

Agriculture in Pakistan

Agriculture plays an important role directly and indirectly in generating economic growth. It provides food to consumers and fibers for domestic industry. It is a source of scarce foreign exchange earning and provides market for industrial goods. Agriculture has strong backward and forward linkages with industry as it is the largest purchaser of farm inputs such as chemicals, fertilizers and machinery and supplies raw material to textile and food processing industry.

A major part of the economy depends on farming through production, processing and distribution of major agricultural commodities. About 65% of population of Pakistan live in villages and is dependent on agriculture formally or informally. It employs about 45% of the labour force and contributes 57% in total export earnings. It accounts for more than 22% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and provides raw material to major industries such as textile and sugar. At the time of independence, agriculture sector contributed 53% of GDP which has gradually declined over years. Agriculture sector is still the largest single contributor to GDP and it will continue to absorb major labour contingent, provide food to people and raw material to industry. Therefore, efficient harnessing of agricultural resources of the country is critically important for sustainable development and meeting the basic needs of the fast growing population.

The country is quite rich in natural resources favorable for agricultural production. It has large areas of deep soils, favorable topography, suitable climatic conditions and water. The Indus Basin is one of the world's greatest natural resources, capable of producing over 100 million tons of food grains annually which hardly produces 50% of its potential.

The country has a geographical area of 79.61 million hectares out of which 57.05 million hectares are reported with 22.17 million hectares as cultivated area which is about 39%. There is about 8.25 million hectares as culture-able waste which could be brought under cultivation by harnessing available water resources, improved water management, building additional surface storage and introduction of better adapted crops/varieties and livestock. Ninety percent of cultivated area is irrigated with canals, tube wells etc while remaining 20% is rain-fed.

Pakistan is blessed with a variety of climatic and geographic regimes which are suitable to grow almost all kinds of food, fiber and cash crops including fruits and vegetables. Wheat and rice are the main staple food crops while cotton and sugarcane are the main cash/industrial crops and the economy of the country is purely dependant on them.

The major crops include wheat, rice, maize, millets, sorghum, sugarcane, pulses, cotton, oilseeds. Pakistan is home to the aromatic long grain 'Basmati rice' grown in the plains of

north Punjab. Some of the best varieties of fruits are grown in Pakistan includes mangos, oranges, apples, peaches plums, apricots, cherries, grapes, pears, pomegranate, guava, melons and dates. A wide variety of vegetables are also produced in Pakistan.

Government has identified agriculture as one of the priority areas to be focused to support economy and address unemployment and increasing poverty problems. The key pillars of Government's strategy in Agriculture sector are:

- To make the agriculture profitable in term of trade.
- Produce and ensure surplus for local industry and export.
- Bring innovation and knowledge in agriculture practices by better seed and machinery.
- Improve policy and legal frame work to facilitate new investment and varieties.
- Timely address crises by maintaining surplus and improving logistic.
- Attract foreign investment and technology through bilateral and multi-lateral interactions.