CHAPTER 2

AGRICULTURE

2.1 After registering a sharp increase of 15.3 per cent in the previous year, agricultural production in 1976-77 declined by 6.7 per cent. Total foodgrains production was lower, by 9.5 million tonnes, than the peak of a little over 121 million tonnes reached in 1975-76. The production of all foodgrains except jowar and wheat registered a decline. The output of rice was lower by nearly 6 million tonnes, of maize by 1 million tonnes, of barley by 0.9 million tonnes and of pulses by a little under 2 million tonnes. The production of both gram and arhar was lower by half a million tonnes each in 1976-77 as compared to previous year. The production of jowar, however, increased by 0.9 million tonnes and that of wheat by 0.2 million tonnes.

2.2 Commercial crops also could not on the whole maintain the high level of production achieved in 1975-76. Though the production of sugarcane, jute and mesta was higher by 9.9 per cent, 20.4 per cent and 17.9 per cent respectively, the production of 5 major oilseeds declined by 21 per cent from 9.91 million tonnes to 7.83 million tonnes. The output of groundnut was lower by 1.49 million tonnes while that of rapeseed and mustard declined for the second year in succession by 0.37 million tonnes. The production of cotton declined by 2.8 per cent, from the previous year's level of 5.95 million bales to 5.78 million bales in 1976-77. As a result, the index of agricultural production in 1976-77 (triennium ending 1969-70=100) came down to 117.1 from 125.5 in 1975-76. The trends in the production of important crops in recent years are given below :—

TABLE 2.1

Agricultural Production

(In Million Tonnes/Bales*)

	1970-71	1971-72	1972-73	1973-74	1974-75	1975-76	1976-77
1. Rice	42.23	43.07	39.25	44.05	39.25	48.74	42.79
2. Wheat	23.83	26.41	24.74	21.78	24.10	28.85	29.08
3. Other Cereals	30.54	24.60	23.13	28.83	26.13	30.41	28.49
4. Pulses	11.82	11.09	9.91	10.01	10.01	13.04	11.21
5. Oilseeds (5 major)	9.26	8.75	6.86	8.85	8.53	9.91	7.83
6. Sugarcane**	12.98	11.63	12.76	14.43	14.72	14.41	15.84
7. Cotton (lint)	4.76	6.95	5.74	6.31	7.16	5.95	5.78
8. Jute and Mesta	6.19	6.83	6.09	7.68	5.83	5.91	7.09

*170 kgs. each for cotton and 180 kgs. each for jute and mesta.

**In terms of gur.

2.3 This relatively poor performance of agriculture in 1976-77 was due to two factors. The weather in kharif 1976-77 was unfavourable in many regions and the area under foodgrains went down by 3.2 per cent. The lack of rains at the appropriate time was responsible for a decline in area as well as output in states like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal and the inadequate water supply due to poor rain in the catchment areas of the irrigation projects in states like Tamil Nadu. The production of rice declined by 1.4 million tonnes in Andhra Pradesh, by 1.3 million tonnes in Orissa, by a million tonnes each in Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal and by 0.8 million tonnes in Karnataka. The same factor affected the area and production of maize in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, of arhar in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh and of pulses other than gram and arhar in Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh.

2.4 The second factor which led to a decline in the area under particular crops like pulses has been oddly enough the extension of irrigation. In Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and the Punjab the extension of irrigation has led to an increase of the area under

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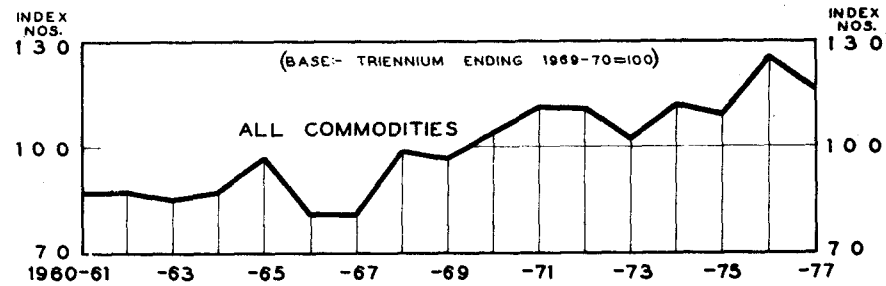

