

*Official Paper*

# Asian Agriculture Turns the Corner?

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**The State of Food and Agriculture 1961**, Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, Rome, 1961, Pp viii + 177, price \$ 2 00 or 10s.

FOR several successive years now the F A O Reports on the state of Food and Agriculture have been pointing out that the greatest improvements in food supplies are taking place in those regions of the world that are already better fed and the worse-fed areas are tending to fall further behind. Higher standards of consumption in these latter areas, as compared with pre-War years, are being maintained by restricted exports or greater imports (often financed by liberal foreign aid) and not by greater domestic production. Indeed, in some of these backward areas the pre-War per caput level of production is yet to be reached, while in others the production at home does not justify the levels of consumption being currently maintained.

One encouraging feature<sup>1</sup> of the latest F A O Report on the subject is the changing picture in the Far East (excluding Mainland China). This is the region with the lowest per caput production of agricultural commodities. (This region includes Burma, Ceylon, Taiwan, Malaya, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Pakistan, Philippines and Thailand.) But it appears that for the last three seasons at least this region has been maintaining a fairly high rate of expansion as compared with the rest of the world and in 1960-61 this region as a whole may have regained the average level of production of the immediate pre-War years. Though this average is very low, one hopes that this rate of expansion (about 3 per cent per year) can be maintained over a long period in the future and a reasonably high level of agricultural productivity can be reached in this densely populated region. It is worth noting that food products, specially foodgrains contributed largely to this remarkable increase in agricultural production.

Can this improvement be sustained? The answer depends on how firmly the recent (often hastily conceived) land reforms through-

out this region have taken root and to what extent the farmer in this region is being permanently won over to more productive methods of farming. Agricultural extension is a new concept (at least in its more recent adaptations) in most countries of this region. The extension services have not yet been properly built up and experiments in methods of communication with the farmer are yet to yield perfect results, it is very appropriate that the F A O has chosen this important juncture to incorporate in its Annual Report for 1961 a survey of land reform measures, agricultural research and education and agricultural extension services in the relatively backward regions of the world.

## Growing Interest in Cooperative Farming

It is remarkable how rapidly the structure of land ownership and management has been changing throughout the world since the end of the Second World War. Not every country, of course, has adopted the moral overtones which we in India associate with such activities as the Bhoodan Movement. But, as the F A O Report notes, "there are very few countries in the world today where some progress toward creating a secure position for the farmer and assuring him of a just return for his labour is not taking place". At the same time, technological considerations which go against the creation of many 'uneconomic' holdings out of purely redistributive motives have begun to assert themselves. The Report brings out this issue in a couple of lucid sentences: "With socially advanced and democratic Governments in power it is no longer difficult to redistribute means of production by a perfectly legal process. But as the purpose of such redistribution is to provide opportunities for progressively greater productivity, emphasis is being placed more on organisation and techniques than oil legal status". The Egyptian dictum that "low yields are a greater

enemy to the cultivator than the landlord" is quoted as a basic principle; it seems to have guided the greater part of post-War land reforms all over the world.

While the value of individual initiative and enterprise is recognised everywhere, the suitability in certain circumstances of some 'integrated' or 'institutionalised' pattern of farming is also being more, correctly appraised. This is just another instance of how notions of free enterprise have to be adapted in the light of newly discovered technological requirements of efficient farming. The Report points out how in recent years measures of land-reform in the densely populated agrarian economies have simultaneously given rise to an interest in some form of co-operative cultivation. Not that there is any ideal form of co-operative farming that suits all countries irrespective of their social and economic conjunctives; but almost every country that has in recent years initiated measures of land reform is currently engaged in discovering, the form of co-operative farming: which best suits its needs'.

The abolition of landlordism, a necessary measure of reform has, in certain cases at least, created a void. This, in its turn, has called for a fresh appraisal of Government's relationship to the farming community. "While the worst landlords had been non-functional and, on expropriation, were not missed, many, had provided some services although they levied an unjustifiably high charge for them". With the disappearance of the landlord—these services for example, the supply of capital, technical assistance and marketing facilities—have in most cases to be provided by the official agencies, land reformers have thus come to grapple, as best as they can, with the problems of positive progressive land management. It can hardly be claimed or believed that efficient extension services are available in all those countries where farmers have been only recently emanci-

paled from their age-old bondages. But governments have now got to provide these inevitable concomitants of land reform measures, if the farmers are not to be left in the lurch.

