THE/NUDGE Prize

DCM SHRIRAM FOUNDATION

Shaping India's AgWater Future

Securing water & prosperity for 1 million farmers

DCM Shriram AgWater Challenge

Challenge journey: 2023-2025


ThinkAg


THE DAUGHERTY
WATER
for FOOD
GLOBAL INSTITUTE
at the University of Nebraska


ecociate


India
waterportal


Deshpande
Foundation


20
YEARS
Arghyam
Safe, sustainable water for all


INDUS
WATER INSTITUTE


MANAGE
मैनेज


omnivore


SOCIAL
alpha


RICH
Research and Innovation
Circle of Hyderabad


2030
Water
Resources
Group


IIT - IIT


ACUMEN
CHANGING
THE WAY
THE WORLD
TACKLES
POVERTY


TIF
TISS Incube Foundation


villgro®
possible.


caspian
debt


ankur
capital


Sahyadri
farms
Seeding goodness


नार्म
naarm


Center for Agri-Innovation
a-IDEA

Shaping India's AgWater Future

By securing water and prosperity for
1 million farmers through the

DCM Shriram AgWater Challenge
Challenge journey overview- 2023-25

Eighteen months ago, The/Nudge Prize and DCM Shriram Foundation launched the DCM Shriram AgWater Challenge to transform water use in Indian agriculture—identifying and scaling innovations that make farming more water-efficient, productive, and resilient.

This book unfolds the journey of pioneering innovators pushing boundaries, rigorous evaluations building confidence, and a growing ecosystem committed to securing water and livelihoods for millions.

Office of the
Principal Scientific Advisor
to the Government of India

Foreword

Ajay S. Shriram

Chairman and Sr. Managing Director
DCM Shriram Ltd.

Water is the lifeblood of agriculture, sustaining not only crops but entire communities. Yet, the growing challenges of water scarcity, inefficient usage, and climate variability threaten the very foundation of our food systems. At DCM Shriram, we have long believed in the power of innovation and collaboration to address these pressing concerns. With this vision in mind, we launched the DCM Shriram AgWater Challenge—a bold initiative aimed at catalyzing transformative solutions for water security in agriculture.

The AgWater Challenge has unlocked new possibilities—be it through breakthrough technologies, sustainable water management practices, or fostering cross-sector partnerships. More importantly, it has amplified the role of innovators—visionary individuals and organisations who are leading the charge towards a water-secure future for Indian farmers. Their commitment, combined with the support of an enabling ecosystem, gives us hope that real lasting change is within reach.

Looking ahead, our vision remains clear: "securing water & prosperity for 1 million farmers" This challenge is not the end by itself but a stepping stone towards a larger goal. We believe that by continuing to invest in innovation, fostering collaboration, and scaling proven solutions, we can create a future where Indian agriculture thrives despite water challenges.

I extend my gratitude to all the partners, participants, and stakeholders who have contributed to this journey. Your dedication and passion reaffirm our belief that, together we can build a more sustainable, water-secure future for generations to come.

About the AgWater Challenge

Across India's farmlands, water—the lifeblood of cultivation—is running out. Smallholder farmers face erratic monsoons, depleting groundwater, and inefficient irrigation, putting their livelihoods at risk. While water-saving technologies exist, high costs, low awareness, and limited validation keep them out of reach.

In response, the DCM Shriram AgWater Challenge was launched in June 2023 with a bold mission—to secure water and livelihoods for 1 million farmers in India. The Challenge asked: how can we accelerate the adoption of AgWater technologies that enhance water use efficiency, boost crop productivity, and strengthen smallholder farmers' economic resilience?

From 134 applications across the country, 16 innovators were selected to develop solutions for India's most water-intensive crops—wheat, paddy, sugarcane, and cotton, tbacked by a ₹2.6 Cr prize purse. Beyond innovators, investors, academia, policymakers, and implementation partners played a crucial role in raising awareness, generating evidence, and strengthening sector investability.

Recognizing the need for greater affordability and data transparency for smallholder farmers, a surprise 'Special Recognition' award of ₹25,00,000 was introduced by Mr. Shriram after meeting the finalists. Inspired by their commitment, he felt this award was essential to further incentivise solutions that truly serve smallholder needs.