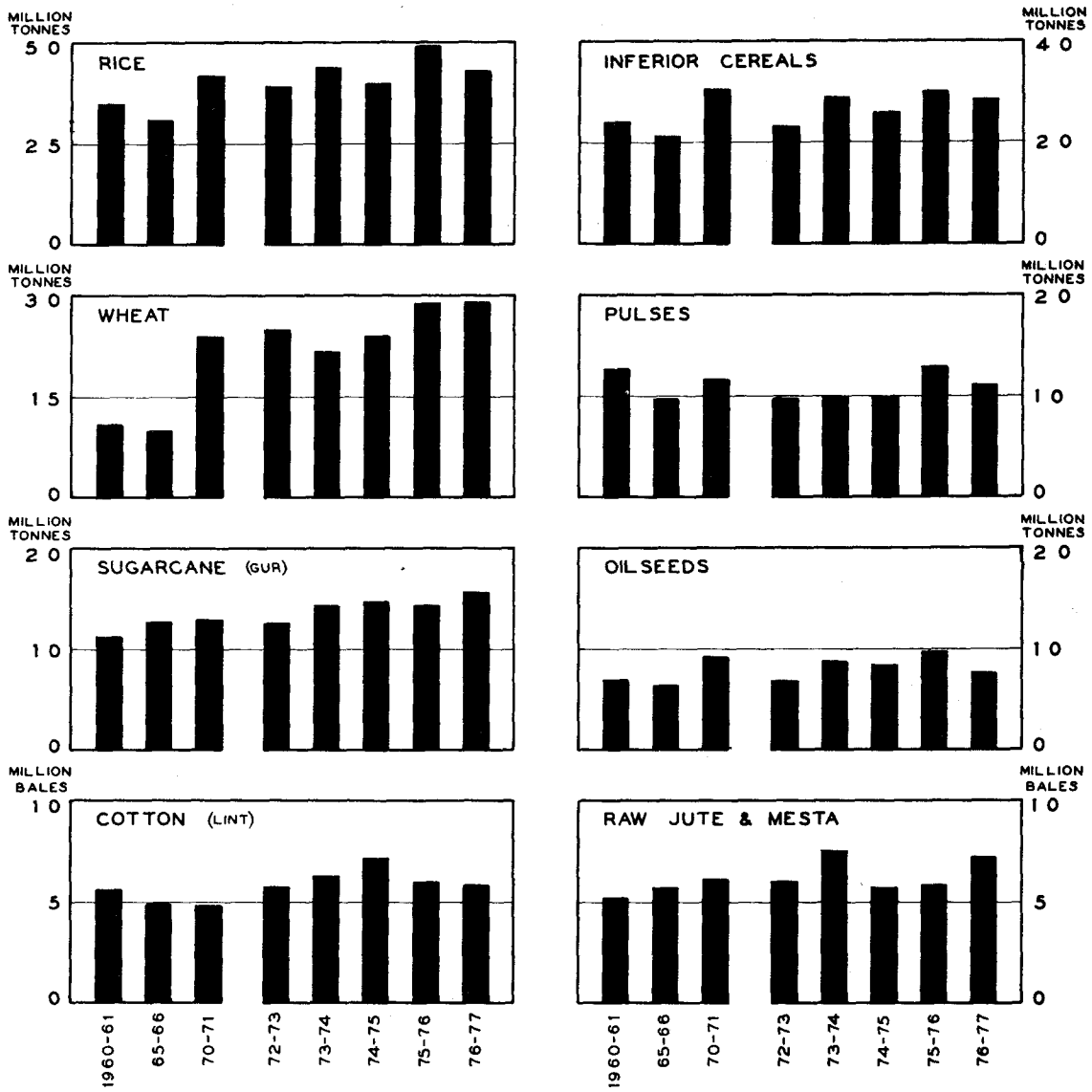

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wheat at the expense of pulses like gram because the higher yield and better return make wheat more profitable and the traditional intermixture of these crops becomes difficult under the new technology.

