

Agricultural Trends of Tanjore District

by

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Introduction : The "PACKAGE PROGRAMME" of intensified agricultural production sponsored by the Union Ministry of Food and Agriculture has been implemented by the Government of Madras. The Scheme was inaugurated on the Tamil New Year's day in the district of Tanjore which is the granary of the South. The introduction of the package programme in Tanjore District makes another land mark in the history of Agriculture in Madras State. At this juncture it is considered appropriate to take stock of all the past trends in the field of agricultural production. An attempt has therefore been made in the following paragraphs to review the trends in the agricultural features of Tanjore District over a period of half a century.

Land Utilisation : The total geographical area of the district is about 2.39 million acres which represents 7.47% of the total land area of Madras State of about 32 million acres.

The entire district consists of almost plain country. Out of the total land surface of 2.39 million acres, forests cover nearly 31,000 acres or 1.03%. For the quinquennium ending 1906—1910 the area under forest was however only 13,000 acres representing 0.57% of the total area. Barren and unculturable lands represent nearly 29%. The area under this category of land shows an increase from 541,000 acres in 1906—1910 to 685,000 acres in 1951—55 thus showing an increase of 5.3%. Culturable waste lands accounted for 230,000 acres or 9.9% fifty years ago. It showed a slow decline to 7.9% during 1946—50 and a sudden decline to 4.9% or 118,000 acres for the quinquennium ending 1955. This decline is mainly due to the extension of irrigation facilities. The trends in the extent of current fallows and net area sown however present some interesting features. Current fallows covered nearly 199,000 acres or 8.6% in 1906—1910. This slowly increased reaching a peak figure of nearly 249,000 acres or 10.4% in 1926—1930. Thereafter it has started decreasing and has reached a figure of nearly 131,000 acres or 5.4%. The net area sown however does not show any appreciable increase

compared to the area obtained in 1906—1910. Area sown more than once has however doubled from 115,000 acres or 5% in 1906—1910 to 263,000 acres or 11.2% in 1951—55. This increase is again reflected in the total cropped area which has increased from 1.44 million acres or 62.5% in 1905—1910 to 1.66 million acres or 70.6% in 1951—55.

Out of the net area sown viz., about 1.4 million acres, roughly, 1.2 million acres are commanded by the various irrigation sources in the district. This represents 85.5% of the net area sown. Agriculture in the rest 14.5% or roughly 0.2 million acres still remains a gamble with the monsoon. The percentage of the total area irrigated to the net area sown was 73.47 for the quinquennium ending 1906—1910. Till 1930, there had not been any appreciable percentage of increase. From 1931 onwards, there has been steady increase. The area now commanded by irrigation is 12% more than that obtained fifty years ago.

There has been a steady increase in the area commanded by Government canals. From 0.8 million acres it has steadily increased to 1.1 million acres thus showing an increase of 10% over the area commanded fifty years ago. The area commanded by private channels has nearly doubled. Reverse is the case under tanks. The area now commanded is only half of that obtained fifty years ago. This may partly be due to the fact that these tanks have been silted up and their water sheds have not been properly protected by anti-erosion measures. Wells with independent ayacuts also do not give a satisfactory picture. The area commanded by this source declined from 1.80% in 1906—1910 to 0.04% in 1936—1940 suddenly shot up to 1.13% in 1946—1950 (probably due to the subsidies offered by Government) but got suddenly reduced to 0.62% in 1951—55. Wells supplementing recognised sources of irrigation also show a downward trend as regards the area commanded.

Cropping Pattern: Food crops occupy roughly 92% of the total cropped area and the rest by non-food crops. From 1.28 million acres in 1921—1925 (88.20% of the total cropped area) the area increased to 1.55 million acres (93.15%) in 1946—50. During 1951—55, there had been a slight fall of about 0.03 million acres. Cereals occupy 83% of the total cropped area. Pulses occupy 5 to 6% and oil seeds about 6%. Paddy is the major cereal occupying 80% of the total cropped area.

The area under paddy has increased from 1 million acres i. e. 75.16% to 1.33 million acres i. e. 80.23% in the course of half a century. The total area covered by cereals does not however show any increase. This means that some of the minor cereals have given place to Paddy. The area under pulses has been steadily increasing till 1950 and thereafter shows a downward trend. Oil seeds exhibit a steady downward trend. A similar picture is presented by fruits and vegetables. The area under condiments and spices as well as drugs and narcotics has been fairly steady.

Trends in Paddy Cultivation: As has already been stated, paddy is the chief crop of the district. It accounts for 80% of the total cropped area. The acreage, total output and yield per acre are furnished in the Table.

TABLE.
Paddy Area of Yields.

S. No.	Average for the quinquennium ending	Average	Output tons	Yield per acre
1	2	3	4	5
1.	1905—1910	1,086,649	608,437	1,254
2.	1911—1915	1,092,887	649,489	1,330
3.	1916—1920	1,087,076	714,505	1,472
4.	1921—1925	1,106,277	725,420	1,469
5.	1926—1930	1,097,841	767,620	1,564
6.	1931—1935	1,104,962	723,098	1,466
7.	1936—1940	1,188,328	888,920	1,675
8.	1941—1945	1,295,720	926,380	1,601
9.	1946—1950	1,341,447	865,204	1,445
10.	1951—1955	1,334,169	934,664	1,569
Total increase } percentage }		22.8	53.6	25.1

From the table it will be evident that the acreage under paddy has steadily increased from 1.08 million acres in 1906—1910 to 1.34 million acres in 1946—50 and there had been a fall by 0.01 million

acres during the succeeding quinquennium. The total output which was only 0·06 million tons some fifty years ago has been stepped up to 0·93 million tons in 1951—55. A point worthy of note here is that the percentage of increase in the acreage is only 22·8 while the percentage of increase in the total output is 53·6 (more than doubled). The yield per acre has also been stepped up by 25%.

Summary: The trends in Agriculture in Tanjore District for the past half a century has been reviewed. The total geographical area has increased by 3·5%. The area under forests has been doubled. Barren and unculturable waste lands including land put to non-agricultural uses have shown an increase of 5%. Area under culturable waste has been reduced by 1/3rd. The net area sown almost remained the same while the area sown more than once has been doubled. This increase is reflected in the total cropped area.

The area commanded by irrigation has increased by nearly 12%. Of the total area cropped, only 85·51% are irrigated and the rest depends on rainfall. Government canals account for 95% (nearly 10% more than the area commanded fifty years ago) and the rest by tanks.

Paddy is the major crop of the district occupying 80% of the total cropped area. The area under Paddy as compared to the total cropped area has increased by nearly 5% when compared to the figure obtained fifty years ago. This increase is not however reflected in the total area under cereals probably due to the fact that millets given place to paddy. The area under food crops shows a steady increase while the area under non-food crops has correspondingly decreased.

The acreage under paddy has increased by about 23% while the total output has increased by about 54%. The yield per acre has been stepped up by 25% in the course of half a century.