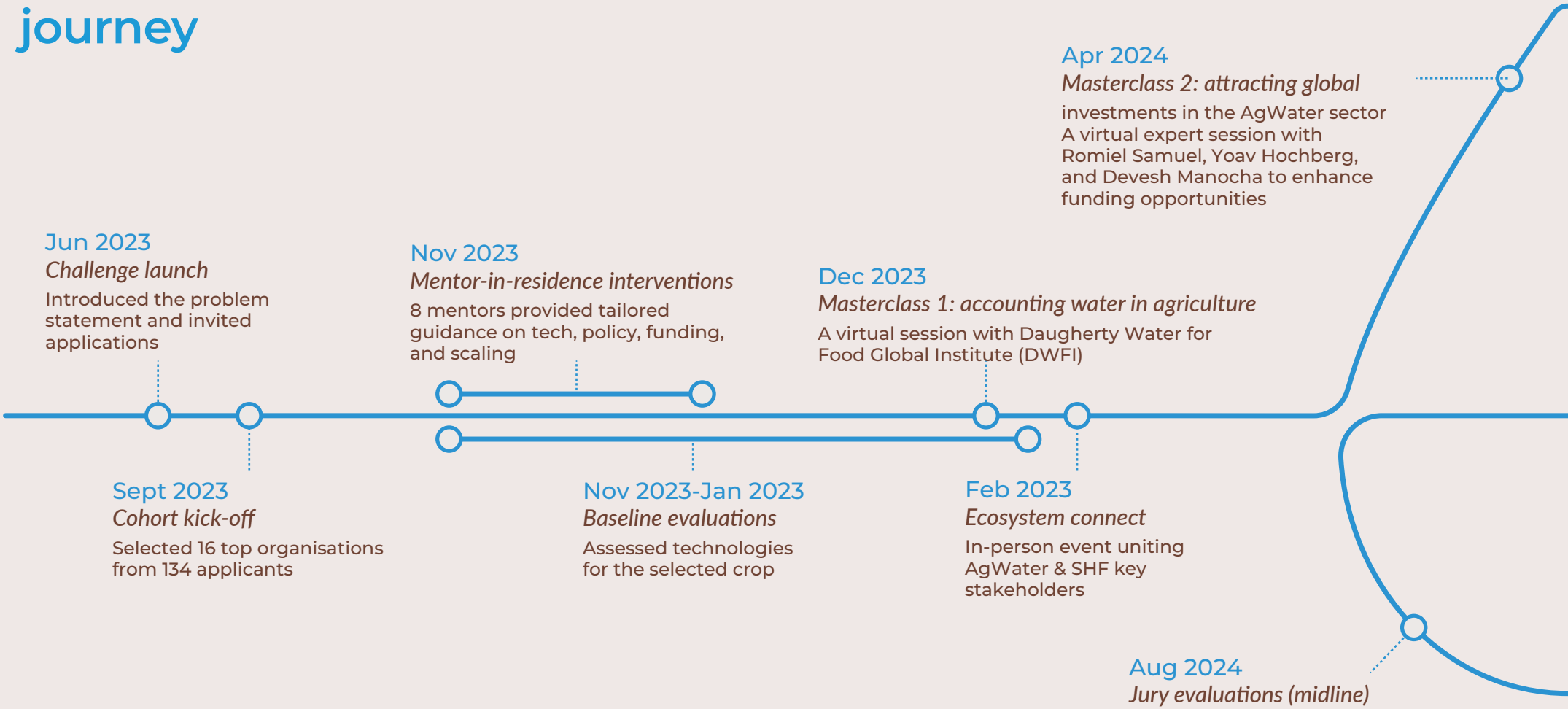
This is the journey of the AgWater Challenge—where bold innovations, a committed ecosystem, and a shared vision have come together to shape the future of AgWater in India.

Dr Sapna Poti

Director - Strategic Alliances
Office of Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India

"With agriculture consuming the most freshwater, water efficiency is key. The DCM Shriram AgWater Challenge has driven transformative solutions for water-smart farming. We remain committed to integrating technology, policy, and community-driven approaches to tackle India's water challenges.

18 months of the AgWater Challenge journey



Jun 2023
Challenge launch
Introduced the problem statement and invited applications

Sept 2023
Cohort kick-off
Selected 16 top organisations from 134 applicants

Nov 2023
Mentor-in-residence interventions
8 mentors provided tailored guidance on tech, policy, funding, and scaling

Nov 2023-Jan 2023
Baseline evaluations
Assessed technologies for the selected crop

Dec 2023
Masterclass 1: accounting water in agriculture
A virtual session with Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute (DWFI)

Feb 2023
Ecosystem connect
In-person event uniting AgWater & SHF key stakeholders

Apr 2024
Masterclass 2: attracting global
investments in the AgWater sector
A virtual expert session with Romiel Samuel, Yoav Hochberg, and Devesh Manocha to enhance funding opportunities

Aug 2024
Jury evaluations (midline)
12 organisations pitched for a spot in the finals

Jun 2024

Workshop 1: Growth strategies and impact narratives for AgWater Tech

A full-day workshop on impact storytelling and growth strategy

Aug 2024

Finalists announcement

EF Polymer, CultYvate, Phyfarm & Industill advance to the final stage

Nov 2024

Workshop 2: Product-market fit for scaling AgWater technologies

An in-person session by Emmanuel Murray focused on scale strategies

Feb 2025

Grand jury (endline)

Final deliberation to select the winner

Oct-Nov 2024

Podcast series

Conversations on data-driven AgWater use & climate-proofing agriculture

Dec 2024-Jan 2025

Endline field evaluations

Final impact assessment through field visits & strategy discussions

Feb 2025

Grand finale

Winner announcement, investment insights, and documentary premiere

Jun 2024

Midline field evaluations

Field assessments across 8 states, engaging 100+ farmers

Watch the journey video

The expert ecosystem powering the challenge

At the heart of the AgWater Challenge has been a robust expert ecosystem, whose guidance and insights have been instrumental in shaping its success.

Our advisors played a crucial role from the very start—refining the problem statement, selecting the right innovators, and providing strategic direction. Beyond them, a broader network of experts across technology, business, policy, and sustainability enriched the cohort's journey through masterclasses, workshops, and valuable feedback.

To deepen this support, seasoned mentors engaged with the cohort and finalists to provide tailored guidance on critical business needs—from refining funding strategies to measuring water-saving impact and building corporate partnerships. Their contributions helped startups navigate challenges unique to the AgWater space, offering practical insights and connections.

