

## The Present Food Crisis and its Solution

By

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The few suggestions, I will be placing before this conference for consideration relate purely to personal views. I feel that too many suggestions have been offered on the subject by the public with the result that from these medley of suggestions, the State is not in a position to make out which of them are really feasible and practicable. I, therefore propose to deal only with such of the suggestions which, I feel, are feasible and have some prospects of success if taken up seriously.

I will give the pride of place to the stabilisation of prices of agricultural produce. It is the common practice with the ryots to increase or decrease the area under any crop depending on the prevailing market rate at the time of sowing. In England, the prices of agricultural produce were fixed as an emergency measure sufficiently in advance of the sowing season to give incentive to the ryots to increase the area under a particular crop. It was only by adopting such a procedure, the United Kingdom was in a position to reduce the quantity of foodstuffs imported from about 70 to 30 percent of their total requirement. This remarkable achievement should not be passed unnoticed. I am confident, given the same concession, the Indian ryot will certainly rise up to the occasion and strive his best to solve the food crisis. I, therefore, feel that, fixing a fair price taking into consideration the cost of cultivation allowing a reasonable margin of profit, will be the easiest and quickest method of increasing the area under any desired crop. Instances are not wanting to confirm this presumption of mine. We have seen during the past few years, that whenever an increase in the controlled price was made by offering a bonus, large stocks of foodgrains were released by the ryots.

The next in importance will be the provision of assured supply of water for irrigation purposes, and this is possible only by the State undertaking construction of irrigation projects. The original policy of Government was to undertake construction of only such irrigation projects from which a fair return was expected. But, the present policy of Government is to undertake construction of irrigation projects without any consideration of the return anticipated, provided a substantial area could be benefitted. This is a move in the right direction. Besides, Irrigation Conferences are held twice a year in each district to examine the possible irrigation projects that can be undertaken. The present set-up of the machinery to recommend new irrigation projects to the State is well-constituted. Due to dearth of materials and the technical personnel, the progress in the execution of irrigation projects is bound to be slow, till conditions improve.

Besides execution of irrigation projects, the present policy of subsidising part of the cost of digging wells should be continued for some more time. There is need for revising the present rate of subsidy, because it is far below the real cost of execution. It is true in some cases, the attempts made to tap subterranean supply of water have proved unsuccessful and also in some cases the subsidy given was not utilised for the purpose for which it was intended. Considering the scheme as a whole, in the Presidency, substantial progress has been made in bringing additional area under cultivation with irrigation facilities. This fact cannot be overlooked. There is bound to be failure in some of the attempts made to tap water and it cannot be helped. As regards the misuse of subsidy, it can be rectified by tightening the administrative supervision.

The next suggestion of mine relates to undertaking intensive propaganda on the advantages of using green manure or green leaf as manure in view of the dearth of other kind of manure. There is considerable scope in this field to bring to the notice of the ryots the possibilities of raising green manure crops without affecting their normal cropping schemes. Besides this, the value of planting quick growing green leaf producing plants and trees have to be brought to their notice.

Wild Indigo (Kolinji) is the green manure crop recommended for cultivation *in situ* in lands where the interval between two successive crops is over six months. This crop has two very desirable points, viz., it is not eaten by cattle and if sown once, it spreads further by its own seed dispersal. In view of these desirable characters, it is eminently suitable as green manure to be introduced in single crop wet lands where the soil is of light type.

We have intensive development work carried on in a few selected firkas in the Presidency. In such area the scheme for free distribution of Kolinji seeds can be taken up by the State. I deliberately recommend free issue of seed, because, it is only by such a step the entire area, if necessary, can be covered in one single year, otherwise it will take years before the improvement is adopted on a wide scale. I specially recommend this suggestion of mine.

The fourth suggestion of mine relates to increasing the quantity of foodgrains produced by the distribution of seeds of improved varieties of crops evolved by the department. The ryots have come to realise the advantages of sowing seeds of improved strains both from the point of view of yield and other desirable characters. In order to undertake intensive work in this direction, it is necessary to make seeds of improved strains easily available to the ryot. This is possible only if the departmental depots are located in more than one place in each taluk.

