

AGRICULTURAL PROBLEMS OF INDIA AFTER PARTITION*

ABLE farming has been the predominant feature of Indian agriculture since times immemorial. Food crops cover the largest area followed by cash crops of different kinds. Mixed farming, including rearing of poultry, dairy farming and the growing of fruits and vegetables is practised by only a few. Vast bulk of the area under cultivation depends on an uncertain rainfall, the irrigated area representing only about 20 per cent. of the net area sown. The net result has been that the average yields per acre are low and compare unfavourably with those in the agriculturally advanced countries.

The shortage of food during the war made the Government awake to the importance of increased food production within the country, and special schemes were brought into operation for increasing food production. The Advisory Board of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research estimated that, for meeting the requirement of food for men and cattle in India, production must be increased by percentages ranging from 10 in the case of cereals to 400 in the case of oilcakes and other concentrates.

The revolutionary political changes of 1947, resulting in the exchange of population on a tremendous scale in some parts of the country, has accentuated certain long-standing agricultural problems and created certain fresh ones. The solution of the problems created by the accession of the food and cotton surplus areas in the North-West Punjab and Sind and the principal jute areas in East Bengal to Pakistan and the migration of four million people from Western Pakistan into the Indian Dominion can brook no delay.

It is most essential to co-ordinate the resettlement of refugees with the increased production of food and cash crops, by methods in harmony with the principles guiding India's industrial and social advancement. The All-India Congress Committee has very recently set up a sub-committee to evolve an economic structure which will yield maximum production without the creation of private monopolies and the concentration of wealth in a few hands. In respect of agricultural development, such a structure should, apart from securing rehabilitation of refugees, aim at achieving national as well as regional self-sufficiency in food production, at the same time guaranteeing balanced nutrition for all. The country's deficit in the long-staple cotton and jute should also be met with. The structure should also increase the cash income of the farmer and lead

to the reconstruction and improvement of rural areas. Considering that low yields, poor quality produce, low wages and a very low standard of living, both for the agricultural labourer and the small farmer, are in no small measure due to the primitive methods and limited resources of the small peasant proprietors, it would appear that a solution of the country's agricultural problem lies in adopting 'group agriculture', employing modern methods with centralised farm management under expert supervision. Of the many different systems of group cultivation, 'co-operative farming' for the production of fruits, vegetables, poultry and dairy products and 'joint-stock company farming' for the growing of food, fodder and cash crops appear to hold the greatest promise of solving the immediate as well as the long-range agricultural problems of the country.

Farming by public utility companies should have the production of food grains as their primary objective. They should be financed jointly by the Government, farmer-producer and consumer and their policy determined by a Board representing all these interests. They should be under expert centralised management, the farmer-members actively working on the estates as partners and receiving an adequate share of the net profits as remuneration. The Government should receive a fixed percentage of the net profit as divided on the capital invested and in lieu of water rates, if any, and land assessment. The annual dividend on the investment of the consumer-members should be limited to a maximum of, say 10 per cent. The first option on the food grains which may be surplus to the legitimate requirements of the employees should rest with the Government. Training should be imparted to workers to increase their efficiency; they should also be provided with social amenities. The Government, for its part, should finance research and experimental work needed for the area of operations of the companies.

A unique plan satisfying many of the principles mentioned above has been in operation in Sudan for the past twenty years in canal-irrigated areas of the Sennar Dam on Blue Nile. Here, a co-operative arrangement between the Government of Sudan, the cultivators and the managing company (The Sudan Plantation Syndicate) has resulted in the quick development of over 300,000 acres of irrigated area under the project. This plan with suitable modifications is advocated for the quick and scientific development of project areas, government lands as do not attract private cultivators in the beginning, and also for the existing cultivated areas where backward agricultural conditions prevail.

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* Summary of the Presidential Address delivered by Rai Bahadur Kalidas Sawhney to the Section of Agricultural Sciences, at the 35th Session, of the Indian Sci. Cong., at Patna, 1948.

OVERSEAS SCHOLARS

IT is proposed to publish periodically lists of the overseas scholars sponsored by the Central and Provincial Governments and the Indian States. The matter which will, in the first instance, appear in instalments in the columns

of *Current Science*, is expected to be issued as a consolidated "Directory" at a later date.

Overseas scholars returning to this country are cordially invited to send in to the Editor particulars of their academic distinctions, research experience and their permanent address.