

2. Agricultural decline in Pakistan and how to counter it.

Outline

1. Introduction

Thesis Statement: Agricultural productivity is declining in Pakistan despite immense potential and natural, favourable conditions. Causes are multiple but not intractable. To counter this decline, Pakistan must modernize its agricultural practices, educate the farmers, and facilitate them in every step from pre-harvest to post-harvest period.

2. Agriculture potential in Pakistan

3. Manifestations of agricultural decline in Pakistan

- Not self-sufficient even in staples, has to import cereals
- Agricultural exports are in low value food items
- Per acre productivity is lower than most countries
- Livestock sector is also struggling to meet true potential
- High prices of food items and livestock products shows low production and agricultural decline

4. Causes of agricultural decline in Pakistan

- Poor seed quality leading to poor growth, low nutrition, and diseases in plants
- Old, inefficient irrigation methods destroy some crops, leaving other dry
- Lack of education among farmers leading to reliance on common sense stalling progress in agriculture
- Governance issues, negligence, and lack of facilitation by government

5. Ways to counter agricultural decline in Pakistan

- a. The government must improve conditions for agricultural activity
- b. Initiatives should be introduced to finance farmers and eliminate landowners' and middle man's exploitation
- c. Modernize farmer and agricultural practices incl. irrigation
- d. Promote research on seeds and ensure regulation of certified seeds.

6. Conclusion

2. Agricultural decline in Pakistan and how to counter it.

Essay

Once known as the 'bread basket' in the world, Pakistan is now struggling to meet the food needs of even its own people. If it exports, say, wheat in one season and boost its foreign reserves, it often imports in the next and drain national treasury. More than 40 per cent of children aged upto 5 are malnourished (World Health Organization). Most of the girls in reproductive age are anaemic. The situation prevails due to food insecurity and food inflation. ^{It is} ~~not~~ that the prices of food items are high due to low produce, but also the food that is produced is low in nutritional content. Pakistan has all factors conducive to agriculture - i.e. ~~so~~ the availability of land, weather, temperature. Although climate change is affecting the environment required for agriculture but it is manageable by climate - friendly agricultural practices. The major factors that have left agriculture of our country in this state include inefficient farming practices, use of low quality seeds, use of old irrigation methods, and systemic hindrances that exist for farmers. To counter this decline, Pakistan must modernize its agricultural practices, educate the farmers, and facilitate them through every stage from pre-harvest to post-harvest period.

Pakistan is in the top ten producers of many crops such as wheat, cotton, corn, ^{rice} and sugarcane etc. This is despite the decades of negligence afforded to this sector. From fertile soil, ^{and} ~~to~~ multiple weathers to all types of terrains and lands, Pakistan has every resource at its disposal to tap on and

enhance its agricultural productivity. It has potential to become a major food exporter in staples, fruits, vegetables, grains and livestock. It has the capability to grow high nutrition dry fruits as well. The potential is there, it just needs to be utilised.

Despite having the capability, Pakistan is not self-sufficient even in daily-use crops such as wheat. Wheat and cereals are largely consumed by lower and lower middle class of Pakistan due to their affordability. But the present ~~sit~~ state of Pakistan's performance in their production is dismal. Wheat is imported and exported in cycles. Cereals, however, are almost always imported. The production of major fruit crops and livestock is also on the decline. In essence, presently, Pakistan is struggling to cover food needs of its people on its own.

A country that is not self-sufficient in food production cannot even export its agricultural specialities. All agricultural exports of Pakistan are low value food crops such as wheat, rice, and corn. The exports of what could earn greater number of dollars are low. Typically fruits, processed vegetables, grains, and livestock are considered more valuable with monetary point of view. Pakistan exports in these are low and in low-value products are high. Pakistan's agricultural exports, therefore, fail to earn the country any substantial amount.

Pakistan's poor agricultural production shows up in its per acre productivity. Pakistan's per acre productivity is low even in comparison to countries with similar environmental conditions. With exception of corn, all other crops ~~from~~ ^{such as} wheat, rice, cotton, ~~to~~ and sugarcane see

less agricultural produce on the same area of land when compared to Bangladesh, Brazil, and even Saudi Arabia that lacks forest cover and water availability. When extended to large swathes of land, it cumulates in large losses and significantly low produce as compared to other countries.

Livestock, which is an essential part of agriculture, is also in peril. The meat content for same number of animals is also lower than many other states. American cows, for instance, produce more liters of milk than cows in Pakistan. The quality and nutritional value of livestock meat is also poor. Chickens which are consumed ~~by~~^{by} the greatest number of people in Pakistan are fed on artificial feeds and kept in high stress environments which affect their nutritional value. Same is the case with goats and cows. In order to raise them quickly, farmers use feeds that are detrimental to the nutritional content in their meat. Livestock production is, thus, also struggling to meet its true potential.