2.5 Weather seems to have affected also the area under commercial crops like oilseeds and cotton. The lack of rains affected the area as well as the output of groundnut in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka while production was affected in Gujarat, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. The area under cotton went down mainly in Karnataka and Maharashtra.

2.6 Inspite of this well established influence of the weather on Indian agriculture, there is enough evidence to show that forces dampening the amplitude of fluctuations are also in operation. For instance, the very fact that the output of foodgrains in 1976-77 at 111.6 million tonnes was higher than the earlier peak of 108.4 million tonnes reached in 1970-71 is significant. Although the area and output of jowar declined in Karnataka due to bad weather, the production in Maharashtra and Rajasthan was higher both because of an increase in area and a much larger increase in yield. This clearly indicates the impact of high yielding variety seeds on the production of jowar. The production of wheat rose to 29 million tonnes, marginally higher than the level achieved in 1975-76. The production of rice rose impressively in the Punjab and Haryana even while it declined elsewhere. The coverage under the high yielding variety seeds has extended to nearly 34.5 million hectares—an increase of more than 2 million hectares in one year and nearly 7.5 million hectares in two years. This increase is taking place mainly in rice, wheat and jowar. Simultaneously, the irrigation potential is estimated to have gone up in 1976-77 by over 2 million hectares to 47 million hectares. This increase was shared equally by major/medium and minor irrigation schemes. A proportionately larger area is being brought under irrigation in states which have relatively less irrigation.

2.7 The achievement in respect of fertilizer consumption is even more significant from this point of view. Total fertilizer consumption in 1976-77 is estimated to have exceeded 3.4 million tonnes as against 2.9 million tonnes in the previous year, an increase of 18 per cent. Whereas the consumption of nitrogenous fertilizers increased by 14.4 per cent, that of phosphatic fertilizers went up by 34.1 per cent, indicating a greater awareness of the need for balanced fertiliser use. Such an increase in fertiliser consumption in a year in which the behaviour of the monsoon was erratic is very encouraging from the point of view of the long run prospects for agricultural production.

2.8 In areas where it is possible to switch from one crop to another, the relative profitability of different crops has been an important factor affecting production. Thus in areas like Punjab, Haryana and U.P., there is a pronounced shift of area to wheat from crops like gram because of the better and more stable return for wheat. Similarly, better return on sugarcane has led to more area being devoted to sugarcane in states like Karnataka and Maharashtra. The fact that the area under cotton in states like Maharashtra is going down seems to be due to better yields and profitability of growing alternative crops like jowar.

Agricultural Production in 1977-78

2.9 During the kharif season in the current year weather conditions remained quite favourable. The South-West monsoon was unusually active and displayed a longer duration compared to the previous year. The rainfall was normal or above normal throughout the country except eastern U.P., Marathwada and Telengana. Parts of Assam, west Bengal, Gujarat, Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan experienced floods or heavy rains which adversely affected bajra and maize crops. The second crop of rice and other crops suffered heavily in the coastal areas of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka on account of the severe cyclone towards the end of November. However, despite setbacks in such pockets, the prospects of kharif production have remained quite favourable. It is expected that the production of kharif rice will recover from the decline in 1976-77 and may even be higher than the level of 44.7 million tonnes reached in 1975-76. The production of jowar is likely to increase further, particularly in Maharashtra. While the production may decline, the output of other millets may slightly exceed last year's level. The output of kharif pulses is expected to be higher than last year. On the whole, the production of kharif foodgrains may register a sizeable increase and may be of the order of 71-73 million tonnes as against 66.6 million tonnes in 1976-77.

2.10 Among the commercial crops, the production of oilseeds is likely to be substantially better. The production of kharif groundnut may be higher by over half a million tonnes than the low level of 4.8 million tonnes in 1976-77. The prospects for cotton production had initially appeared very favourable and its output was expected to be close to the nigh level reached in 1974-75. However, the crop suffered a considerable setback in Maharashtra on account of a dry spell in September-October and in the cotton growing districts of Andhra Pradesh because of the cyclone. Still cotton production may be higher by about 8 lakh bales than last year's level of

5.8 million bales. Tobacco is another crop which suffered very badly on account of the cyclone. The production of sugarcane is expected to increase further since the area under the crop is reported to have increased under favourable weather conditions. The combined production of jute and mesta may be marginally lower than the 7.1 million bales produced last year. On the whole, the production of commercial crops is likely to have registered an appreciable increase during the kharif season.

