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## INAUGURAL SPEECH\*

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*Minister for Food and Agriculture*

MR. DAMLE AND FRIENDS,

I CONSIDER it a privilege to have been called upon to address you on the occasion of this annual gathering of the Indian Society of Agricultural Statistics. It is a matter of great satisfaction to learn that the Society has completed six years of its useful life. The importance of the activities of the Society to the nation is already emphasized by the fact that the President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, has been the President of your Society from its inception, and continues to give his benevolent guidance to the Society in spite of his other onerous duties. It goes without saying that as the Minister for Food and Agriculture, I am in deep sympathy with the aims of the Society and I am happy to have this opportunity of associating myself with its work.

As Mr. Damle stated, the formation of the Society was largely inspired by statistical workers in the Indian Council of Agricultural Research. The Council has been known for its active interest in the promotion of the application of statistical science to agriculture and animal husbandry and I am glad to see that your Society is providing a better platform for the expansion of this work and for creating a wider public interest in it by organizing annual conferences and seminars in India and by bringing out a journal which, I am pleased to learn, has acquired a high reputation both in India and abroad.

\* Speech delivered at the Sixth Annual Meeting of the Indian Society of Agricultural Statistics, at New Delhi, on 25th February 1953.

I should not be very wrong, if I were to say that we are living at present in an era of statistics. A time there was when much persuasion was needed to convince people that statistics was useful and that statisticians should be given a serious hearing. Times have changed and it is for the non-statisticians now to appeal that they too may claim a hearing. We have now established larger and more comprehensive statistical organizations at least at the centre as compared to 10 years ago and the State Governments seem anxious not to lag behind. I hope, this is all for the good, but I do feel that this development would be justified only in so far as it helps us to improve the reliability of our statistics, a question which has been weighing on my mind for sometime, since I am required to look into the food statistics of the country rather critically. We have been arguing for sometime past about the pros and cons of self-sufficiency in food, how long it would take to attain it, what should be the pace of our progress towards the target of making good the gap between our food production and requirements and so on. Our discussion of this problem and our plans to achieve our aims imply the availability of reliable statistics of agricultural production and of requirements for consumption. In the former field, the I.C.A.R. has made a significant contribution by evolving a reliable method of random sampling of crop estimation and establishing its use as an annual measure in almost all States. In 1951-52, statistics of food production were available for 70% of the area under food crops in the country by this scientific method. On the basis of this method we have assumed our annual food-grain production to be about 45 million tons of cereals and another 4 million tons of gram, making a total of about 49 million tons. Imagine our bewilderment when the report of the National Sample Survey, which was published recently, placed this estimate at 60 million tons. This latter figure when converted into an estimate of gross production to make it comparable with the I.C.A.R. estimate, after allowing for seed requirements and normal losses, has to be further raised to 68 or 69 million tons. The discrepancy between the estimates from the two sources is wide and can upset all our assumptions, calculations and plans. It is, therefore, of utmost importance to know which of these two estimates is nearer the reality, for they have been obtained by following radically different approaches. A scientific comparison of the two approaches to bring out their drawbacks and advantages and to make recommendations for an objective, reliable and efficient procedure of obtaining production estimates over the whole country and in different States is urgently needed. It is for a social scientist's yours, possibly in collaboration with other bodies interested

very important issue, to organize dispassionate discussions on a purely scientific level on this subject and to help in focussing a correct perspective to bear on this issue. I shall greatly appreciate if through such discussions any independent body of evidences is made available to me or to the Government for enabling them to form their judgment of the actual position.

Apart from reliability, a second equally important requirement of our production statistics is their timeliness. During the past year, I had several occasions to call for urgent estimates of the prospects of food-grains in different parts of the country long before the estimates of crop surveys could become available. I require this information and the States Governments require it for planning the country's food policy by taking into account probable production and surpluses and deficits in the different areas. It is, therefore, very important that random sampling and other scientific methods should be applied for obtaining these early estimates of crop prospects so that we have a sounder basis for planning our annual food programme than is available at present. I understand that the I.C.A.R. had already provided for this improvement in the 5-year scheme for improvement of agricultural statistics that they had prepared and actual fieldwork had commenced in certain areas. I hope that this work will be extended rapidly in future.

Timeliness of statistics has yet another important aspect in connection with our 5-year plan for agricultural development and the work in the community projects on which it is proposed to devote a very large share of our national resources. It is essential that we should have reliable statistics of the progress made in the community projects or in the 5-year plan as a whole almost continuously, so that the effort could be directed along the most profitable channels at any stage, as soon as it is discovered that such a change is desirable. In the absence of such continuous assessment, we may find at the end that at least some part of our attention and energy was concentrated on the wrong spots and in the wrong directions. The Planning Commission has, no doubt, ensured that such continuous assessment is provided for as an integral part of the plan, but the problems are vast and intricate and a society such as yours devoted to the cause of agricultural statistics should look upon this problem as a vital national problem and give it the attention that it deserves by way of scientific discussions and research. I am glad to learn that your Society already recognizes the importance of such studies and had, on a former occasion, organized a symposium on the scientific assessment of our

Grow More Food Campaign. I hope that you will organize more such symposia on the various aspects of national development.

My reference to the Grow More Food Campaign brings to my mind one more aspect of this campaign in which the Statisticians can play a leading role. For increasing agricultural production, State Governments have been recommending to the farmers improved cultivation practices including better seeds, timely irrigation, use of fertilizers, etc. In doing this, they have necessarily gone by past experience and the results obtained at experimental farms. They now find that the yardsticks that they had assumed for increased production by various methods need to be corrected, as they were not representative of the results that might be obtained on cultivators' fields. This means that extensive trials under the conditions of actual farming practice are needed both for testing the usefulness of the recommendations made by the States and for demonstrating their values to the farmers. Take agricultural fertilizers, for instance. We ought to have valid experimental evidence to show on what crops and in what areas the farmer can use these safely and in what quantity he should use them in order to secure a profitable return. The usefulness of fertilizers has been recognized all over the world and yet we find stocks of fertilizers accumulated in the country or that cultivators are not fertilizer minded. I cannot imagine that any cultivator will refuse to use fertilizer, if he is shown on his own field or on his neighbour's field that fertilizers can increase production and are an economical proposition. A concerted effort to plan and carry out experiments on a large scale to achieve this end is needed and the Statisticians can take the lead in making this effort.

Before I close, I would like to remind you of one point which I touched earlier, *viz.*, the importance of bringing your activities within the reach of a wider section of the public who are now more conscious of the beneficial role of statistics in national welfare than ever before. Side by side with its scientific activities, the Society should consider measures for educating the lay public in the correct appreciation of statistics. This can be done by organizing symposia, group discussions, statistical demonstrations and so on in a popular manner and by issuing simple literature easily accessible to the public. This in itself will bring forth further statistical problems deserving your attention. I have great pleasure in inaugurating this session and shall now request Dr. Yates to deliver his address.