

PRESIDENT'S INAUGURAL SPEECH*

It gives me great pleasure to be in your midst once again to inaugurate the 14th Annual Meeting of the Indian Society of Agricultural Statistics. While I have not been able to be present at some of your recent meetings I have been following your progress from year to year with great interest and feel that, especially at the present moment when we are on the threshold of the Third Five-Year Plan, your deliberations will have a very useful rôle in helping to solve the numerous problems that we face in quickening the pace of our agricultural development.

The present is also a suitable moment at which we should look back and consider what has been achieved in the field of agriculture during the period of the first two Five-Year Plans. Expansion of irrigation potential as a result of progress of the various river valley projects and minor irrigation works would probably stand out as the most noteworthy achievement in the field of agriculture during this period. The large-scale production of fertilizers at Sindri and elsewhere is another achievement of great significance. I am glad to say that our research workers have bred new, superior varieties of crops and developed improved agricultural practices and our extension workers have created a new fertilizer consciousness amongst our cultivating community. Satisfactory as these developments are, we cannot forget that our agriculture has not only to meet current demands more adequately but to keep pace with the growth of our population. It is necessary therefore to examine our position from time to time and to take all possible steps to accelerate the pace of agricultural development to meet our requirements.

Some difficulties in our progress such as the non-utilisation of irrigation potential generated by the various plan projects point to the fact that we should further examine our approach to planning in this field. In animal husbandry also there appears to be a wide scope for improvement especially because Indian population is largely vegetarian and suffers from lack of protective feeds like milk.

The broad approach to agricultural development, however, has resulted during the past ten years in creating consciousness among

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our rural population of the need for increasing agricultural production and has also achieved some measure of success in securing higher production. I recall having observed at an earlier conference of the Society that the problem of planning in agriculture is analogous to and might be considered in the context of planning for an individual cultivator who is the ultimate unit of our agrarian structure. The resources ordinarily available to him are his land, his own labour and that of his family and some capital. The alternatives open to him are many. He can grow one or more crops and choose a larger or smaller acreage for each keeping in view all the while the investment he will have to make and the return that he was likely to get. Even after deciding which crops to grow various alternatives are open to our farmer in using his limited capital for providing irrigation, fertilizer, improved seed, etc., to his crops. His basic problem in allocating his resources is to secure the maximum return from them. He cannot possibly adopt any improvement measures which do not fit in with his needs and limitations of his resources. Agricultural planning for the nation must be founded on the needs and capacities of individual farmers in different areas depending on their environment. It has thus to take the shape of planning for small homogeneous areas taking into account the needs and resources of such areas. I am therefore glad to see that the need for planning for small areas is recognised in the Third Five-Year Plan, the community development block is put down explicitly as the unit of planning and development in the draft outline of the Plan and the final national targets for agriculture are proposed to be worked out on the basis of detailed agricultural plans for villages and blocks.

It is obvious that realistic planning for such small areas would require a variety of detailed agricultural statistics for the respective areas. These should include statistics of land utilisation, crop acreages, live-stock numbers, irrigation resources, extent of drainage, agricultural population and labour force, crop yields, etc., at the village and block levels. Information regarding agricultural holdings, their number, fragmentation, size, tenure, cropping, irrigation, availability of human labour, animal power and machinery will be required for formulation of detailed village and block plans. Detailed planning requires detailed data on the structure of agriculture in each small area. Collection of this information will, of course, involve appreciable effort and expenditure, but in the context of our development needs and the magnitude of our targets this expenditure would be seen to be modest and would in fact be a very wise investment as it would make more effective plan-

ning possible. Fortunately quite a substantial portion of the data is already available in the village records and has mainly to be reorganised after scrutiny and verification in a form suitable for purposes of planning. The decennial agricultural census sponsored by the F.A.O. and initiated in 1960 seems to offer a very good opportunity to collect the basic data required for agricultural planning and I hope that the fullest advantage will be taken of this opportunity.

Armed with this information the planners and extension workers can go ahead with detailed planning. If through the limitation of our resources it should not be possible to aim at the targets emerging from detailed village and block plans this information will still be useful in efficient allocation and utilisation of available resources. The basic information would be useful not only at the stage of planning but also in the implementation of the development programmes and at a later stage for evaluating the progress made in agriculture.

There is another aspect of agricultural planning to which I wish to call your attention, which might be called the human aspect. As I have said on an earlier occasion the problem in agricultural planning is not merely one of securing maximum return or income from agriculture or providing raw materials to industries but one of meeting the needs of the population and of alleviating the extensive under-employment prevalent in rural areas. The latter involves planning for the mass of rural population which is either landless or possesses tiny holdings hardly adequate to maintain their owners. The solution of the problem would seem to be in developing a pattern of rural activity such as dairying, poultry-keeping and various cottage industries that will reduce the seasonality of employment inherent in arable farming. This would require a study of employment opportunities offered by various cropping and farming patterns in different areas. This again would entail study of each small area and collection of employment and other relevant data for these areas.

I hope that steps would be taken to collect the basic data required for broad-based and detailed agricultural planning. The task of collection of these data presents a challenge to our statisticians which I have no doubt they can meet successfully. I trust that these problems would receive the priority they deserve in the deliberations of the Society. I wish your Conference all success.

I now declare the session open and invite Dr. Lokanathan to give his address,