

# The Madras Agricultural Journal

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## Editorial

**The Food Front:** Within a period of two years India is to become entirely self-sufficient with regard to her food requirements and all food imports from abroad should cease by 1951. This is the objective set forth by the Prime Minister of India and he has appealed to the Nation to make serious efforts in this direction. While the problem of maintaining our food production to the level of our needs in relation to the rapidly growing population of the country is a large range problem and should be tackled as such, the immediate problem is what should be done here and now to make good the deficit of our basic requirements within the stipulated period of two years. A special organisation has been set up and a Commissioner of food production has been appointed to tackle the problem on an All-India basis. The highest priority is to be given to the food problem both in the centre and the provinces. Transport bottlenecks are to be removed and steps taken to increase the supply of fertilizers, seeds and implements. The activities of the various provinces and states are to be co-ordinated and adjustments made to avoid wastage, overlapping and duplication of effort. Sufficient funds will be placed at the disposal of the Food Commissioner to enable him to carry out the work entrusted to him. This organisation, it is hoped, with the active co-operation of the provinces and states and the people of this country will be able to make the country self-sufficient before the end of the year 1951.

But it is well to recognise that the task is not an easy one and correct planning and hard work lies ahead. If past experience be any guide, certain mistakes which resulted in wastage of huge sums of money on unfruitful ventures should be avoided. Particular care should be taken to see that new lands brought under the plough are cultivated with due regard to the suitability of the crop to be grown on them and also to the status of soil fertility. Except, perhaps, in the West coast the bulk of the uncultivated land in South India is



marginal land and only under extreme conditions like the present will it be worthwhile to cultivate them. With regard to the use of artificial fertilizers though we hold that they have an important part to play in increased food production, it is not to be forgotten that injudicious and unbalanced application of fertilizers will upset the biological equilibrium of the soil and may in the long run deplete the soil of its natural fertility which is an evil to be guarded against at all costs. Improved strains of crops do result in increased returns for a time. In recent times agrobiologists have recognized that improved strains 'run out' after a period and a recognition of this fact is necessary before distribution of any one particular strain is undertaken on a large scale and strains and varieties which have shown signs of decline should be eliminated and new strains substituted. We have thought it necessary to make mention of these facts in order to indicate the magnitude of the task involved so that people may not take a too complacent a view of the situation and take it for granted that somehow things will get adjusted by themselves. Conscious effort on the part of Government and people alike is necessary and the Prime Minister's appeal is meant to make us realise this. This brings us to the question of the part to be played by consumers in solving the food problem. The Prime Minister has appealed to the people to make less demand on rice as it would appear to be the costliest item in our food purchases from abroad. We recognize that it is difficult to change a food habit, but habits are formed and not inherent and a slight adjustment in the daily menu to meet a national emergency should not after all be difficult to a people interested in their country's welfare. Tapioca, sweet potato and plantain have been suggested as alternatives or supplements to a cereal diet. Tapioca, it may be mentioned in this connection, has been the mainstay of the people in the West coast where supplies of rice have been woefully inadequate during the last few years. We have to mention, however, that the vitamin content of these subsidiary foods is inferior to that of rice and steps should be taken to ensure a plentiful supply of vitamins to those who take to the changed diet. This can be done by the manufacture of food yeast on a large scale. The sugar factories which receive protection to their industry may be asked to undertake this enterprise as a side line and sell the material at a low margin of profit.

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