

## The Present Food Crisis and its Solution\*

By

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Why this "Food Crisis" in India when India is mainly an agricultural country and more than 80% of the population are agriculturists? The causes are not far to seek. Agriculture as such is still in a backward state, in spite of all attempts to improve it and food production is far below consumption. This is especially so in the case of rice, the demand for which has become great while its production is low. The whole problem of food production has thus centred round rice as far as the Madras province is concerned.

In Madras province the production of rice is estimated at 50 lakhs of tons every year, while the consumption has been yearly 56½ lakhs of tons. This deficit was not felt during the pre-war years due to imports from Burma, Siam and Indo-China. The Second World War put a stop to these imports and to this was added the increased demand by the army. The situation was further aggravated by the appalling increase in the population of India. As the Food and Agricultural Council of the United Nations has pointed "In Asia the rice-eating population is increasing twice as fast as the rice output.

Attempts were made in all directions to meet this deficit. A vigorous grow more food campaign was started. A number of concessions were granted to bring in more area under cultivation; to increase the area under irrigation, and intensify cultivation by manuring and good seeding. An all-out drive for extensive green manuring was launched. A five-year programme was drawn up under which small irrigation projects were contemplated. Imports from abroad were arranged and rice, maize, wheat and milo were obtained. Rationing was introduced and the movement of food grains were controlled. But all these attempts were only partially successful so much so that the situation has not materially improved and the province is still in great deficit in regard to rice.

It cannot be denied that a very sincere attempt was made by the Agricultural Department of this province to improve food production. But their efforts were thwarted by factors which were

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beyond their control. The cost of manures like groundnut cake was controlled and they were distributed at controlled rates. But production of cakes was low and demand was high. Chemical manures like ammonium sulphate and ammonium phosphate were arranged to be got from foreign countries and supplied. But the imports did not reach 1/5th of the requirements. Tractors were taken from the army and supplied one or two to each district to break up new lands for cultivation.

But these tractors were already "army-beaten" and no sooner were they put into the field than they went into repairs. There were no trained mechanics or spare parts to repair them. The Public Works Department were anxious to construct a number of new irrigation projects. But as one would expect, the process was slow due to want of technicians and funds. It is not surprising therefore that no immediate effect of the Grow More Food programme was felt as at best they can be only long-range schemes and the result will be seen only after some years.

What then is the immediate remedy? The only solution which would produce quick results is the "adjustment of cropping". By this I mean a regulation of the areas under each crop according to needs. In the Madras presidency the deficit in rice production works out to 10 lakhs of tons of paddy. These 10 lakhs of tons of paddy should be made good in one year. The area required to produce 10 lakhs of tons of paddy will be 13 lakhs of acres. Thus the paddy area should be increased by 13 lakhs of acres. This should be achieved by diversion of the lands not only under commercial crops but also under certain millets to paddy. Any deficit in millets and other crops can be made good by increasing its area in the dry lands. There are extensive areas of current fallows, out of which a portion can be cultivated for such purposes.

It may seem paradoxical to suggest a reduction in area under important commercial crops like cotton, groundnut, sugarcane and tobacco, when special committees for each of these crops are working with zeal to increase their production. The Indian Central Cotton Committee, the Tobacco Committee, the Oilseeds Committee and the Sugarcane Committee can all concentrate on the improvement of cultivation of these crops by improved seeds, manures etc. but not by extending the areas to the detriment of foodcrops like paddy or millets.

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How is this policy to be enforced? In these days of freedom and democracy it is not possible to do it by mere propaganda. Enforcement by legislation is the only practical solution. It may be argued that during the War, in order to increase the area under pulses, an act was passed that cotton and groundnut should never be grown as pure crops but always as mixtures with a pulse-crop like blackgram, horsegram and redgram. But the return for 1945-46 showed a decrease in the area under each crop instead of an increase and thus the act was a failure. The main reason was that there was no organisation to enforce it.

If an Act called the "Agricultural Crop Adjustment Act" is passed and enforced with all earnestness it will produce amazing results in the shortest time possible. By this act every ryot who grows a commercial or cash crop out of proportion to a paddy crop should be compelled to divert a portion of this area to paddy. The details should be worked out taking a district as the unit and trying to make each district self sufficient as far as possible such that the target aimed at is reached. I may point out here that this is not a new original suggestion. Such acts have been passed in countries like America with very good results and hence it is worth a trial in our province as well.

It should be emphasised that unless the enforcement of the Act is done with zeal and enthusiasm the whole scheme will fail. To achieve this end the check and supervision should be entrusted not to the Revenue Department, but to the Agricultural Department only. Even the working details of how much each ryot should grow each crop should be left to the Agricultural Department who are better judges of the ryots' conditions than the Revenue Department. This will of course mean additional work to the Agricultural Department and additional establishment and expenses. But that cannot be helped. Food and Agriculture go together and anything concerning food can best be tackled only by the Agricultural Department.

The above programme is for immediate increase in the total production and to relieve the suffering millions from food scarcity within a year or two at the most. But side by side with this a long-term scheme should also be launched to meet the growing menace of the increase in population every year. The programme is nothing but the one already started viz., to increase the production by the increasing of water, better manures, and better seeds and by bringing in <sup>two to</sup> practically



under cultivation in a period of 5 years. The foodgrains Policy Committee has rightly come to the conclusion after reviewing the work from 1943-47 that "The measures which were undertaken were doubtless in the right direction but the objectives were far diversified, the efforts were inadequate and in most areas necessary vigour and drive were lacking. If definite results are to be achieved a radical revision of approach is necessary and a new production policy and machinery has to be devised".

In short, diversion of commercial and other nonimportant food crops to paddy in the irrigated areas and enforcing the same by legislation and introducing a Crop Adjustment Act as the immediate short term policy; and increasing the production gradually by the distribution of good seeds and large quantity of manures, by green manuring and by bringing in more of waste lands under cultivation by mechanised cultivation as a long range policy is the only solution to solve the present food crisis.



### ERRATA

*The Madras Agricultural Journal.*

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|-------------|--------|---|
| Vol. XXXVI. | No. 3. | Page 147, 8th line—read 40 feet instead of 40".   |
| "           | "      | Page 147, 9th line—read square instead of squire.   |
| "           | No. 4. | Page 188, line 33, read 100 H.P. instead of a 10 H.P.   |
|             | "      | Page 190, in the heading of the appendix third column read "ploughing by a 40 H.P. tractor instead of ploughing by a H.P. tractor". |
|             | "      | Page 191, column three, read "ploughing by a 40 H.P." instead of "ploughing by a H.P. tractor.                                      |
|             | "      | Page 162 para 2 line 14 read "offset" instead of "affect".  |

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