

An 'Ever Green' Revolution

Significant investments made in India's agriculture sector in recent years have started paying handsome dividends, notes **N.B. Rao**. The farm sector is witnessing an upsurge, with record food grains production and the promise of better days ahead.

THE agriculture sector, which has seen its share in the overall gross domestic product (GDP) pie shrink in recent years – overtaken by the industrial and service sectors – is witnessing a smart revival in India.

Food grains production for fiscal 2008 (ending March 31, 2008) was at a record high of 230.67 million tonnes, a 6.16 per cent growth over the previous year. Analysts expect this trend to continue in the current fiscal as well.

The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), a leading think tank, notes that “This would be the fourth straight year of positive growth in agricultural production, with the first three years clocking an average growth of 5.5 per cent.” This is the first time that the agriculture sector has grown consistently for four years in a row.

Eminent agriculture scientist M.S. Swaminathan also predicts another year of good agricultural growth in the current fiscal. The farm sector as a whole expanded at 4.5 per cent in the previous fiscal, up from 3.8 per cent in financial year 2006-07.

“The outlook for the agriculture sector this year is good,” explains Swaminathan. “The growth rate will be more than last fiscal. Of course, it depends on how good the monsoon progresses, though it is predicted to be normal despite some aberration.”

The allied sector, comprising livestock, forestry and logging and fishing, is projected to grow by 4.8 per cent in the current financial year.

With the south-west monsoon having covered most parts of the nation by mid-July, sowing operations have also been going on at a fast pace for most crops. According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), cumulative seasonal rainfall during the first half of the monsoon – June 1 to July 15 – was six per cent above the long period average for the nation as a whole.

The good rainfall in most parts of India – except the peninsula, which received inadequate rains in the first half – has boosted kharif sowing. Sowing of cereals is up by 33 per cent this year.

Agriculture Minister, Sharad Pawar, says sowing for most crops has been

above normal, an average of about 30 per cent over the previous year. Pawar expects a rich kharif harvest, especially of rice, maize and soybean.

Besides favourable weather conditions, what has boosted food grains produc-

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ENHANCED COVERAGE : Improved supply of quality inputs to farmers has helped raise production

INDIA'S RISING RICE YIELD

Year	Total Yield (kg per hectare)	Kharif season	Rabi/summer Season
1997-98	1,900	1,821	2,765
1998-99	1,921	1,798	3,073
1999-2000	1,986	1,892	2,897
2000-01	1,901	1,788	3,042
2001-02	2,079	1,982	2,992
2002-03	1,744	1,658	2,783
2003-04	2,078	2,004	2,947
2004-05	1,984	1,883	3,077

Source: Directorate of Rice Development, Union Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India

tion is the higher support price offered by the government to farmers. Agriculture secretary, P.K. Mishra, points out that the increase in minimum support price (MSP) encouraged farmers to enhance the area of production and yield. Another reason that he attributes for the excellent production is the enhanced supply of quality inputs to farmers.

Wheat production in 2007-08 rose by 3.4 per cent to a record 78.4 million tonnes; rice production was at 96.4 million tonnes, up from the previous fiscal's 93.4 million

tonnes. Oilseeds production soared by 18.7 per cent to touch a record 28.8 million tonnes. Within oilseeds, soybean production grew by 13 per cent to 9.9 million tonnes and groundnut by 93 per cent to 9.4 million.

The production of pulses was also at a record of 15.1 million tonnes, a growth of 6.4 per cent. Cotton production in fiscal 2008 expanded by 14 per cent to a record 25.8 million bales (one bale equals to 170 kg). Coarse cereals production grew to 40.7 million tonnes (from 33.9 million

tonnes in 2007) and maize was up at 19.3 million (from 15.1 million tonnes).

The only major crop that saw a decline in 2007-08 was sugarcane, which fell to 340.6 million tonnes from 355.5 million tonnes in the previous year. India, which is the largest milk producer in the world, saw an eight per cent increase in milk production, which crossed the 100 million tonne mark. "Starting with food grains production of about 51 million tonnes in 1950-51, today we have achieved an all time record harvest of 231 million tonnes

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of foodgrains," says Agriculture Minister Pawar. "The net sown area since 1970 has remained practically static, around 140 million ha, of which more than two-thirds is rain-fed." The over four-fold increase in the production (since 1950-51) has come about by the increase in productivity.