Since the production of food items and livestock is low, the prices for food, meat, and milk are high. Food inflation is the biggest manifestation of agricultural decline in Pakistan. At some point, in the last few months milk prices rose to as high as they weren't even in the most developed countries like ^{the} U.K. and France. Most people cannot afford fish, beef, and mutton. Most cannot even afford fruits and full three meals a day. The high prices of food items due to low production and high demand take away the purchasing power of consumers.

The causes of this agricultural decline are multiple. The biggest one of these is low quality of

seeds because they determine output from the very start which is unchangeable no matter the improvement in other conditions. In Pakistan, farmers usually use indigenous seeds most of which are left away from the previous year. Another issue is, most seeds are not even certified. When seed quality is poor, the farmer's hard work and patience are wasted. The plants ^{that} grow from such seeds are stunted, ~~and~~ ~~a~~ fallible to climatic conditions and disease, and low in nutrition. Seed quality, thus, is the biggest setback our agriculture is facing right now.

The second factor that hinders the growth of our agriculture sector are our irrigation practices. In most fields, flood irrigation is used to water the plants which, to most extent, water the field not plants. Some sprouts get more water than they could absorb resulting in death. While others at the corners and far end might not receive water at all. This not only affects crops productively but also wastes water. Inefficient irrigation, therefore, is a major blow to our agriculture potential.

Another reason behind low agricultural output is lack of awareness in farmers. Typically, a child who is not at all interested in his/her studies ends up being a farmer. Resultantly, most farmers have no knowledge about plants, ^{and} ~~their~~ ideal time to sow ~~and~~ seeds and water them. They operate on chance and common sense. Due to lack of education, they also struggle with adopting modern farming methods and keep relying on old, inefficient ways because they are familiar. Lack of knowledge ^{on} ~~at~~ farmer's end keeps most of agricultural potential stalled.

Lack of facilitation by government also stalls agricultural progress. First, small farmers have no access to finances and loans because government's borrowing crowds out money from banks and the initiatives to lend money to the farmers are few and less known. Second, modern machinery is expensive and isn't subsidised by the governments. Then, farmers are not linked to the markets. Furthermore, the produce, however much that is, is also deteriorated on its way to big cities due to lack of proper roads in far-off rural centers. These factors are related to governance and a farmer, even if educated, can do little about them. The negligence by government, thus, is also what fails our agriculture sector.

To counter the agricultural decline, the government must come into action and play its part. We have to facilitate the farmer through all stages from pre-harvest to post-harvest period. This includes a) establishing the needed infrastructure and roads in far-off rural areas (that are farming hubs) to connect them to highways, b) ~~then~~ linking the farmer to direct markets so the middle man exploitation is eliminated, c) ensuring fair price to the farmers to incentivise them, d) growing public private dialogue, and e) harmonizing trade agreements such as import of wheat with local production so local producers aren't at disadvantage.

Alongside creating favourable conditions for agricultural activity, the government must also work on ways to provide finance to small farmers. Small farmers are often discouraged when they cannot get loans from banks and have to rely on big landowners for money to harvest their crop. This forces them to sell a percentage of what they

produced at low prices to those who facilitated them. Providing finance through initiatives to the farmers is essential to counter the decline in this sector.

Financial incentives, though, won't work unless they are ~~combined~~^{coupled} with modernizing techniques. The adoption of modern farming methods, ~~and~~ tilling, and ploughing can do wonders for the productivity of this sector. Farming techniques such as crop rotation can help keep the soil healthy and nutrient-rich. Modern irrigation methods such as drip irrigation and sprinkler system can help save water and improve plant growth. Moreover, educating and modernizing the farmer can improve productivity manifold. The modern knowledge and farming techniques must be instilled in our agriculture sector to counter its decline.

All of these reforms, however, will be rendered useless if the seeds implanted aren't fine. With these steps, the government must also encourage research on seeds. The world is moving to genetically modified seeds that are drought resistant and unaffected by climate change. Pakistan should invest in that as well. Furthermore, the seed production must be regularised so that uncertified seeds do not make rounds in the market. Pakistan's crops are vulnerable to plant diseases, locust attacks, and climate induced affects. Only by promoting research on seeds can help counter the factors that contribute to agricultural decline.

In conclusion, Pakistan has immense potential for agricultural growth. It has favourable conditions to boost its productivity to not only attain self-sufficiency in food production but also become a major ~~exp~~ agri-exporter. The need of the hour is to realise what is causing the

decline of productivity in this sector and address each of that hindrance. Each of such factors is workable if there is the will. Pakistan must begin by fixing the governance blockades that stalls agricultural activity and then modernizing agricultural and irrigation practices. Further, pain must be taken into educating the farmer and promoting research in this field. Difficult it is, but it is the surest path to prosperity of Pakistan in this sector!