It is the usual practice with the ryot to come for seed just a day or two before sowing. It is, therefore, too much to expect him to go a long way to procure the seed. There are instances where because of the distance involved, the ryots were obliged to resort to sowing local varieties though they know as a matter of fact the advantages of growing the departmental strains.

I often remember with pride the remark made by a very rich landlord who takes personal interest and has made cultivation not as a mere subsistence farming, but as a commercialised one. He remarked that the cost of administration of the Agricultural Department incurred so far from its inception can be safely set off against the profits realised by the ryots growing improved strains.

The next suggestion of mine refers to a problem which has so far not been tapped. About 70 percent of cultivable land is now cultivated with the aid of rainfall. Due to inadequate or unevenly distributed rainfall, the yield obtained from this type of cultivation is invariably low, often resulting in famine or scarcity in certain tracts. Ryots of dry land can be assured of a safe return for their time, money and energy spent in raising crops provided the State can undertake the lay out of contour bunds. In an ordinary irrigation tank, we have three components, viz., the watershed, reservoir, and ayacut. In the case of contour bunded area, these three components are not only inter-related but located together in the interspace between two consecutive contour bunds. Herein lies the advantages of contour bunds. The advantages of contour bunding have been so well demonstrated that the State should take steps at an early date to implement this scheme. This appears to be one of the potential methods of increasing the yield of food crops from an area, which now entirely depends on the vagaries of the monsoon.

I have now dealt with the suggestions which, I feel, are the possible lines, if taken up seriously, can solve the present food crisis.

I will now examine a few suggestions which are often made by the public. One such suggestion is that the large extent of cultivable waste lands available should be brought under cultivation.

The fact that these culturable waste lands have been lying as such in spite of the increase in population clearly shows that there are some really serious handicaps which prevent them from being exploited. The chief drawbacks are, either these lands are located far in the interior giving rise to transport and inadequate labour difficulties or the soil is so poor that they will not even pay the cost of cultivation. These are the main drawbacks that are responsible for the continuance of large area as culturable waste lands and unless these drawbacks are rectified, I feel that this suggestion is not going to be of any practical value.

Another suggestion which we often hear is the cry for the restoration and reclamation of tanks, which, of late, have gone out of usage. The terms restoration and reclamation convey different meanings. The word restoration denotes that the area which was originally part of the tank has now been brought under cultivation due to some reason or other. Such instances are commonly met with in Zamindari areas. If such tanks are to be restored, the cultivation which is now going on in the foreshore has to be abandoned. Fortunately, cases calling for such drastic action, are few.

The term 'reclamation' means the removal of silt and repair of bunds. This is possible only in places where the tanks are small in size. In the case of large tanks, the amount of labour, time and cost involved in reclamation will be enormous. Instead of removing silt and trying to find out methods of disposal, a suggestion has been made to increase the level of surplus weir. If such a step is taken even by increasing it by a few inches, some appreciable additional area can be brought under the ayacut. This suggestion is already receiving the attention of the State and we can expect some active steps taken in this direction in the near future.

Another suggestion which is frequently made relates to increasing the quantity of groundnut oil cake produced so as to meet the demand. The production can be increased only if the area under groundnut is increased. The area under groundnut can be increased only with a corresponding decrease in area under some other crop, invariably, it will be a food crop. The possibilities of growing groundnut before and after the paddy crop in wet lands are limited, subject to availability of water.

It is often suggested that one of methods of solving the present food crisis, is to resort to Co-operative farming, joint farming, collective farming and so on. The object of this suggestion is that people should combine and cultivate together. The land in such cases will be jointly owned by them, the cultivation will be done jointly, and the profits will be shared jointly. In some cases, without affecting the existing individual ownership, the people are asked to cultivate together and share the profits on the basis of area owned by each individual. The main drawback of this system is that no scope is given to give expression to the best effort that an individual can put forth. Various schemes have been tried in different parts of India and so far, nowhere any progress has been made. Even in Russia, where collective farming is reported to be progressing well, the main principle had to be remodelled and individual ryots were given scope to own something which they can call as their own property, I feel, much progress cannot be expected from this suggestion at any rate, for some time to come till the word "self" loses its significance.