2.11 The prospects for rabi are also on the whole very good. Weather conditions remained favourable at the time of sowing in most parts of the country. The production of summer rice, wheat, gram as well as rapeseed and mustard is expected to be substantially better than last year. Summer rice production may reach higher level in the southern states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu as the reservoirs which provide irrigation during the season are full to capacity. The same is true about summer groundnut. The total kharif and rabi production of groundnut may increase to over 6 million tonnes, showing a marked improvement over last year's output of 5.3 million tonnes.

2.12 While the overall production picture in agriculture in 1977-78 thus appears gratifying, the fact that the fluctuation in production is very large cannot be lost sight of. Though fluctuations in production are unavoidable in an agricultural system based largely upon rainfall, sharp fluctuations lead to two undesirable consequences. Firstly, they cause large variations in prices which affect the incentive to undertake investment for increasing production. Secondly, they lead to violent changes in the supply situation which have undesirable consequences for the consumers of these commodities as well as those who want to use them for further production.

2.13 The new agricultural technology introduced a decade ago has largely succeeded in reducing fluctuations in wheat output. While the output of rice and coarse cereals is still subject to large variations, the policy of procurement and buffer stocking seems to have mitigated their harmful consequences. In respect of other essential commodities like oilseeds and pulses and to some extent cotton as well, production trends give a good deal of cause for concern. As the bulk of the area under these crops is without irrigation and consists of marginal lands, their production has tended to fluctuate around stagnant or slowly rising trends in recent years. Only in 1974-75 was the cotton crop good and in 1975-76 the output of oilseeds and pulses was high. Prices have, therefore, been under great pressure in the past year and a half, while in 1975-76 the relatively comfortable supply position led to a significant fall in prices.

2.14 It is now well recognised that the key to a higher and more stable level of production is increased irrigation. The Fifth Plan aimed at bringing an additional 11 million hectares under irrigation. 2.23 million hectares will have been brought under irrigation during the current year—the highest achieved in a single year—and of this 1.13 million hectares would be from major and medium projects. A proportionately larger area is being brought under irrigation in states like Bihar, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra which have relatively less irrigation. The total area under irrigation at the end of the year would amount to about 50 million hectares out of a total cropped area of 170 million hectares. Government have now decided to accelerate the building up irrigation facilities and the utilisation of all available potential in the next 15 years; that is, to raise the level of irrigation from roughly 30 per cent at present to more than 50 per cent of total cropped area in the next five years. The objective is to add another 17 million hectares to the area under irrigation. Of this approximately 8 million hectares would be under major and medium irrigation and 9 million hectares under minor irrigation.

2.15 A problem that is likely to arise with regard to the implementation of the minor irrigation target is the lack of funds because the bulk of Government funds tend to get allocated to major and medium works. This is done on the ground that resources for minor irrigation will come out of financial institutions. Such an exclusive reliance on financial institutions may have the unwanted consequence of enabling only the better off peasants to have tubewells and denying the small and the marginal farmers the benefit of such a facility. It is necessary, therefore, to devise ways by which the poorer peasants will also have better access to groundwater resources.

2.16 Simultaneously, water management has to be improved considerably if the maximum benefit is to be derived from the potential created. Firstly, supporting facilities such as field channels have to be constructed quickly to utilise the potential fully. Secondly, water use must improve considerably. Presently 37 Command Area Development authorities have been set up covering 48 irrigation projects in order to exploit more effectively the potential created. Up to the end of 1976-77 field channels in 14 lakh hectares and land levelling in 7 lakh hectares have been completed. In 1977-78 the two figures are expected to increase further by 2 lakh hectares and 1.5 lakh hectares respectively. In addition, planning and design work covering an area of 11.2 lakh hectares has

been completed. Effective agricultural extension services are being organised in these areas.