Thanks to the bountiful harvest, India's import of food grains declined in financial year 2007-08, at a time when global prices were high and the supply position was tight. India's food grains import bill was down by over 50 per cent at \$625 million in 2007-08, as compared to the previous year. Finance Minister, P. Chidambaram, attributes the record agricultural output to the farsighted plans of the government. "We launched the National Horticultural Mission and the National Food Security Mission, undertook the repair and maintenance of water bodies and introduced the National Rainfed Area Authority," points

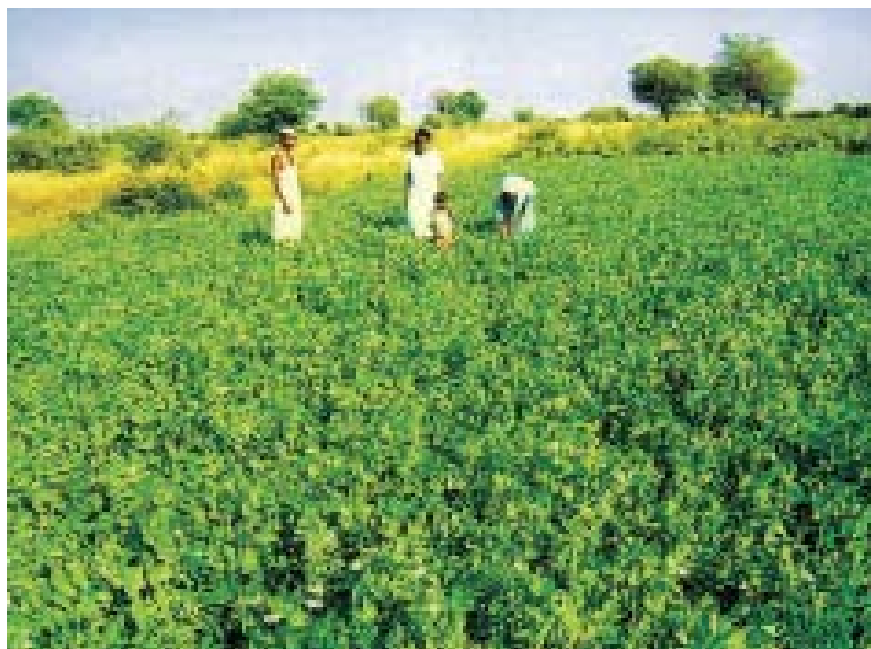


ILLUSTRATION: FARZANA COOPER

out Chidambaram. Pawar believes that the huge investments made in agriculture over the last few years have started paying dividends. The rate of capital formation in agriculture has increased from 10.2 per cent in 2003-04 to 12.5 per cent in 2006-07.

Recent decisions relating to the increase in MSP of paddy and incentives on use of nutrient-based fertiliser will also help boost production and productivity, he adds. Swaminathan, also known as the father of the Green Revolution, advocates an 'Ever Green Revolution' in agriculture to ensure sustainability in the availability of food and to maintain sufficient buffer stock at all times. Increasingly, there are calls for a second Green Revolution in India, to boost productivity and to meet the growing needs of an economy expanding at between eight and nine per cent per annum. With the sharp decline in poverty, eating habits of the formerly poor change dramatically; they begin consuming staple foods, leading to a spurt in demand for food grains. The Green Revolution of the 1960s saw the average yield of food grains go up from just one tonne a hectare to two tonnes, and in the case of some items to three tonnes and more a hectare. The average yield of wheat in India is 2.63 tonnes a hectare, and of rice slightly over three tonnes; a second Green Revolution – by using high-yielding seeds, for instance, or ushering in optimal use of fertilisers and pesticides – could easily boost productivity. But agricultural productivity is stagnating around the world.

The President of India, Mrs Pratibha Devisingh Patil, recently made a call for enhancing crop productivity to usher in the second Green Revolution. "We must enhance productivity on a constant basis and bring about a second Green Revolution which, along with agro-biotechnology, can translate into an 'Ever Green Revolution' in India," she said. "The Indian Council of Agricultural Research has taken an initiative to establish one of the largest gene bank of crop genetic resources. Agricultural growth would also depend upon technological inputs relating to water management systems, better seeds and farming practices." The continuing investments being made in the sector will indeed help usher in a new era in agriculture. 🌱



FLOURISHING FARMS : The average farm yield in India has been growing over the years

BOUNTIFUL HARVEST

Crop	2007-08 (in million tonnes)	2006-07
Rice	96.4	93.4
Wheat	78.4	75.8
Oilseeds (including soybean and groundnut)	28.8	24.3
Soybean	9.9	8.9
Groundnut	9.4	4.9
Pulses	15.1	14.2
Coarse cereals	40.7	33.9
Maize	19.3	15.1
Cotton*	25.8	22.6
Sugarcane	340.6	355.5

• Cotton production is in million bales
Source: Union Ministry of Agriculture