Together, they have not only nurtured innovation but also strengthened the AgWater narrative in India.

Advisors

Arindom Datta
Senior Advisor, Agri & Fintech, Ex-Exec Director, Rabobank

Aruna Rangachar Pohl
Agri value chain & FPO Expert, IFHD

Hemendra Mathur
Venture Partner, Bharat Innovation Fund and Co-founder ThinkAg

Mentors-in-residence

Asitava Sen
Co- Founder and CEO, Carbon Removal India Alliance (CRIA)

Emmanuel Murray
Investment Director, Caspian

Nicholas Brozivić
Director of Policy, Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute

P Suryakumar
Former Deputy Managing Director, NABARD

Ravi Trivedi
Chief Digital Officer (CDO), Digital Bharat Collaborative

Renuka Diwan
Co-founder and CEO, Bioprime Agri Solutions

Romiel Samuel
Founder & Executive Director, Indus Water Institute

Roshan Lal Tamak
Executive Director & CEO, Sugar Business, DCM Shriram Limited

Sanjay Chhabra
President & Business Head, Shriram Farm Solutions (unit of DCM Shriram Limited)

Sreekanth Chundi
Executive Director & Business Head, Shriram BioSeed Genetics (unit of DCM Shriram Limited)

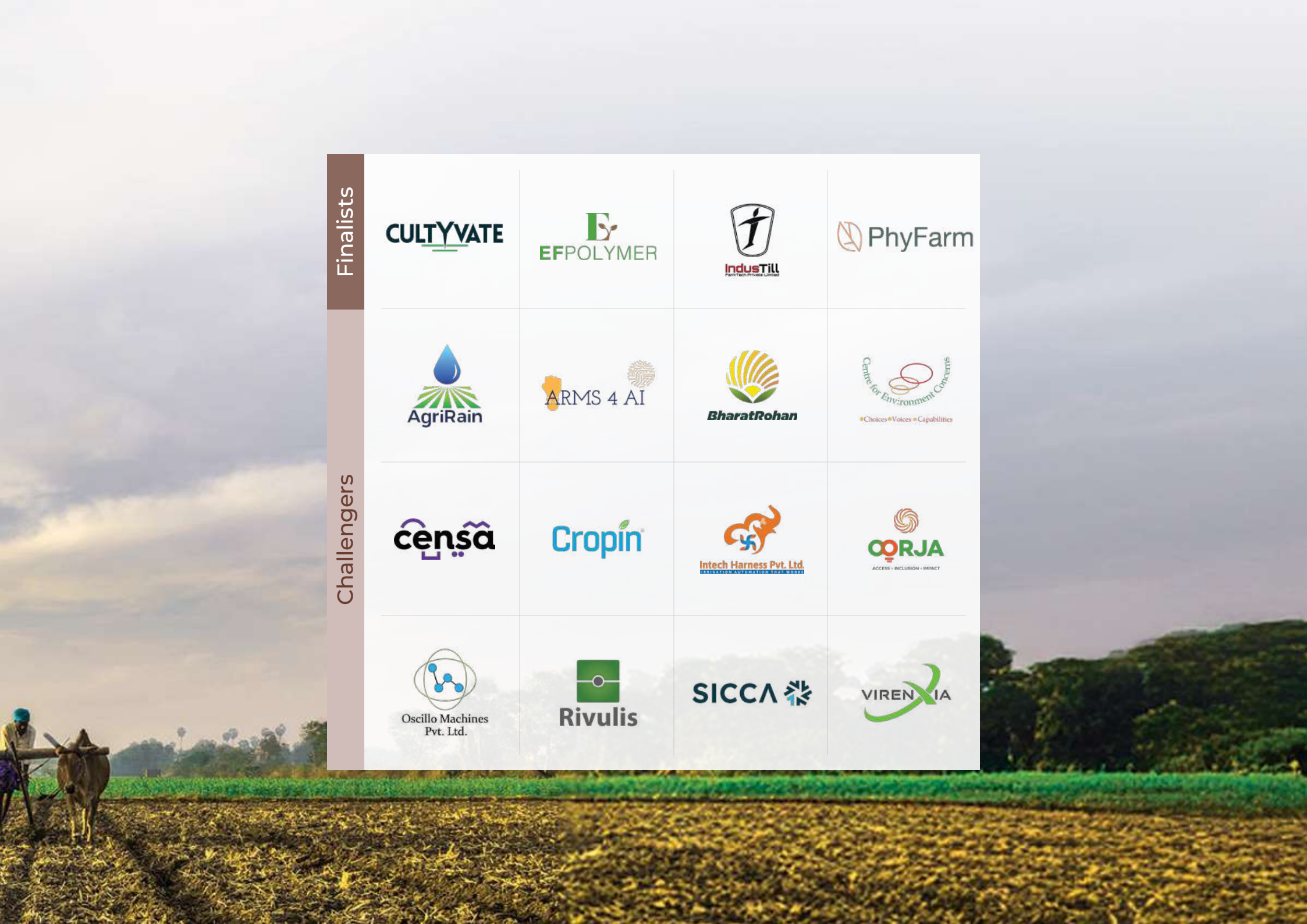
Introducing the AgWater ‘challengers’

For a year—September 2023 to August 2024, the Challengers immersed themselves in the fields, working to transform water use for India’s most water-intensive crops. They refined their technologies, expanded their reach, and made their solutions more accessible to farmers. Their journey was one of persistence, adaptability, and an unwavering commitment to change.

