Food Grain Production in India

Synopsis: Freedom from hunger and malnutrition presupposes availability of food-grains at reasonable rates all over the country. The present availability of food gain in the country is 38 gms per person per day, which is very low. India is an agricultural country and the monsoon plays a very vital role here. We had nine successive good monsoons and this year 1997 too it has been good and the target has been fixed to 193 MT for 1997-98. In 1994-95 India had the highest food-grain production ever achieved but it went down in 1995-96 and food-grain had to be imported. India is still a country of malnourished people and self-sufficiency in food-grains is still a far cry. The rapid increase in population has outpaced our food-production growth and there is an urgent need of a new thrust of food production. We need more and more technology and research in agriculture. Besides food-production, there are other problems like distribution, storage, subsidies etc. to be tackled.

Food is one of the basic human needs. It is the chief means of subsistence. Therefore, agricultural development is as important as industrial development. They are interrelated and interdependent. Development means providing means of sustenance to the people. Adequate availability of food-grains at reasonable prices ensures freedom from hunger and malnutrition. Availability and entitlement of food both are important. Food should be within the easy reach of the masses. India's population is increasing at the rate of over 2 percent per annum. Therefore, the production of food-grains, procurement, storage, distribution and timely movement to the deficient regions are to be given top priority. The per capita availability of food-grains in India is nearly 38 gms per day.

India is basically an agricultural country and in this sector monsoon plays an important role. The southwest monsoon starts in June and lasts till October and causes rains in various parts of the country in various degrees. Rains play a vital role in agriculture. The kharif crop depends chiefly on the south-west monsoon and the Rabi crop on north-east monsoon which blows from November to May. It brings rain mainly to the peninsular India and here the main crop is paddy.

India had good monsoon for successive nine years since 1989 and is now poised to have the tenth successive good monsoon. It is expected that this year's food production will be around 190 million tones which had declined to 180 million tons in 1996. In the expectation of good and normal monsoon, the target of food production has been fixed at 193 MT for 1997-98. But in spite of good monsoon last year, food-grain production slumped to 185 Mt against the target

monsoon and unfavorable weather conditions at the procurement time of Rabi crops. But again the procurement of food-grains this year has been way behind that of the previous year and therefore, the experts are doubtful about the improvement over last year's; target of 62.6 MT. 43 per cent of the total food production is that of rice and its production this year is estimated to the tune of 81 MT over 79.6 Mt for 1995-96.

When in 1994-95 India's food grain production went up to 191 MT from 181 MT for 1993-94, this was widely publicized and it was stressed that the country had not only achieved self-sufficiency but also gained export capability. But the following year it came down to 185 MT. The food-grain production in 1994-95 was the highest India ever achieved. It meant 210 kg per person per year. China produces 300-370kg. Per person per year and still they find insufficient and so import food-grains. It shows how underfed are people in India. As per the standard of nutrition norm, there should be 300 kg. Food-grain per person per year.

Obviously, our present food-grain production is much less than our needs and so the fact in India is a malnourished nation and about 30 crore Indians suffer from starvation and hunger. The present rate of increase in food production is 4 MT per year but we need it to be 5.4 MT. This increase is essential to achieve self-sufficiency in this sector. India population has been increasing at the rate 2 per cent per year. India's population by 2006-7 is likely to be nearly 1,100 million requiring 330 MT of food-grain but the Union Agriculture Minister has targeted the food-grain production at 285 MT by the year 2006.7, and it is still far short of the norm of 300 kg per capita per year. Moreover, it is doubtful if even this target of 285 MT will be achieved. Fortunately was have had good monsoons for the last ten years, but if the monsoon fails, it will be really disastrous because only 27 per cent of our cultivated land is irrigated. As such, there is hardly any scope for complacency. Unless there is new thrust to increase the productivity of food-grains, the gap between the requiremt5n and availability cannot be bridged.

The demand of food-grains in India is far less than the actual need because the people are poor and their purchasing power is absolutely low. Therefore, the air of self-sufficiency is artificial and false in regard to food-grain production. Actually we will need about 300 MT of food-grains by the turn of the vestry itself which is just 3 years away. Unless we adopt a strategy of higher production and target 300 MT by the year 2000, we shall be left far behind and this is not an unrealistic target if we tighten our belt and take appropriate measures to improve the irrigation facilities, check the soil degradation, which is over a million hectares per year, and have definite programme and policy in the

sphere of biological production. We need more and more technology in agriculture based on sound and fundamental research of our scientists.

The growth rate of population in the country has declined and yet India will take over China's position as the most populous country. There is addiction of 45,000 new mouths to feed every day. It means there is increase of 31 persons every minute in our population. Thus, every year we will have 16 million more to feed, shelter, educate, clothe and find employment. Consequently, population growth is bound to out space our food-production. Besides food production, there are other problems like distribution, marketing and storage. The problem of subsidy is also there. There are increased subsidies every year but then they don't reach the poor for whom they are meant. They are grabbed by the rich farmers, middlemen and bureaucrats who hardly need them.