

Dedicated team of scientists to develop new varieties of sugarcane: Shivraj Singh Chouhan

– By Ajith Athrady

(DECCAN HERALD; NEW DELHI: SEPTEMBER 30, 2025)

NEW DELHI: UNION Minister for Agriculture & Farmers Welfare and Rural Development Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Tuesday announced that a dedicated team will be set up within the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) to develop alternate sugarcane varieties as the current variety 'CO 0238' has become susceptible to red rot disease.

"This team will also work on the sugarcane policy," the Minister said while addressing a national discussion on the sugarcane economy, organized by Rural Voice and the National Federation of Cooperative Sugar Factories in collaboration with ICAR.

Chouhan pointed out that sugarcane variety 238 has shown good sugar content but is vulnerable to red rot disease, a statement from the Agriculture Ministry said.

Emphasising the need to work simultaneously on developing alternatives, the Minister said "Controlling diseases is a critical challenge since new varieties often bring new disease risks. "

CO 0238 was launched in 2009 with moderate resistance to the prevalent races of red rot disease, which contributed to its rapid adoption by farmers in north India. But this resistance started to break down between 2020 and 2023, particularly due to the emergence of more virulent red rot pathotypes.

He pointed out that mono-cropping leads to multiple problems, including nutrient depletion and limitations in nitrogen fixation. The possibility of replacing mono-cropping with intercropping, requires careful assessment, he said.

ICAR Director General M L Jat said that sugarcane requires high amounts of water and fertilizer. To address water scarcity, several studies have been carried out, and micro-irrigation practices—such as those adopted in Maharashtra, offer promising solutions. He added that current fertilizer usage is inefficient and that improving fertilizer efficiency is essential.

Devendra Kumar Yadav, Deputy Director General of Crop Science at ICAR, explained that sugarcane variety 238 was initially welcomed by farmers but eventually encouraged monocropping. He clarified that although there are alternatives, new varieties take time to be adopted. Each variety undergoes three years of testing to monitor disease, insect resistance, and yield. According to him, analyzing the yield gap is critical for most crops.