Each brought a distinct vision to the AgWater Challenge. Some harnessed AI, remote sensing, and hyperspectral imaging to decode water needs in real time—helping farmers optimise irrigation and curb wastage. Others engineered precision irrigation systems, fine-tuning water distribution while cutting energy costs. Some built holistic farm management solutions, seamlessly integrating renewable energy, soil moisture sensors, and automation to make irrigation smarter and more affordable.

Meanwhile, others focused on scaling innovations, bridging the gap between cutting-edge AgWater technologies and smallholder adoption.

Together, they tackled the Challenge from multiple angles—advancing technology, improving affordability, and making water efficiency more accessible for smallholder farmers.


Finalists
CULTYVATE
EFPOLYMER
IndusTill
PhyFarm
Challengers
AgriRain
ARMS 4 AI
BharatRohan
Centre for Environment Concerns
Choices Voices Capabilities
censa
Cropin
Intech Harness Pvt. Ltd.
OORJA
ACCESS • INCLUSION • IMPACT
Oscillo Machines Pvt. Ltd.
Rivulis
SICCA
VIRENXIA

The ‘finalists’ who made it to the top 4

After a rigorous evaluation journey, in August 2024, four organisations emerged as the most promising to solve, scale, and make a breakthrough in AgWater for smallholder farmers—CultYvate, EF Polymer, IndusTill, and PhyFarm. The jury, impressed by the range and quality of solutions, called them the Fab 4 for pushing the boundaries of sustainable water use in agriculture.

"The most satisfying part of this Challenge has been seeing the sheer number of innovators tackling Water Use Efficiency (WUE)," shared one jury member. Another noted, "I am optimistic that this Challenge will trigger new innovations and partnerships to drive WUE in agriculture beyond 80% from the current 50%."

These four organisations represent diverse yet essential approaches—sensors and advisory, automation, irrigation, and bio-inputs, showcasing the many ways innovation can drive meaningful impact in agriculture.

CultYVate

Sensor & Advisory

Founder(s): Mallesh TM, Bhavana & Sudarshan

Incorporated: 2016

Challenge Crop:
Paddy

Geographies:
Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Punjab, Haryana, UP

33.8%
Irrigation efficiency

5%
Yield increase

7
States covered

3739
Farmers covered

18 months of transformative impact

CultYvate is revolutionising irrigation with their AI/ML precision analytics through field sensors, helping farmers optimise water use and improve crop yields. Their subscription-based advisory services provide real-time irrigation recommendations, accessible even on basic analogue phones. By measuring soil moisture and water requirements, CultYvate reduces water usage and minimises irrigation frequency. The company has developed Computer Vision, an affordable, portable device for large-scale projects, expected to drive 80% of future business. Through smart, data-driven irrigation, CultYvate enables a transition from traditional irrigation methods to precision agriculture, reducing fungal infestations and enhancing sustainability in cultivation.

CULTYVATE

Mallesh TM
Finalist

We aim to empower small and marginal farmers with affordable technology that provides actionable insights to optimize water use in rice and sugarcane farming—boosting yields, conserving water, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions for a sustainable future.

Hemendra Mathur
Advisor & Jury

CultYvate has demonstrated huge water savings in crops like paddy and over the years has made the solution affordable to farmers. I admire Mallesh's persistence in constantly evolving products as well as a business model positively impacting thousands of farmers.

Scan for website

EF Polymer

Bio-input

Founder(s): Narayan Lal Gurjar, Puran Singh Rajput, Ankit Jain

Incorporated: 2018

Challenge Crop:
Wheat

Geographies:
Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat

40%
Irrigation efficiency

18.72%
Yield increase

11
States covered

9950
Farmers covered

18 months of transformative impact

EF Polymer's Fasal Amrit is an organic soil conditioner that enhances water retention and farming efficiency. Its granules absorb up to 100 times their weight in water, retaining moisture from irrigation or rainfall and releasing it when required. This reduces irrigation requirements by 40% and improves soil water-holding capacity for six months. Certified organic and crop-agnostic, Fasal Amrit also prevents fertiliser leaching, cutting fertiliser use by 20% while boosting yield by 30%. By mitigating water stress during both dry spells and periods of excessive rainfall, EF Polymer empowers farmers with a sustainable solution to optimize water use and improve productivity.

EFPOLYMER

Narayan Lal Gurjar
Finalist

Our vision is to revolutionize water management in agriculture through efficient, climate-smart, and farmer-friendly solutions that enhance productivity while preserving natural resources. By driving innovation, we strive to curb groundwater depletion, equip smallholder farmers with accessible technologies, and secure sustainable water use for the future.

Arindom Dutta
Advisor & Jury

The unique innovative Super Absorbent Polymer can potentially provide a global scaled up cost effective solution to address water efficiency and productivity issues. The sustainable manufacturing of the products from waste material shows efficient circular economy climate wins. With innovation as the key lever, EF Polymer addresses tough climate problems, thus creating sustainable agriculture food chains.

