Preface
Like many other States of our Country more than 65% of the population of Maharashtra depend on agriculture (crop and animal husbandry, fisheries, forestry and agro-processing) for their livelihoods. Much of Maharashtra’s agriculture is rainfed. The contribution of agriculture to State’s GDP is going down but there has been no commensurate decline in the number of women and men dependant on agriculture for their employment and income. Consequently, poverty is increasing in rural areas and urban slums are growing because of the migration of the assetless poor from villages to towns and cities. Mumbai is a classic example of the impact of inadequate livelihood opportunities, particularly in the non-farm sector in rural areas.

Experience from different parts of our country shows that agricultural progress is the most effective safety net against hunger and poverty. The growth linkages between agriculture and industry are high. It has therefore been an act of vision on the part of the Government of Maharashtra to have set up a High Level Committee to go into the many dimensions of agricultural progress, particularly in the context of the ongoing globalisation of economies and liberalisation of trade.

Maharashtra is richly endowed with outstanding agricultural research and educational institutions both in the public and private sectors. It has diverse agro-climatic and soil conditions. The farm families are hard working and innovative. Given a proper synergy between technology and public policy, rapid progress can be made in improving the productivity, profitability, stability and sustainability of major farming systems of the State, as is evident from Maharashtra's horticultural revolution.

While past accomplishments are impressive, future challenges are even greater. The State has to work towards achieving revolutionary progress in enhancing agricultural productivity, quality, income and employment. Fortunately, ecological agriculture (which I have termed “ever-green” revolution) is knowledge, and not capital or chemical intensive. It should therefore be possible to attract and retain educated youth in farming, provided integrated attention is paid to technology, training, techno-infrastructure and trade. This Report offers suggestions on shaping Maharashtra’s agricultural future in a manner that agriculture yields more food, jobs and income. We have indicated how a job-led economic growth strategy can be adopted in rural Maharashtra. We have also shown that “production by masses” (i.e., production by 10 million small farm families) can compete effectively with the “mass production” technologies of industrialised countries, provided institutional structures are developed for conferring the power of scale to small producers at the production and post-harvest phases of farming. Also, we should end as soon as possible the
prevailing mismatch between production and post-harvest technologies. Agricultural progress can be accelerated if there is a systems approach to production planning, with concurrent attention to all the links in the production-marketing-consumption chain. Also, training has to be holistic. For this purpose there is need for a Krishi aur Udyog Vigyan Kendra in every district, with the capability of imparting trade and quality literacy.

We have included examples of innovative farm achievements in different parts of Maharashtra in the form of “boxes”. A major challenge lies in converting these unique examples into more universal accomplishment. Maharashtra has considerable capacity in information and communication technologies. We have hence proposed the immediate establishment of a Virtual University for Agrarian Prosperity, through the intelligent and integrated use of the internet, cable TV and community radio. We have also proposed a New Deal for Self-Employed in the farm sector, since agriculture constitutes the largest private sector enterprise in our country.

Inventions and innovations will be the key to successful and sustainable agriculture. Maharashtra farmers, as the Boxes will reveal, are gifted with an innovative spirit. In order to use their knowledge on a continuing basis, it is suggested that a Consortium of Innovative Farmers for Agricultural Transformation of Maharashtra under the chairmanship of Minister of Agriculture may be formed. This will help to extend the extrapolation domain of successful experiences and achievements.

Past experience indicates that if agriculture goes wrong, nothing else will have a chance to go right. I therefore hope our recommendations will receive speedy consideration by an Empowered Committee constituted by the State Government.

To me, it has been a real privilege to have been associated with very devoted and distinguished experts and officers in this work. I would particularly like to record our gratitude to the Hon Chief Minister, Shri Vilasrao Deshmukh, and the Hon Agriculture Minister for their support and interest. It has also been a particular good fortune to have an administrator of the vision and dedication of Dr SK Goel, as Member-Secretary of the Committee.

Chennai
31 December 2002

M S Swaminathan
Chairperson
High Level Committee