional purpose—to reintroduce NARVOS to the Indore circle and catalyse renewed collaboration among industry, farmers, and civil society around regenerative agriculture. Hence, he also asked participating company representatives to solicit the NARVOS charter to show their support.

3.1 Industry Perspective

Mr. Akash Matlani (Director – Export Sales and Business Development, Sonic Biochem), was requested for his opinions on the sustainable sourcing and he highlighted the practical necessity of sustainability, which are:

- Traceability and transparency are critical for international buyers.
- Sustainable practices can improve farmer incomes and long-term agricultural productivity.
- Sustainability initiatives should be consumer-focused, not just supply-focused.

He asserted that European consumers want to know where their food comes from, how it was produced, and whether it meets the environmental standards. Indian exporters need to embrace transparency to remain competitive. He emphasised that storytelling and simple communication of sourcing, production practices, and social impact can build trust without relying solely on expensive international certifications.

3.3 Consumer-Centric Approach

The discussion highlighted that sustainability conversations often neglect the consumer perspective: In the Indian market, consumer attitudes are shifting rapidly, with growing curiosity about how products are made and a rising willingness to pay a premium for goods that are environmentally and socially responsible. This evolving mindset signals a powerful opportunity for brands to strengthen market positioning through credible sustainability practices.

Panellists emphasised that capturing this value requires clear and engaging communication. Consumers today seek transparency, not technical jargon. Brands that can effectively convey their environmental footprint, social impact, and commitment to ethical sourcing stand to gain higher trust and stronger loyalty. The challenge lies in translating complex sustainability efforts into simple, meaningful narratives that resonate with everyday buyers.

“We have underestimated Indian consumers’ ability to ask brands about their purpose. There is an increasing willingness to pay for responsibly produced products.”

3.4 Role of NGOs

Dr. Suresh Motwani, representing NGOs implementing sustainable agriculture in the field, discussed how intervention are being implemented and experiences from the field. Solidaridad is promoting standards and practices suitable for Indian conditions for the vegetable oils produced in the region.

Solidaridad is supporting farmers in adopting regenerative agricultural practices to protecting soil health and biodiversity. This includes promoting the use of organic inputs, integrated pest management, efficient water use, and agroforestry. In addition, it facilitates capacity-building programs for smallholders and processors to strengthen their technical knowledge, meeting sustainability. Through workshops, training sessions, and demonstration projects, farmers are empowered to access better markets, adopt traceability systems, and align with global sustainability standards, thereby improving both income stability and environmental performance.

- Helping farmers adopt eco-friendly methods and improve market linkages.
- Providing capacity-building programs for smallholders and processors.

He stressed that Indian farmers are ready to implement sustainable systems if provided with guidance and support.

3.5 Traceability and Storytelling

Panellists highlighted that cost continues to be one of the most critical barriers to adopting sustainability standards, especially for small producers and micro-enterprises. Compliance often demands upfront investments in new infrastructure, improved storage systems, training of personnel, and third-party certification. For many smallholders, these expenses can feel prohibitive and may delay their transition to sustainable processes.

However, the discussion also emphasised that technology is emerging as a powerful equaliser. Digital traceability platforms, mobile-based data collection, and software-driven monitoring systems can streamline compliance requirements and significantly reduce operational costs. These tools not only minimise paperwork and manual oversight but also enhance transparency and accuracy across the supply chain, making sustainability adoption more accessible and efficient.

Importantly, panellists noted that international markets increasingly reward sustainable production with higher price premiums. Sectors such as coffee and cocoa already demonstrate the value of compliance, with sustainably certified products often earning 10–20% higher prices. These premiums can help producers recover initial investments and improve long-term profitability. “Sustainability is not just a cost—it is an investment in long-term competitiveness, risk management, and brand reputation.”

3.6 Government Support

Government plays a pivotal role in accelerating the adoption of sustainability practices across agriculture and small enterprises. One of the most effective pathways is capacity building, which equips farmers and MSMEs with the knowledge and skills required to integrate climate-smart and resource-efficient methods. Through targeted training programs, field demonstrations, and digital extension services, governments can help stakeholders understand sustainable technologies, improve productivity, and reduce environmental impacts.

Infrastructure support is equally essential. Many farmers struggle with post-harvest losses and quality deterioration due to inadequate storage and logistics. By investing in warehousing, cold-chain networks, grading and quality testing facilities, and village-level processing units, government can create an enabling ecosystem that reduces waste and enhances market access for sustainably produced goods. Incentives also play a crucial role in encouraging behavioural change. Tax benefits, interest subvention, and subsidies for adopting sustainable inputs, renewable energy systems, and water-efficient irrigation can significantly lower the cost burden for farmers and MSMEs, making the transition more viable.

Finally, sustained research support is fundamental for long-term resilience. Government-funded institutions can drive innovation by developing high-quality seeds, climate-resilient crop varieties, and improved cultivation practices. Together, these interventions strengthen sustainability adoption, improve livelihoods, and promote inclusive growth. In the discussion a point emerged that there is need for the platform which has representatives of the stakeholders like farmers, FPOs, government, and edible oil processing companies. This multi-stakeholder platform will be used to facilitate the conversation with the representatives of the government, companies, etc. This dialogue will facilitate to interact, collaborate with other stakeholders. The panellists were informed that such platform exists: NARVOS, which would be relaunched during the SOPA 2025. The charter was presented to the panellist and the attendees. However, the attendees at SOPA event were hesitant as they require permission from the top management of their companies. Program secretariate will provide letters of support to solicit NARVOS charter at CEO level of these companies.

Conclusion

Discussions during the SOPA event concluded that sustainability is no longer optional in global trade. It is driven by regulatory requirements, market premiums, and reputational considerations. Indian industry and agriculture must proactively embrace sustainability to remain competitive, support farmers, and meet the expectations of global and domestic consumers. Whether it is regulation, market incentives, or reputation, there is no way out from sustainability. It is the future of trade and agriculture.

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Aditya Petwal
Senior Consultant
Centre for Responsible Business
Email : aditya@c4rb.in
Phone: 9324796025
Website: www.c4rb.org

Amit Singh
Senior Programme Manager
Centre for Responsible Business
Email : amit.s@c4rb.in
Phone: 8989440475
Website: www.c4rb.org

