

Can they do it?

By

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The general inference one is able to draw from many speeches made and numerous articles written by various persons giving suggestions for increasing food production is that majority of our farmers, being illiterate, prefer to follow the traditional practices and are suspicious to adopt improved (otherwise termed scientific) methods advocated by the Agriculture Department. Another line of criticism usually levelled also is, that improved methods are not within the means of poor cultivators.

After effects of demonstrations: The few instances listed below will show how further these two charges are from truth :-

(a) Co. 419 sugarcane variety demonstrated by the Department about 1939 on a few cents of land, in a few important cane growing centres, now occupies about 80 per cent of the total area under cane in the State.

(b) Uganda cotton - an improved strain of long staple Cambodia cotton has practically replaced the old Cambodia variety.

(c) Synthetic chemicals demonstrated on a small-scale in 1949 to control grasshopper insect pest on paddy is now being sold in hundreds of tons to farmers who queue up in an orderly fashion in depots; and

(d) The area under paddy strains specially evolved for resisting "blast" - the dreadful fungus disease and also salinity, has increased far beyond expectations within five years after first demonstration.

It is possible to cite many such spectacular instances but the few typical examples furnished above are enough for the present argument, that the diagnosis by the critics is not correct. The causes have to be looked elsewhere.

Production facilitating factors: The factors facilitating increased production in any country in the world are :-

- (a) Assured irrigation facility or adequate and well distributed rainfall,
- (b) remunerative price for the produce produced,
- (c) supply of "production" requisites such as seeds, manures, pesticides etc., within easy reach; and
- (d) easy credit facilities.

To these must be added the help of well organised "trained" personnel who should guide the farmer in his day to day practice.

The removal of "price" control in our State allowing price to adjust itself according to demand and supply is undoubtedly a great incentive. High priority is given to this factor in western countries and "price support" policy is usually adopted whereby the farmer is informed the price he is to receive after the harvest even before sowing the crop.

If our farmers are given (a) easy credit facilities for cultivation expenses based on the present day labour charges and on the prevailing market price of their production requisites;

(b) facilities to purchase their production requisites within easy reach; and

(c) the help of power drills to go deeper into the bowels of the earth to tap subterranean water reservoir, they will certainly increase the production and wipe out the deficit now experienced in food supply.