The F A O Report recognises the danger that agricultural extension may simply be old wine in new bottles and hence seeks to formulate some general principles which extension services in the new developing countries must adopt if they are to be of service to the farmer. The need to diversify methods of extension teaching to suit local conditions is stressed and the importance of seeking out local leadership is given adequate recognition. The Report is quite outspoken about the failure in main of these countries to co-ordinate extension activities with agricultural education and research. A closer link-up between research and extension could be more fruitful and opportunities given to trained teachers to engage in research would have paid rich dividends. As things stand at present, "training is too theoretical and academic. The practical side is not given sufficient attention. The curriculum is often too rigid and not adjusted to local farming realities; the courses do not provide for realistic teaching in agricultural economies, farm management, agricultural extension and rural sociology". In spite of these drawbacks, some of which at least time and experience should normally eliminate, there is no doubt that the developing region\* have made some progress since 1945 with the organisation of agricultural training and extension services. The requirements of the moment are : provision of more funds, of more and better trained personnel, and of a greater emphasis on field and applied work".

An important role is assigned to international cooperation in the held of agricultural research, thus enabling the relatively backward countries to draw upon the fund of knowledge available to the more advanced regions. If agricultural research and extension services have caught on in the newly developing economies, it is in no small measure due to the increasing flow of technical assistance from the advanced areas since the end of the Second World War. Unfortunately, many of the international contacts occur at levels which are

not the most effective so far as the determination of national agricultural policy is concerned. The key personnel often remain absorbed in routine-work while scores of less important officials feel frustrated because they receive some sort of instruction and are unable to put it into practice.

Gains in agricultural productivity, however, will not be an unmixed blessing for countries which depend upon exports of agricultural commodities to secure their requirements of manufactured goods. It is disquieting to find from the Report that the average unit value of all agricultural exports fell in 1960, to its lowest post-War level. The terms of trade (approximate) for agricultural exports since 1953 are given below ;

**Index Numbers of Terms of Trade of Agricultural Exports**

*For all regions of the world except U.S.S.R. Eastern Europe and Mainland China (1952-53 = 100)*

1948	52 (Average)	103
1953		99
1954		103
1955		97
1956		91
1957		90
1958		84
1959		82
1960		80

The volume of trade, however has been rising and gross earnings from agricultural exports rose by about 0 per cent between 1959 and 1960. The backward regions of the world, however, had little solace in

this, since this rise was mostly accounted for by larger agricultural exports from Western Europe and North America. In the Far East there was a rise of 18 per cent in total agricultural imports (of which foodstuffs make up about 60 per cent). For the first time in recent history, this region has become a net importer of agricultural products.

Some part of the agricultural exports from North America is, however, non-commercial and sent out under special programmes of Government assistance. India, for example, received in 1960 about 1.3 million tons of wheat from the U S A under these special terms and some amount of rice. One of the tasks in which the F A O is currently engaged is the constitution of a Fund of food surpluses so that the abundant supplies of food in some areas can be used to relieve want and foster development in the less fortunate countries. Many of these countries are now in a stage when more food supplied to the workers at concessional rates will enable them to raise their productivity and make fuller use of the technical facilities that are provided by various national and international agencies. At the same time, the export interests of some of these backward countries have to be more firmly supported by the F A O so that they may have a real interest in improving productivity.

**Table 1 : Food Supplies Available for Human Consumption in Selected Countries in 1959-60 (In kg per caput per year)**

	Cereals	Starchy roots	Pulses	Sugar	Fish	Meat	Eggs	Milk	Fats
U S A *	66	47	6	41	5	94	20	307	21
Canada	71	63	5	45	6	82	16	274	19
U K	84	88	9	41	10	71	15	235	22
West Germany	85	139	4	27	7	54	13	220	25
Sweden	75	99	4	39	18	52	10	320	21
Italy	142	53	13	20	4	27	8	134	16
Yugoslavia *	183	73	10	14	2	27	3	149	11
Japan *	151	66	18	14	23	6	4	20	4
India **	143	12	30	14	1	2	0.2	50	4
Pakistan **	147	6	7	16	2	4	0.3	47	3

\* Relates to calendar year 1959

\*\* Relates to 1958-59

**Table 2 : Indices of Per Caput Agricultural Production (Base : Average 1952-53 to 1956-57 = 100)**

Region	All agricultural products			Food products only		
	Pre-War Average	1959-	1960-	Pre-War Average	1959-	1960-
Western Europe	93	60	61	93	60	61
Eastern Europe & U S S R	84	123	120	85	124	121
North America	88	100	99	85	102	101
Oceania	103	105	106	108	101	105
Latin America	109	106	102	104	102	99
Far East (excl Mainland China)	110	106	108	108	107	109
Near East	94	105	104	94	104	103
Africa	92	98	97	95	95	95