Scan for website

IndusTill

Irrigation automation

Founder(s): Shrilesh Mande, Shubham Pardeshi, Umesh Yadav

Incorporated: 2018

Challenge Crop:
Sugarcane

Geographies:
Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh

33.84%
Irrigation efficiency

15-20%
Yield increase

3
States covered

226
Farmers covered

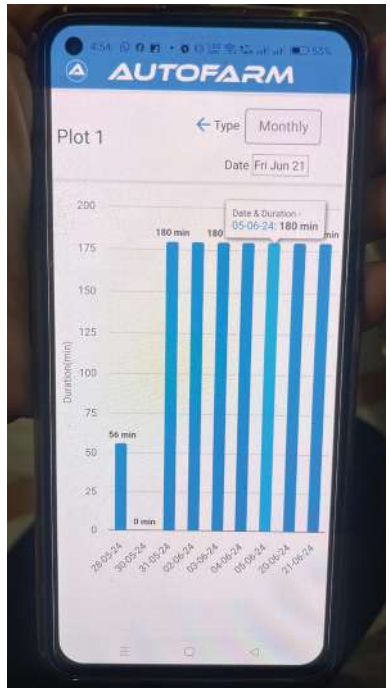
18 months of transformative impact

IndusTill's solar-powered, IoT-enabled irrigation system empowers farmers with automated water management, reducing reliance on electricity and labour. Featuring an E-SIM-enabled controller and IrriSense sub-controller, it integrates valves without requiring a centralised pipeline, making it adaptable to diverse farm setups. The system allows farmers to control irrigation duration and quantity, supporting a transition to precise water management, especially in water-scarce areas and shared irrigation systems. While widespread adoption requires behavioural change, it acts as a decision-making tool for optimised irrigation. By advancing farm automation, IndusTill also seeks to engage the youth in agriculture, encouraging the adoption of modern, tech-driven farming solutions.

IndusTill
FarmTech Private Limited

Shrilesh Mande
Finalist

Our vision is to commoditize precision agriculture, making it ultra-affordable for smallholder farmers and transforming agriculture into the most advanced sector of our economy through technology adoption.



Aruna Rangachar
Advisor & Jury

An Agtech solution of, by and for the farmers best describes IndusTill co-founded by 8 bright young guys from farming families, who are on a mission to get "more crop per drop" and ease farmers' workload.

Scan for website

PhyFarm

Irrigation automation

Founder(s): Naveen Singh

Incorporated: 2017

Challenge Crop:
Sugarcane

Geographies:
Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh

21% Irrigation efficiency

27% Yield increase

5 States covered

239 Farmers covered

18 months of transformative impact

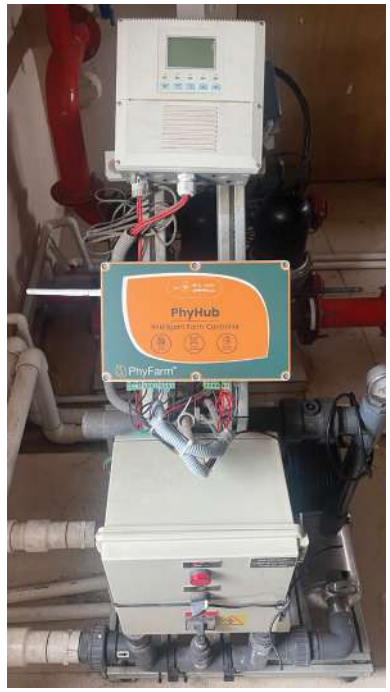
PhyFarm is a smart agriculture platform that integrates data-driven automation with sensing hardware to optimise farm operations. Their crop-agnostic technology enables precise irrigation and fertigation using time and volume-based controls, preventing water overuse. With cloud connectivity, wireless valve operation, and real-time data logging, farmers can manage irrigation remotely via a Wi-Fi-enabled app, ensuring seamless operations even during power outages.

PhyFarm also provides electricity alerts and facilitates remote pump control, reducing labour dependency and improving efficiency. By enabling precision agriculture at the farm level, PhyFarm empowers farmers to enhance productivity, conserve resources, and automate irrigation for sustainable farming.

PhyFarm

Naveen Singh
Finalist

Water, the silent architect of life, has nurtured civilizations to greatness. A thriving water ecosystem isn't just essential; it's the very foundation upon which our societies stand, and its decline will be our undoing.



Emmanuel Murray
Jury

The Phyfarm team has a clear vision about what they want to do – provide world class farm automation technology that is easy to install and use while being affordable by small farmers. PhyHub's sleek and compact design combined with the ability to collect data and provide real time analytics remotely makes it attractive for the new gen tech savvy farmers as well as has the potential to cater to overseas markets.

