

(13 March, 2026)

Honoring Excellence in Agriculture: Highlights from the TAAS Awards Ceremony 2025

The Trust for Advancement of Agricultural Sciences (TAAS) recently held on its prestigious 2025 Awards Ceremony at the C. Subramaniam Convention Hall in New Delhi, 13 March 2026, during the Global Conference on Women in Agri-Food Systems (GCWAS-2026). This was attended by a high-profile gathering of the global scientific community, dedicated to celebrating leadership and innovation in the pursuit of global food security.

The ceremony was graced by a panel of eminent experts who highlighted the collaborative nature of agricultural advancement. The event was co-chaired by **Dr M L Jat**, Secretary, DARE & DG, ICAR, alongside **Dr Raju Barwale**, Chairman of Mahyco Pvt. Ltd. Adding to the prestige of the occasion were special invitees **Dr S K Vasal**, a World Food Prize Laureate and renowned maize breeder, and **Dr Nitya Rao**, Director of NISD at the University of East Anglia were present as Special Invitees. The proceedings of the events were skillfully anchored by Ms. Sonal Dsouza from Alliance Bioversity International – CIAT, India Office, New Delhi.

Dr R S Paroda, Chairman of TAAS, opened the ceremony by defining TAAS as a "neutral and vibrant think tank." He reminded the audience that the organization was born from a challenge issued by former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in 2001: to ensure that scientific vision documents lead to actual action rather than remaining academic exercises.

"Our core mission is to bridge the gap between scientific research and its practical application in society through policy advocacy and strategic partnerships." — **Dr R S Paroda**

The ceremony centered on honoring two distinguished scientists whose work has reshaped agricultural landscapes both in India and globally.

1. Recipient of the Dr MS Swaminathan Award for Leadership in Agriculture

Dr Prabhu Pingali, the Director of the Tata Cornell Institute in Ithaca, USA, was honored as the recipient of the prestigious Dr. MS Swaminathan Award for Leadership in Agriculture. As an internationally renowned agricultural economist, Dr Pingali was recognized for his lifetime of work influencing global food policy. During the ceremony, Chief Guest **Prof. Ramesh Chand**, Member of Niti Aayog, described him as the "greatest leader in agricultural economics today," specifically highlighting Dr. Pingali's prophetic early warnings regarding the sustainability of the Green Revolution and his insights into the "westernization" of the Indian diet.

2. Recipient of the Dr. S K Vasal Award for Excellence in Crop Hybrid Research

Dr Bhupendra Kumar, a Senior Maize Breeder at the ICAR-Indian Institute of Maize Research (IIMR) in Ludhiana, was honored as the recipient of the Dr SK Vasal Award for Excellence in Crop

Hybrid Research. Dr. Kumar was recognized for his significant contributions to the field, having developed and released 39 single-cross maize hybrids. His work has achieved substantial impact, with his hybrids being licensed to 32 private companies and flagship varieties generating cumulative economic benefits exceeding 3,000 crores. Furthermore, Chief Guest Prof. **Ramesh Chand** credited the dedication of scientists like Dr Kumar for the remarkable doubling of India's maize production—from 22 million to 44 million tons—over the past decade.

Dr Paroda also highlighted the growth of TAAS initiatives, including the recently launched Dr Borlaug Award for Women in Agriculture. He noted that the inaugural recipient, woman farmer Ms Neelam Tyagi, was honored in late 2025, indicating a new era of recognizing grassroots leadership alongside academic excellence.

In their closing remarks, **Dr Raju Barwale** and **Dr M L Jat** emphasized the vital role of the private sector and the "human element" of leadership. Dr Jat praised the awardees for championing the goals of "zero hunger" and "zero carbon," while Dr Barwale reaffirmed Mahyco's commitment to supporting science that serves the best interests of farmers.

The event concluded with a vote of thanks by Dr Bhag Mal, Secretary of TAAS.