2.17 There is a great deal of loss of water in many canal projects and the farmer has to be educated in the economical use and equitable sharing of water. Poor drainage has led to waterlogging and loss of land due to increased salinity in many areas. The latter is a sufficiently serious threat in many irrigated areas to deserve immediate attention. Attention also has to be paid to soil conservation and afforestation in the upper reaches of irrigation projects.

2.18 As mentioned earlier, the consumption of fertilizer which began to increase from the rabi season of 1975-76 following a large price reduction has further risen in 1976-77. Total fertilizer consumption last year is estimated to have exceeded 3.4 million tonnes as against 2.9 million tonnes in 1975-76, an increase of 18 per cent. Also the need for balanced fertilizer usage seems to have been realised to a greater extent. The price of urea has been further reduced by Rs. 100 per tonne with effect from 12. 10. 1977 and the excise duty on triple super phosphate has been reduced from 15 per cent to 7½ per cent. The consumption of chemical fertilizer during the current kharif season has gone up by 30 per cent. In particular the consumption of phosphatic and potassic fertilizers increased by 42 per cent and 51 per cent respectively. It is also encouraging that the increased consumption took place not only in states like Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and the Punjab where the consumption of fertilizers was already high but also in other states like Bihar, Rajasthan and Gujarat where consumption was not so high. It is expected that total consumption of fertilizer in 1977-78 will reach a level of 4.2 million tonnes representing an increase of 26 per cent over the previous year.

2.19 A number of small improvements in cultural practices can improve yields considerably. Even in the driest parts of the country a considerable amount of rain water runs off. If this can be stored and used at critical times, yields can improve considerably. The extension of the practice of community nurseries will help increase yields in rainfed areas for both big and small farmers. Better crop rotation, a greater use of phosphatic fertilizers, greater pest surveillance etc. can help improve yields greatly. Since these changes need convincing farmers to give up well tried practices and building up organisations within the village community and outside, they can come about only over time. Therefore, extension activity needs to be pursued with greater vigour. Simultaneously, research and supplies have also to be built up considerably.

2.20 With regard to pulses and edible oils, the greatest need seems to be for a high yielding variety of seed if production is to increase considerably. Such varieties do not exist because till now the bulk of our research effort has been concentrated on foodgrains like wheat, rice, jowar and maize and, to a certain extent, on cotton. Research effort, therefore, needs to be stepped up in these crops. Developing *HYV* seeds would however take time. Therefore, in the meanwhile, efforts need to be made along several directions to increase and stabilize yields of these crops. These would include the use of phosphatic fertilizers, cultivation of pulses in rice fallows and the growing of moong as a catch crop between wheat and rice in the northern states.

2.21 In addition, steps will have to be taken to prevent the diversion of area under rabi pulses to irrigated and high yielding crops like wheat. This is not possible unless the profitability of cultivating gram on marginal lands improves as compared to the cultivation of alternative crops. The high support price for gram announced last year should have such an effect.

2.22 The control of pests and diseases of groundnut and rapeseed and mustard, the production and distribution of larger quantities of certified soyabean and sunflower seeds and the use of phosphatic fertilizer would raise production of oilseeds considerably. In groundnut an increase in the area under irrigated summer groundnut in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Orissa would lead to a substantial increase in production. Such a diversion of area which would otherwise be devoted to a more profitable crop like rice or cotton would not be possible without a high support price. One of the disincentives of increasing area under groundnut has also been the extreme volatility of prices. Therefore, unless there is an assurance of a reasonable price, not much groundnut is likely to be grown under irrigation.

2.23 There is another reason why a high support price is necessary if irrigation is to be used for oilseeds. Most of the rainfed crop is grown without the use of any of the modern inputs like fertilizer and pesticides; whereas an irrigated crop would need these in order to boost yields. This naturally increases the cost of production. Unless, therefore, the support price for groundnut is adequate to cover these higher costs, it would be difficult to persuade farmers to devote newly irrigated land to oilseeds rather than to other crops like rice. A modest beginning has been made in this direction and the support price for groundnut has been raised from Rs. 140 per quintal to Rs. 160 per quintal in 1977-78.