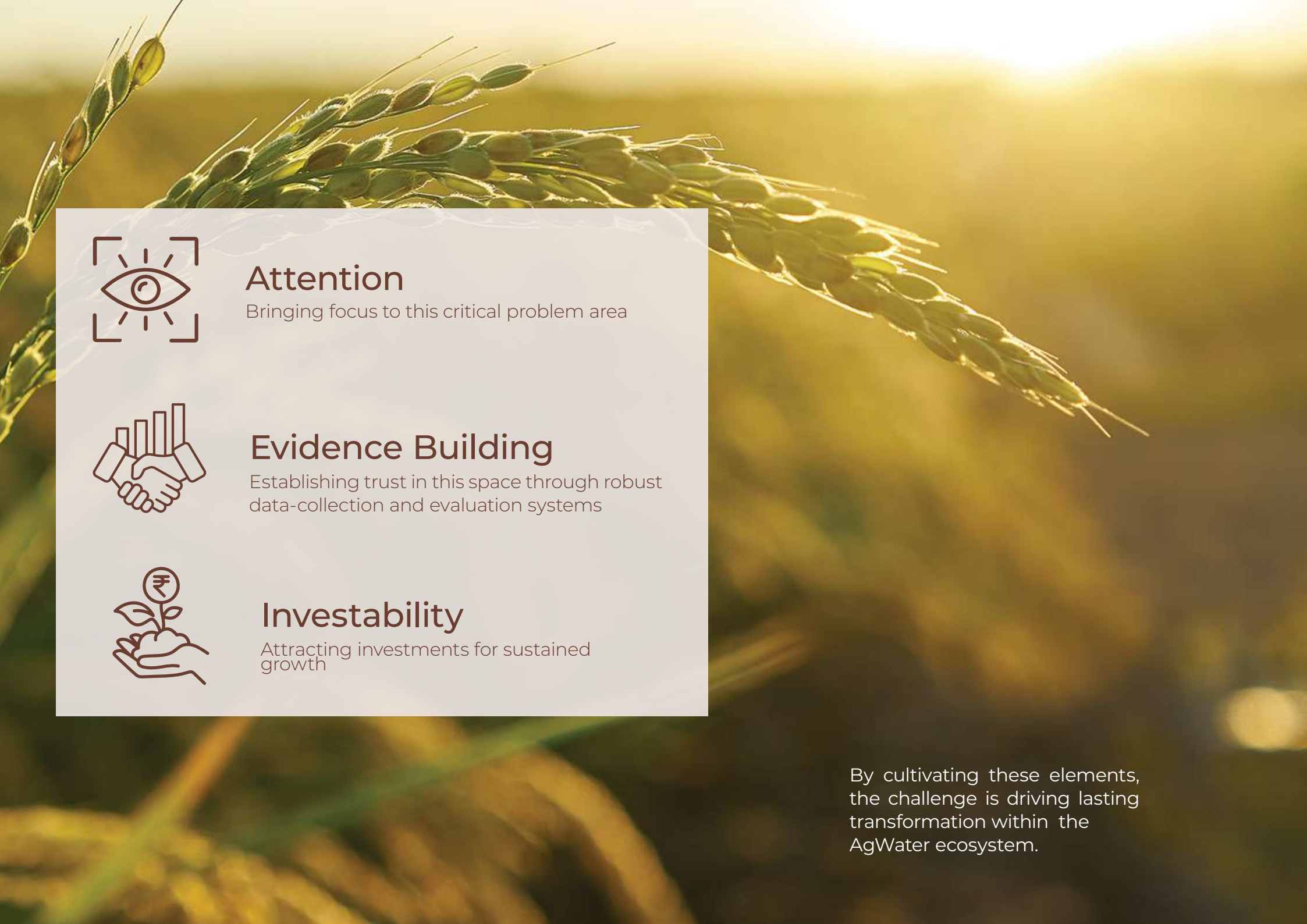
Scan for website

Inducing change in a complex sector

AgWater is a complex space—far more intricate than agriculture itself from a market perspective. The DCM Shriram AgWater Challenge was never just about identifying top technologies or awarding a prize. It aimed to bring urgency to water use efficiency, align key players, and catalyse long-term change.

At its core, the Challenge sought to equip AgWater solutions with the capital, opportunities, and expertise needed to scale sustainably. This is what we call inducement—not just rewarding innovation, but shaping the conditions for it to thrive.

To achieve this, the Challenge focused on evidence-building, meetups, and workshops to map sector gaps and refine solutions. It also fostered ecosystem-building by connecting policymakers, investors, and industry leaders, creating synergies for long-term impact.



Attention

Bringing focus to this critical problem area

Evidence Building

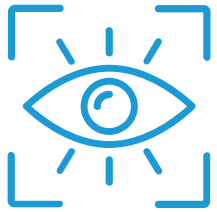
Establishing trust in this space through robust data-collection and evaluation systems

Investability

Attracting investments for sustained growth

By cultivating these elements, the challenge is driving lasting transformation within the AgWater ecosystem.

Attention:
Bringing focus to the AgWater story



One key goal of the Challenge was to spotlight the often-overlooked issue of water use in agriculture, inspiring problem-solvers to act. The overwhelming response—134 applications in a month, proved the urgency of this mission. Many of the 16 selected organisations had never explicitly focused on these water-guzzling crops before.

To bring AgWater issues into mainstream discourse, we secured media coverage for the challenge launch and finalists' announcement in major digital and print outlets, highlighting the urgency of solutions. We published eight articles, including features in Down To Earth, and amplified these conversations through social media, newsletters, and ecosystem engagements—drawing thousands of eyeballs to the issue. A first-of-its-kind gathering in Delhi brought together key stakeholders to discuss Challenges and pathways for scaling AgWater innovations, fostering critical dialogue and collaboration.

Hundreds tuned into expert-led podcast discussions on data-driven water use and climate-proofing agriculture, featuring insights from the four finalists. ***..to Turn a Tide***, a documentary produced with a national award-winning filmmaker, captured farmers' struggles in Punjab, Rajasthan, and Maharashtra, highlighting both the urgency of water stress and the promise of technology-driven solutions.

