

Military Farms Service

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In news: Recently, Indian Army has formally closed the Military Farms Service which administered the 130 military farms all across the country.

A brief History of Military Farm Service

- **Establishment:** British established the first Military Farm in 1889 at Allahabad
- **Aim:** To ensure nutritious milk supply to the troops deployed in India. The Military Farms also supplied hay to the Animal Transport units of the Indian Army.
- **Location:** Initially, the military farms were mostly located in the Central, Southern and Western Commands of the Army and subsequently, when Northern and Eastern Commands were raised, new Military Farms were set up in these areas too.
- **Gradual change in its role:** The role of Military Farms had expanded from only milk production to artificial insemination of cows too and the first pioneering steps in this regard were taken as early as in 1925
- At one point of time the Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR) had found Military Farms to be the largest holders of cattle in the country
- **Project Frieswal:** In collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, the Military Farms undertook 'Project Frieswal' one of the largest cross-cattle breeding programmes in the country.

Timeline of the decision to to close military farms

- In 2013, the QuarterMaster General's branch of the Army Headquarters, under which Military Farms fell, issued a direction that the farms will be closed in a phased manner
- In June 2014, another order was issued by the Deputy

Director-General Military Farms that the responsibility of supply of milk and milk products was being shifted from Military Farms to Army Service Corps (ASC).

- In 2016, a committee under Lt Gen DB Shekatkar (retd) submitted a report on reorganisation of several branches of the Army in which it was recommended that the Military Farms be closed down.
- The government wishes to save nearly Rs 280 crores per year which was spent on the upkeep of the farms, the cattle and for salaries to the staff.

Stauss of cattle held by the Military Farms

After the decision to close Military Farms, the Ministry of Defence has directed the Chief of Army Staff in May 2018 to sell all cattle held by the Military farms to central or state dairy departments or state dairy cooperatives at a nominal amount of Rs 1,000 per head. Around 25,000 cattle were with the Military Farms in 39 farms when the decision was announced.

Currents status of the land and staff of the Military Farms

Staff: As result of the closure of the Military Farms, the permanent staff of the Military Farms has been transferred to other departments of the Ministry of Defence and the bulk of them are civilian personnel

Land: Around 20,000 acres of land which belongs to Military Farms throughout the country and most of it is in prized locations and the utilisation of this land will be decided by the Ministry of Defence

Project Frieswal

- It was launched by Military Farms in collaboration with the ICAR and the aim was **to develop milch cattle by cross-breeding which would suit the tropical climate of countries like India.**

- **Aim:** Its aim was to **produce and rear Holstein Friesian crossbred with Sahiwal breed for high milk productivity**
- A memorandum of understanding had been signed between the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Defence in this regard in 1991.
- The aim of the project was to develop a milch breed yielding 4000 kgs in 300 days lactation with four percent butterfat.
- Semen freezing, planned breeding, progeny testing and gene mapping were some of the other areas in which the research for the project was undertaken.

Holstein Friesians

They are a breed of dairy cattle originating from the Dutch provinces of North Holland and Friesland, and Schleswig-Holstein in Northern Germany. They are known as the world's highest-production dairy animals

Sahiwal cattle

- Sahiwal is considered to be one of the best milch cattle breed of India
- The breed derives its name from Sahiwal area in Montgomery district of Punjab in Pakistan. These animals are also known as "Lambi Bar", "Lola", "Montgomery", "Multani" and "Teli".
- Sahiwal is considered a heat-tolerant cattle breed