2.24 However, to remove completely the uncertainty regarding prices, the support programme has to

be accompanied by a procurement programme. In particular, there is need for the procurement agency to be active in the primary mandis in the growing areas immediately after the harvest season when the producers part with most of their oilseeds to traders and millers. Agencies like the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation (NAFED) and National Consumers' Cooperative Federation (NCCF) will have to play an effective role in the procurement of these crops as the FCI has been doing with regard to cereals.

2.25 In cotton, the picture is somewhat mixed. A considerable amount of success in increasing production was achieved largely on account of the introduction of long staple high yielding varieties. These varieties have been widely adopted in the command areas of the major irrigation projects in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Gujarat and this has led to a steady increase in the output of long staple cotton. On the other hand, total production of cotton has experienced sharp fluctuations because the bulk of the crop which is medium staple, is grown in arid and semi-arid lands characterised by uncertain and precarious rainfall. These are located in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Therefore, while there is a relative balance between the supply and demand of long and short staple varieties, there is an imbalance in respect of medium staple varieties. While large imports have been made to fill up this gap, the long term solution seems to lie in increasing the production of medium staple cotton in irrigated areas such as Rajasthan canal area. This will need not only the use of quality seed, but also the application of fertilizers and plant protection measures which would require a substantial provision of production credit. An intensive production programme on the above lines had been launched in the current kharif season. At the same time, the support price of cotton has been raised substantially to provide an incentive for increased production.

2.26 The high level of cereal production in 1975-76 and the anticipation of an equally good outturn this year plus the large food stocks should not lull us into a false sense of complacency. Given the level of malnutrition in the country the level of foodgrain supplies cannot certainly be considered adequate. Secondly, given the low level of productivity per hectare it cannot certainly be assumed that we can relax in our effort to increase foodgrain production. For instance, the average yield of rice per hectare in this country is probably less than a fourth of that in Japan. Aside from Japan, rice yields in Korea and Taiwan, seem to be two to three times higher than in India. Therefore, our attempts to increase the production and productivity of cereals should continue unabated.

2.27 There is yet another reason why we should continue the drive to increase productivity in cereals. As noted above, there is an urgent need to increase the output of crops like pulses, edible oils and cotton. Since productivity increases in the latter are going to be limited till a research break-through has been achieved, the only way to obtain a greater output would be through increasing the area under these crops. Since net cropped area cannot be increased any further in any substantial way, this can only be brought about by a reduction in the area under other crops. This means that cereal productivity has to increase substantially if supplies are to simultaneously keep pace with demand. There is, therefore, an urgent need to redouble our agricultural research effort, organise the supplies of inputs and credit more effectively and increase extension effort significantly.

2.28 Intensive cultivation which is necessary to raise productivity requires large outlays on inputs. Such outlays cannot be undertaken without an adequate provision of credit. It has been estimated that by the end of 1978-79 the annual short-term production credit needed by agriculture would be around Rs. 3000 crores of which co-operative banks and commercial banks are expected to provide Rs. 1700 crores. In 1976-77 co-operatives provided nearly Rs. 1100 crores as short-term loans and commercial banks a little more than Rs. 200 crores. The latter figure is expected to increase suitably in 1977-78. Co-operatives are estimated to have provided Rs. 330 crores as term loans in 1976-77 and this figure is expected to go up to Rs. 463 crores in 1977-78. It has been estimated that the share of small holders (below 5 hectares) in the institutional production credit is about a third of the total provided although they account for nearly 70 per cent of the total holdings. The objective is to increase their share to 50 per cent of total institutional credit within a short period. Regional disparity in the disbursement of credit is also proposed to be reduced.

2.29 In spite of the satisfactory growth of institutional agricultural credit there are several problems which need to be tackled. The viability of small farmers and marginal farmers cannot be improved unless the volume of credit they receive is much larger than what conventional banking criteria permit. The criteria for judging the credit requirements of small and marginal farmers will have to be different from those for others because the farm as it exists cannot provide an adequate surplus. Otherwise inadequate credit

may only lead to overdues as small farmers' repayment capacity does not get built up fully.

