

Giriraj Singh asks Commerce Min to keep dairy out of RCEP trade deal

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New Delhi, Oct 13 () Union Minister Giriraj Singh has asked the commerce ministry to keep dairy sector out of the proposed RCEP free trade pact, voicing reservation on possible import of milk produced by cattle that are given animal feed.

Opening of free trade in dairy sector will affect farmers of India, which is the world's largest producer of milk, the dairy and animal husbandry minister said.

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) - a mega free trade agreement being negotiated among 10 ASEAN countries with their six FTA partners (India, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand). The proposed deal is expected to be finalised and signed by the next month.

Last week, RCEP member countries met in Bangkok for three days of negotiations, perhaps for the last time to conclude the deal.

Explaining reasons why dairy sector should be kept out of the ambit of the proposed RCEP trade pact, the minister said: "I have objection on two issues. We will not accept the milk produced by cattle that are given animal protein. Our condition is milk imported should have not any animal feed".

India does not use animal protein as feed to cattle, the minister told .

Noting that India is the world's largest milk producer and has highest cattle population, Singh said, "Despite all, the country's per capita milk yield is lowest in the world and as a result the cost of production of milk is higher compared to other countries".

The per capital yield of milk is around 10 litres in India, while 40 litres in other countries due to animal feed, he added.

"For us, dairy is a backyard business. We request all RCEP countries to keep this sector outside the proposed trade pact," the minister said.

About 80 million rural household are engaged in milk production in India with very high proportion being landless, small and marginal farmers.

The total estimated milk production in the country was 176.35 million tonnes during 2017-18. The government has targeted milk production of 254.55 million tonnes by 2022. LUX BAL