

Grow More Cotton

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Introduction: The conditions after World War (II) brought about a sharp decline in the area and production of cotton in the Indian Union. The partition of the country aggravated the situation. The annual needs of the present mill industry in the country work to a minimum of forty lakh bales of cotton (of 400 lb. each). During the year 1949-'50, the production declined to the low level of 28 lakh bales. Import of foreign cotton at a very high cost of about one hundred crores of rupees and over per annum became inevitable for bridging the gap between the demand and supply in order to avert a crisis in the Indian Mill industry. There was a scramble for the purchase of the limited quantities of cotton produced in the country and this resulted in the unhealthy competition in trade with the result that prices for all varieties of cotton shot up and superior varieties began to be mixed up with inferior ones. The Government had to step in and fix a price structure for the different varieties of cotton grown in the Indian Union and allot quotas to the various mills in the country in order to assist the Mill industry from closing down and in order to keep the cost of the resulting yarns and cloth at reasonable levels so as not to hit the consumer. The price structure for the various cottons was also designed in such a way as to check wilful adulteration of superior with inferior cottons.

The Integrated Cotton Extension Plan: The Integrated Short term Cotton Extension Plan of the Government of India was launched during 1950 in order to make good the shortage of 12 lakhs of bales required by the Nation. The Scheme was originally planned for a period of two years, 1950-'51 and 1951-'52 for increasing the production in the country by six lakh bales in each year i. e., increasing the 1950-'51 production from 28 lakh bales to 34 lakh bales and taking it up to 40 lakh bales at the end of the 1951-'52 season. The co-operation of the various State Governments was sought for implementing the Scheme and financial assistance was assured by the Central Government. The Government of India and the State Governments gave various concessions for encouraging cotton cultivation without at the same time affecting the food production in the country. Additional staff for propaganda for the purpose was sanctioned for the important cotton growing States of India and targets for each State fixed.

Extension work in 1950-'51 & 1951-'52: This Cotton Extension work has been in progress in the Indian Union during the years 1950-'51 and 1951-'52. The seasonal conditions not only in Madras but in certain

other States also were very adverse for increased cotton production. The production at the end of 1951-'52 season has been estimated to be about 36 lakh bales as against the original target of 40 lakh bales. The Scheme was extended for a further period of one year (1952-'53) and the work has been in progress once again in the face of adverse seasonal conditions in Madras and in certain other States of India.

Cotton Extension in the Five-year Plan: Population has been increasing at an alarming rate of 1.1% per annum and commensurate with the growing needs of the country a target of 45 lakhs of bales has been fixed in the Nation's Five Year Plan. Besides the short-term Integrated Cotton Extension Plan. Targets and programme for 1953-54 have been called by the Government of India in furtherance of the increased targets fixed. It is, therefore, incumbent on every State to implement the plan energetically in order to realise annually the target of 45 lakh bales fixed for achievement at the end of the period of operation of the Five-year plan. The country has not only to achieve the total quantity of 45 lakhs of bales of cotton every year but the bulk of it must be transformed into up-graded qualities i.e., the Short-Staple to be converted as medium Staple and the medium Staple to be changed to Long-Staple, through extended cultivation of improved varieties of cotton seeds evolved through years of patient research by the various Departments of Agriculture in the Indian Union. Not only that, the country must be able to grow a certain quantity of extra-long Staple cottons like the Egyptians in order to check the drain of money from the country by the import of such superior styles. Besides, large cotton acreages must be brought under irrigation in order to step up yields through extended use of chemical manures.

