

Need to declare Kuttanad and Upper Kuttanad in Kerala as a Special Agricultural Zone (SAZ)-Laid

SHRI KODIKUNNIL SURESH (MAVELIKKARA): Kuttanad, the "Rice Bowl of Kerala," is a unique agrarian region situated below sea level, relying on bunds and canals for cultivation. Recognized as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System (GIAHS) by FAO, its traditional below-sea-level farming is globally rare. Given its ecological and economic significance, declaring Kuttanad & Upper Kuttanad, spanning across Alappuzha, Kottayam and Pathanamthitta, a Special Agricultural Zone (SAZ) is essential for sustainable farming and climate resilience. Frequent floods, saline water intrusion, and soil erosion threaten agriculture, while urbanization and shrinking cultivable land reduce paddy production. High farming costs, inadequate price support, and weak market linkages have forced many farmers to abandon agriculture, leading to economic distress. SAZ status should include financial incentives for paddy cultivation, climate-resilient rice varieties, and integrated farming models like paddy-fish farming. Strengthening bunds, scientific dredging, and better drainage are crucial for water management. Establishing a Kuttanad Agricultural Research Centre will drive innovation in climate adaptation. Declaring Kuttanad and Upper Kuttanad as an SAZ will ensure long-term sustainability, food security, and improved farmer livelihoods through a holistic policy approach integrating technology, financial support, and sustainable water management.