KRISHI JAGRAN

Winning Prize Is Rs 2.6 Crore For DCM Shriram AgWater Challenge

The challenge under the DCM Shriram AgWater Challenge aims to secure water and unlock prosperity for 1 million smallholder farmers.

Vivek Singh Updated 18 September, 2023 5:11 PM IST

THE HINDU businessline.

4 organisations shortlisted for DCM Shriram AgWater Challenge PREMIUM

Updated - August 27, 2024 at 10:46 AM. | Mangaluru, August 26

They will now focus on scaling their technologies to improve water use efficiency and profitability for smallholder farmers

Evidence building: Establishing trust in an under-explored space

Another key objective of the Challenge was to build evidence in a space where data is scarce due to the complexity of agricultural water use. It aimed to create a structured mechanism to understand both the organisational systems behind these innovations and their on-ground impact.

To achieve this, the Challenge implemented a two-layered evaluation system. Ecociate led an independent M&E process, ensuring systematic data collection, while a grand jury of experts provided validation. Over 18 months, three large-scale surveys and two rounds of field evaluations across eight states engaged over 120 farmers.

As Ecociate noted, *"the three-stage M&E process strengthened stakeholder engagement by integrating technology developers and users. It highlighted end-user priorities, water scarcity realities, and smallholder challenges like affordability and ease of use. Contestants gained clarity on water efficiency, while the SWOC analysis provided key insights into technology development and future pathways."*

By embedding this approach, the Challenge has provided critical insights into AgWater tech, laying a foundation for future decision-making.

We hope these findings will serve as a valuable resource for innovators and stakeholders driving change in the sector.


Rivulis

Investability:
Attracting capital for a sustained growth

The Challenge aimed to drive capital into AgWater innovations, which need significant investment due to long gestation periods, infrastructure needs, and complex scaling. To bridge this gap, it created funding pathways by equipping startups with strategic knowledge, fostering investor connections, and co-developing a knowledge base.

Between Nov 2023 and Jan 2025, multiple interventions helped bridge the capital gap. A mentor-in-residence program brought industry experts to guide startups on technology, policy, funding, and scaling. Capacity-building sessions included a virtual masterclass on attracting global investment and an in-person workshop on achieving product-market fit, highlighting the dual challenge of scale and complexity across diverse geographies, farming practices, and infrastructure.

The Challenge also revealed the limitations of traditional VC, which misaligns with AgWater's longer timelines. Instead, blended finance models, combining grants with low-cost debt, offer a more sustainable path, mitigating risk while enabling growth.

To drive long-term investment, we are co-developing ***'Unlocking Investments to Shape India's AgWater Future'***, an open-source guide detailing funding needs, investment-ready tech, financial sources, and case studies—providing a roadmap for investors and policymakers.

Scan the QR code for the full report

Our esteemed jury and M&E partner: From baseline to endline

Selection panel

The initial selection panel comprised distinguished experts from academia, investment, and advisory roles. Their collective expertise was instrumental in evaluating 134 applicants and selecting 14 high-potential AgWater innovations. This rigorous process ensured that the chosen solutions had the greatest potential for impact, scalability, and addressing critical challenges in water-efficient agriculture.

Venky Ramachandran
Founder, Agribusiness Matters

Romiel Samuel
Founder, Indus Water Institute

Piyush R Golecha
Ex Senior Analyst, Social Alpha

Ratish Charam
Manager, Social Alpha

Maithili Regi
Lead - Agriculture, Villgro

Dr. Krishna Reddy
Director, MANAGE

Jonathan Philroy
ExCEO, RICH (Research and Innovation Circle of Hyderabad)

Ankit Chandra
Program Manager, Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute

Nicholas Brozović
Director of Policy, Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute

Nikhita Nadkarni
Program Lead, Agriculture and workforce, Acumen

Sujay Dixit
CEO, TISS Incubator Foundation

Aparna Ananthan
Senior Manager, Caspian Debt

Sai Pramod
Direct Lending Head, Caspian Debt

Pia Batanakar
India Lead, 2030 Water Resources Group (WRG)

Meghana Rao Pahlajani
Technical Lead, 2030 Water Resources Group (WRG)

Niv Pintow
Chief Water Engineer - Managing Partner, Alphaviridis Foundation

J.V.R. Murty
International Development Consultant

M&E partner

Ecociate played a pivotal role in the Challenge, staying deeply engaged throughout the 18-month journey. They conducted farmer surveys, in-depth organisational interviews, and extensive field visits to assess each challenger's progress and impact. Their hands-on approach ensured a thorough understanding of how these innovations were evolving on the ground.

Beyond evaluations, Ecociate led internal analyses and developed detailed reports for each organisation, capturing key insights on their growth, scalability, and challenges. Their work provided a data-driven foundation for decision-making, ensuring that every selection was backed by rigorous assessment.

They also facilitated key convenings, collaborating with the team and jury to discuss each challenger's impact and trajectory. By validating innovations and documenting critical learnings, Ecociate not only strengthened the challenge's outcomes but also built a valuable knowledge base to guide future investments in AgWater technologies.