Seasonal and other Conditions in Madras: The position of Madras is somewhat peculiar as compared to the other States. There are a number of Commercial Cotton regions in the State, each with its own sowing and harvesting seasons. Throughout the year, cotton sowing will be in progress in some part of the State or other. The cottons in the various Commercial regions are of diverse qualities. When the Cotton Extension Scheme started in 1950-'51, Madras was already experiencing the fourth year of drought in succession. The Season during 1951-'52 was the fifth year of drought in succession in Madras and eleven of the districts were in the grip of famine conditions either totally or partially. The year 1952-'53 has once again been disappointing, the conditions being much worse than during the previous five years as both the monsoons happened to fail. Under such very adverse conditions, Madras has been able to achieve a part of the target fixed. On account of the diversity of seasons of sowing and harvest, of cultivation practices and of quality of the various cottons grown in the State, the methods to be adopted in this State for stepping up cotton production are also many and varied.

Achievement in Madras: What was over 25 lakhs of acres under cotton in the Madras State producing over 5 lakh bales every year dwindled down to 13.6 lakhs of acres producing 2.7 lakhs of bales in 1947-'48, the partition year. The production of cotton in Madras during 1950-'51 and 1951-'52, was 3.48 lakh bales and 3.97 lakh bales respectively. The seasonal conditions during these two years were very adverse and on account of the intense propaganda work under the Cotton Extension Plans formulated for the State, it was possible to realise the production levels as mentioned above. It has been estimated that as a result of the Cotton Extension Plan in Madras during 1951-'52, about 50,000 extra bales of cotton have been achieved. The final forecast estimates of area and production during the year 1951-'52 are 17.95 lakhs of acres and 3.9, lakhs of bales respectively.

It has been possible to achieve the extra production of half a lakh of bales of cotton in spite of eleven districts in the State being in the grip of famine either in part or whole. A scrutiny of the expenditure shows that it has cost approximately Rs 2.7 to produce every bale of extra half a lakh of bales produced under the Scheme during 1951-'52 and the total value of the extra 50,000 bales works to between 2 and 2½ crores of rupees. It will, therefore, be seen that the amount spent on the Cotton Extension Scheme in the Madras State is quite a small sum when the value of the extra-production of raw cotton for meeting the serious cotton shortage in the Country is taken into consideration. It is also to be noted that had the season been either a normal or a good one for cotton, the cost of production of every additional bale would have been still less and the total value of the extra cotton produced would have been much more than the 2 to 2½ crores of rupees.

Items of Cotton Extension work in Madras: The more important items under the Cotton Extension Plan in Madras for stepping up cotton production of improved varieties of cotton are (1) reclamation of waste lands by tractor cultivation for growing cotton (2) diversion of area from oil-seeds and other non-food crops, (3) double-cropping i. e., cultivation of cotton in rice fallows, (4) mixed cropping with crops like groundnut, ragi and chillies both unirrigated and irrigated, (5) distribution of seeds of improved strains on an extended scale, (6) application of fertilizers like ammonium sulphate, (7) adoption of plant protection measures and (8) adoption of improved cultivation methods. Under all these items, the extended use of improved seeds of cotton has an important place.

Cotton Control Bill in Madras: The Cotton Control Bill in Madras which has been recently passed into an Act aims at improving the quality of cottons grown in the State and at preventing wilful adulteration. The Act empowers the Government to fix the variety of cotton to be cultivated in any area and prohibit the mixing of the Standard cotton with any

other cotton. This measure, if properly worked, ought to create a good demand for improved cotton seeds and enable the Madras State to produce the pure strains of cotton evolved by the Department over large areas and increase the production of improved strains particularly of the type of Madras Cambodia Uganda-1, which has placed Madras prominently on the Cotton map of India.

Conclusion: It may be necessary to continue the Cotton Extension Plan in the Indian Union for some more years, at least till the completion of the Five-Year Plan period, so that the 45 lakes of bales of cotton required by the Nation could be achieved at the end of the period. What is more important is to devise ways and means of retaining the areas and production of cotton required by the country on a permanent basis. A National Crop Planning enforcing by law definite areas for cotton cultivation every year in suitable places in the country with price guarantee for the cottons produced will ultimately become necessary as also for other essential crops required by the nation such as food crops, jute and sugar. At the present moment, *it is a National duty for every cultivator to become cotton-minded and help in increasing the area and production of cotton in the country without affecting the cultivation of food-crops.*