2.30 Because of such requirements, the banking system has to assume responsibilities regarding their clients which they do not traditionally assume. Loans have to be evaluated not merely from the security angle but also from the angle of production potential. They will also have to be much more involved in the operations of the client than they would normally be. These requirements impose considerable burdens on the staff of banks and it is, therefore, necessary to quickly train and orientate bank staff to discharge these responsibilities satisfactorily. The establishment of Rural Banks has improved matters to some extent but much more needs to be done to increase the involvement of bank staff in rural development. Instruments like the Lead Bank Scheme and the formulation of the District Credit Plan need to be used more effectively. This is an area which needs immediate attention if the quality of service is to improve and a more equitable and effective distribution of funds is to be ensured.

2.31 In a country where the pressure on land is heavy and the bulk of the peasantry has small holdings, it is essential that the small farmer becomes productive if the overall growth strategy is to succeed. That is why great emphasis is being laid on projects for the benefit of small farmers, marginal farmers and agricultural labourers. These were taken up as separate projects earlier but have recently been made part of a composite programme. Presently 169 agencies are functioning and upto the end of September 1977 they have identified 131 lakh participants of whom nearly 55 lakhs were enrolled as members of co-operative. Co-operative and commercial banks disbursed through these societies short-term loans totalling over Rs. 33 crores during April-September 1977. Term loans exceeding Rs. 210 crores have been sanctioned upto September 1977 and a total amount of Rs. 124 crores has so far been utilised. 5.29 lakh farmers have benefited under the minor irrigation programme, 2.97 lakh under the milch cattle programme, and 1.71 lakh under other programmes.

2.32 However, for greater success, security of tenure and tenancy reform has to be undertaken if this section is to be productive. What is required, therefore, is vigorous implementation of the national policy of land reform. Though almost all states have legislation to declare land owned in excess of a minimum holding as surplus and distribute it among those who have none or smaller holdings, the process of acquisition of surplus lands and their distribution has been very tardy. Some 5.4 lakh hectares have been distributed to the landless agricultural workers till the end of November 1977 out of 16.6 lakh hectares declared surplus. This programme has to be speeded up. In addition, funds have to be found for the new allottees to enable them to cultivate the land that has been distributed.

2.33 Consolidation of land holdings is recognised to be a key factor in agricultural development and needs to be pursued actively if small farmers are to undertake investment and derive benefit from other facilities such as co-operative and public tubewells. Progress in this regard, however, has been far from uniform and state Governments have been urged to take this up on a priority basis. The Government of India are assisting states to take up the programme in command areas of irrigation projects where, it is felt, consolidation would yield larger dividends. In addition, urgent attention should be given to the proper maintenance of land records as these are crucial for facilitating the inflow of credit for production and investment.

2.34 There is no gainsaying that agricultural growth is extremely important both for overall progress and an increase in employment. Every effort should, therefore, be made to provide agriculture the necessary wherewithal to increase its production and productivity. This has, however, been interpreted by some to mean that the inputs for agriculture should be available at concessional rates. There is increasing pressure that fertilizer should be provided at prices below cost. Already irrigation water is being made available in many states at prices which do not even cover the cost of maintenance and repair let alone the interest charges on funds used in the construction of irrigation projects. Such concessions are certainly not the right policy in an economy like ours in which resources are so scarce. Resources used in the development process should yield a return which can then be used for financing further investment in the economy, particularly for the benefit of those hitherto untouched by the development process. It is not sufficiently realised that if water rates in a particular project do not yield a return on investment, it will mean that Government will find it that much difficult to undertake investment for irrigation elsewhere. Already the slow rate of growth of agriculture in different states and in different areas within the same state is leading to increasing dissatisfaction. If the facilities for agricultural development provided in the better off areas do not produce a surplus which could be used for providing similar facilities elsewhere, the discontent in the areas without these facilities is bound to grow. Therefore, the policy towards the pricing of such inputs should take into account the larger interests of the country as a whole.

2.35 Finally, the various programmes for developing agriculture, while they have contributed to rural betterment, have been confined to specific areas or groups. They have also to a large extent maintained their separate identities with the result that the total development of an area has not taken place. Therefore, the future strategy for the growth of the rural areas will have to aim at the area as a whole. Instead of aiming at this or that aspect, the objective should be the development of the entire resources, both human and material, of that area. This will enable the benefit of development to reach all persons living there unlike at present when specific programmes are aimed at particular sections of the rural community. This is not an easy task since it involves comprehensive planning, large mobilisation of resources and materials and an organisation which will arrange supplies of inputs, provide extension services, enthuse people to imbibe new technology and get them to cooperate for development. Such a programme cannot succeed unless people themselves participate in its planning and execution.

