

'Centre's digital agri proposals raise concern'

91 groups send feedback to govt.

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The Centre's digital agriculture proposals raise concerns of exploitation of farmers, data protection and consent, mismanaged land records, exclusion of landless cultivators and the corporatisation of agriculture, according to 91 organisations which sent in their feedback to the government on Wednesday. They also demanded that the Centre stop implementation of the pilot projects being rolled out in partnership with tech and retail giants including Microsoft, Amazon and Patanjali.

The Centre published a consultation paper on an India Digital Ecosystem of Agriculture (IDEA) on June 1, and sought public feedback by the end of the month. The 91 organisations, which include some of the farm unions groups protesting against three farm reform laws at Delhi's borders as well as digital rights advocates, urged the government to extend the deadline to translate the

document into other languages in order to hold meaningful consultations with farmers. They noted that there is no farmer representation in the task force which brought out the proposals or in the governance framework of IDEA.

The organisations said it was important to bring the benefits of digital technology to farmers, but emphasised that such digital infrastructure should be owned by the government, not private corporates. They alleged that the current model is more focussed on using the government's existing databases and geared towards corporate revenue models, rather than ensuring that farmers' needs and interests are considered. "The proposition of a "farmers' database" based on digitised land records will lead to problems and exclusions, given the seriously flawed condition of the digitised land records and their failure to capture the information of actual cultivators and those operating the landholding," said their letter.