Ashwini Chandak
Cofounder and Director, Ecociate Consultants

Madhuri Newale
Development Management Consultant, Independent

Santosh Gupta
Director, Ecociate Consultants

Grand jury panel

The grand jury comprised distinguished industry leaders with decades of experience in agri-finance, entrepreneurship, and scaling innovations. They didn't just rely on reports from the M&E team—they invested time in deeply understanding each technology, asking founders and their teams tough, thought-provoking questions.

Their deliberations were intense, with internal discussions and email chains weighing every solution's potential to solve real challenges, scale effectively, and drive breakthroughs.

Their insights were instrumental in evaluating the top 14 Challengers, selecting the 4 finalists, and ultimately determining the winner of the DCM Shriram AgWater Challenge, as well as the recipient of the special recognition award.

Arindom Datta
Ex-Executive Director
Rabobank

A visionary in sustainable agriculture and finance, Arindom has been an unwavering pillar of support for both enablers and innovators in this Challenge. As an advisor and jury member, he has provided strategic insights, ensuring impactful innovations receive the support they need to thrive. His deep engagement has helped shape the Challenge's outcomes and strengthen the AgWater ecosystem.

Hemendra Mathur
Investor & Venture Partner
Bharat Innovation Fund
& Co-Founder of ThinkAg

A tireless advocate for agritech, Hemendra has played a pivotal role in guiding strategy, shaping interventions, and mentoring innovators. As an advisor and jury member, he has provided sharp insights to refine solutions, drive investment readiness, and unlock opportunities for challengers. His hands-on approach and belief in the mission have been instrumental in strengthening the Challenge's impact.

Aruna Rangachar Pohl
Sr. Advisor, Chairperson - Advisory Committee, IFHD

A steadfast champion of farmer-first innovation, Aruna has been deeply engaged in the Challenge, taking the time to understand each organisation's journey.
As an advisor and jury member, she has actively participated in interventions, provided strategic guidance, and ensured the Challenge remains true to its mission of transforming smallholder farming.

Vilas Shinde
Chairman & MD
Sahyadri Farms

A pioneer in farmer-led enterprises, Vilas ji has brought a pragmatic and grounded perspective to the Challenge. His sharp, practical insights and tough yet necessary questions have helped assess real-world viability. As a jury member, he has played a key role in shaping a results-driven evaluation process and ensuring AgWater innovations can scale meaningfully.

Emmanuel Murray
Investment Director
Caspian

With vast expertise in agribusiness and impact investing, Emmanuel Murray has been a thoughtful, deeply engaged jury member. He has studied each Challenger's model with rigor, offering sharp feedback and strategic guidance. Beyond assessments, he has generously shared his time through mentorship and workshops, helping finalists strengthen their impact and investment readiness.

The enablers –
The team behind the AgWater Challenge






Aman Pannu
President
DCM Shriram Foundation

Joy Mukherjee
Team Lead
DCM Shriram Foundation

Kanishka Chatterjee
Director
The/Nudge Prize

Sravya Jandhyala
Senior Challenge Associate
The/Nudge Prize

Nisha Chawla
Challenge Lead
The/Nudge Prize

Arushi Chaudhary
Ex Challenge Lead
The/Nudge Prize

THE/NUDGE Prize

DCM SHRIRAM FOUNDATION

A note of gratitude

"The DCM Shriram AgWater Challenge set out to answer a simple question—what would it take to find scalable solutions for India's twin crisis of depleting groundwater and smallholders relying on it to sustain their incomes?

It remains a tough problem to crack, with incentives stacked against change—free water, cheap electricity, fragmented decision-making, and assured markets for water-intensive crops.

But what if, for a short time, we could flip the script? Create incentives that bring the best minds together to take a real shot—a moonshot?

This challenge was that opportunity. Fourteen organisations took it head-on, proving that AgWater solutions could be affordable, effective, accessible, and income-enhancing.

They weren't alone. Experts, investors, incubators, and enablers rallied, forming India's first AgWater ecosystem—offering intelligence, networks, and urgency.

None of this would have been possible without DCM Shriram Foundation, whose commitment ran deeper than funding, and ecosystem partners who gave more than they took. I remain deeply grateful.

Kanishka Chatterjee

"A heartfelt thank you to The/Nudge Prize team for designing this challenge with such depth and rigor, aligning with the vision of DCM Shriram Foundation to drive scalable AgTech innovations in India's agri-water ecosystem.

Special thanks to KC for leading the way, and to Arushi, Nisha, Sravya, and the entire team for their tireless efforts.

Grateful to our ecosystem partners for their invaluable support and insights that made this challenge truly impactful. A huge shout out to the Ecociate team—Ashwini, Santosh, and Madhuri—for their meticulous and fair assessment of the challengers.

Deep appreciation to our Advisors—Hemendra, Aruna, and Arindom Sir for their time, expertise, and guidance. Special thanks to Emmanuel, Vilas, and our final jury for their crucial role and our mentors for their commitment to the challenge.

Sincere gratitude to the Office of the Principal Scientific Advisor for their unwavering support. And congratulations to the winners and finalists—you've inspired us all with your resilience and innovation!

Thank you for being part of this journey.

Aman Pannu

The big question—
who won the Prize?

No matter the result today, the future winners will be India and the smallholder farmers of our country.

Let’s keep India’s farmlands from running dry.

Unpack breakthrough solutions, the collaboration of a focused ecosystem,
and bold ideas shaping the future of AgWater.

The journey doesn’t end here.
Join the pursuit of water security and prosperity for millions.

Connect with us