India needs to significantly improve technology in the milk industry to compete at the international level.

At least 30 per cent of India’s agricultural income comes from livestock, so a similar amount must be spent for research and development in the sector, said John Mellor, vice-president, Abt Associates, Inc, USA.

Mellor was delivering the keynote address on ‘Agricultural growth and poverty reduction - the rapidly increasing role of small holders of livestock’ at an international workshop on “Livestock and Livelihoods: Challenges and opportunities for Asia in the emerging market environment” organised by National Dairy Development Board and the Pro Poor Livestock Policy Facility (PPLPF) of the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) at Anand on Monday.

“Rapidly rising income in low and middle-income countries has resulted in demand for livestock growing at six to eight per cent per year. If the domestic livestock industry meets this demand, it will double in size every 10 years and its share in agricultural GDP will grow rapidly, soon accounting for over half of the agricultural GDP. That will make possible an overall growth rate in agriculture of four to six per cent,” he said.

“If the growth is in the small-holder livestock sector, it will contribute directly to poverty reduction and employment growth. Moreover, over time, it will provide much of the effective demand for the employment-intensive rural non-farm sector,” Mellor added.

Around 40 participants from seven Asian countries — Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Philippines, and Vietnam — along with eight organisations — Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Department for International Development (DFID), International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), International Farm Comparisons Network (IFCN), Capitalisation of Livestock Project Experiences India Project (CALPI), Food and Agriculture Organisation of UN (FAO) and National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) — are participating in the three-day workshop at Anand.
Amrita Patel, chairman NDDB, Anand, in her opening address, said: “Over 60 per cent of the close to 11 million farmer members in about one lakh village milk cooperatives all over the country are small, marginal, and even landless producers. Dairying has not meant just producing milk. It has provided livelihoods to millions of poorest in our country”.

“In India, the distribution of livestock amongst the poorest is far more equitable than the distribution of land. Livestock therefore plays an extremely critical role in supporting and sustaining livelihoods of a large number of people. Livestock are often the only livelihood option available to the landless as common property resources are being increasingly captured by individuals for private gain,” she added.

Livestock production in Asia is growing at a much faster rate than any other agriculture commodity and it is expected that in a few years, it would account for nearly half of the agricultural output, in terms of value.

In India dairy production accounts for about 70 per cent of the livestock produce. The demand for livestock products in developing countries is predicted to triple in next 20 years, offering opportunities to farmers to improve their incomes.

The workshop was also attended by Deepak Tikku, managing director, NDDB, Samuel Jutzi, director, Animal Production and Health Division, FAO, Rome and Daniel Gustafson, FAO representive in India and Bhutan.