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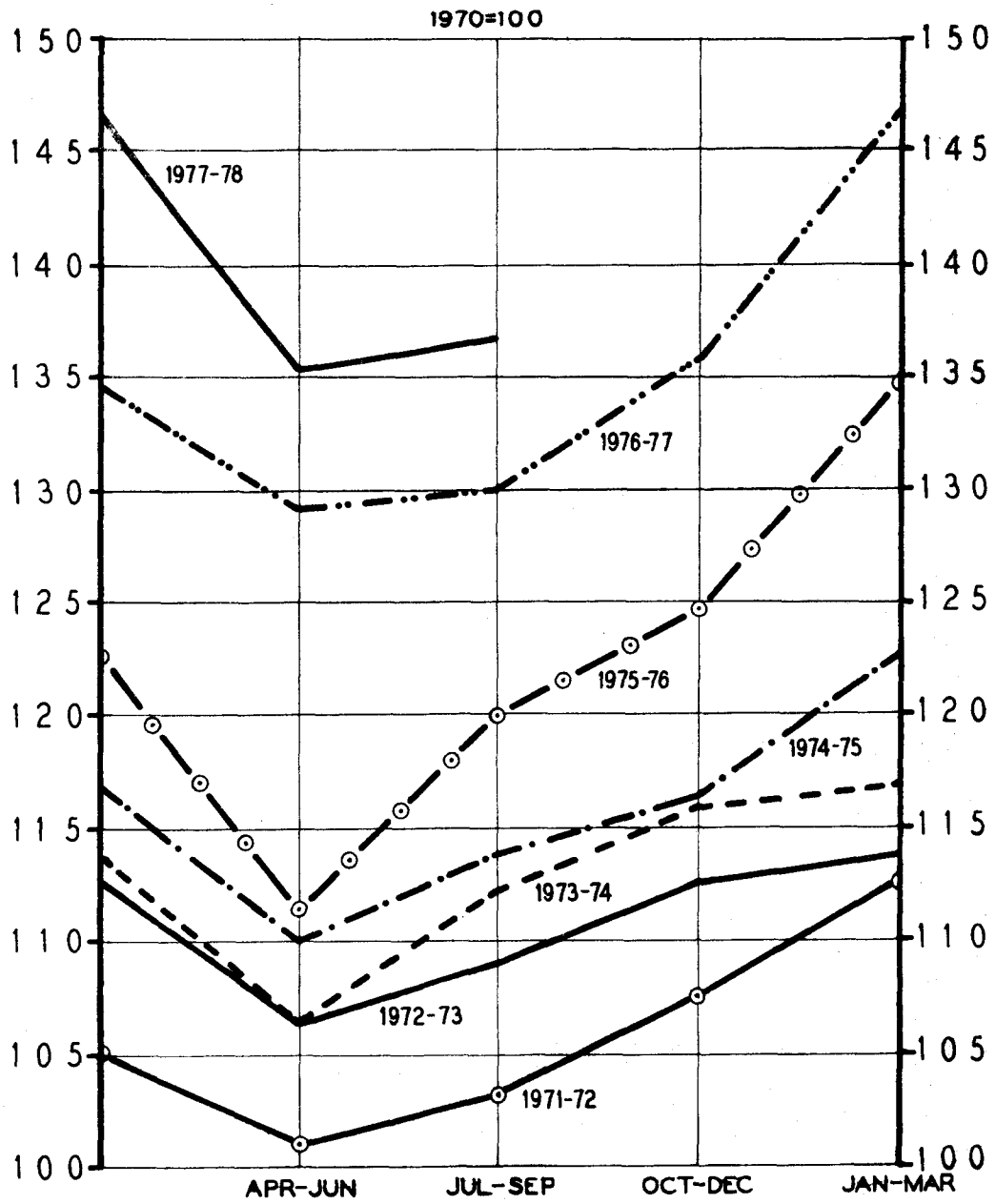

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