

WELCOME ADDRESS*

BY

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Mr. President, Delegates of the Indian Society of Agricultural Statistics and Friends :

I have great pleasure in welcoming you to this Thirtieth Annual Conference of the Indian Society of Agricultural Statistics. This is being held for the second time in Orissa. I am given to understand that the Nineteenth Conference was held in this State in the year 1965. It is no exaggeration to say that the decision for holding the Conference again in this State is not only proper but also timely in that the State is presently faced with acute drought conditions and the problem of feeding millions of people. I am really glad to find myself in the company of experts in the field of agricultural statistics and place before you some of the problems which I would urge upon you to pinpoint in the course of your deliberations.

One must confess that the development on the agricultural front has all along been lopsided. To add to this, agricultural operations are always exposed to vagaries of nature. Want of adequate and timely rainfall resulting in shortage of water during crucial periods of growth and lack of proper irrigation facilities and the resultant severe crop loss has broken the backbone of our people. The development of agriculture on modern lines is, no doubt, necessary for the three-fold objective of creating a base for industrialisation, for raising the incomes and the standard of living of the vast mass of population. This necessitates provision of adequate irrigation facilities, increased application of modern inputs, such as, fertilisers, pesticides and hybrid seeds and promotion of institutional credit. The other problem that comes in the way is the instability of the weather cycle which calls for adoption of a permanent policy to deal with this. We are trying hard to minimise the impact of the weather cycle and to resist the adverse effects of natural calamities by expanding irrigation and flood control measures and by

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developing more varieties of seed and more cropping strategies. But it remains imperative that we should go ahead with studies and find our remedies that seek to cope with the instability of rain-fed agriculture on the basis of earlier analysis which might provide a framework of policy. Unfortunately, there is no evidence that the search for policies and criteria is moving in the right direction and the fact remains that we still grope in the dark. Meteorologists are working to fathom the instability of the weather cycle. Agricultural scientists are trying to increase our capacity to cope with this instability. But neither group can promise the administrator an escape from the need to decide when and how to respond to the exigencies of rain-dependent agriculture. Thus, objective and meaningful measures against crop loss and scarcity consequences need be developed. Analysis along these lines cannot be systematically carried on by experts in agriculture nor by administrators. A permanent independent organisation that stands apart from the problem-faced agencies can think creatively and find out the solution. Hence, I would urge upon you to think and work in this direction.

The correlation between rainfall and production is a point to ponder over. Scientists are discovering that the so-called normal rainfall patterns of India are not as simple as tradition assumes. Doubts have arisen as to whether incidence of rainfall is the proper index of the problem that afflicts cultivation. The assumption that there is clear correlation between rainfall and output is not entirely obvious. I would request you to search for the correct assumption and derive statistical norms and standards and assist the administrators in formulating policies for maximising output which will be realistically possible for a system which is under great strain.

Agricultural statistics has recently assumed special significance. But want of a comprehensive and adequate data-base or a weak data-base restricting the scope for sustained efforts and endeavour, the timelag involved in formulating estimates and lack of proper co-ordination between various agencies connected with agricultural statistics resulting in duplication and discrepancies are the main problems which need be solved urgently in order that agricultural statistics become objective and reliable and far from something embellishing and misrepresenting reality. On the other hand, agricultural statistics should be a matter of current interest rather than a historical fact.

You will be glad to learn that a timely Reporting Scheme has been recently introduced in our State, with the objective of covering the entire State in five years. This is really a landmark in the estimation of area and yield rates. The World Bank Mission has agreed

to extend financial assistance for the agricultural statistics and data processing project. This will obviously help in augmenting the continuing T. R. S. Programme by equipping the field agency and improving the position of agricultural statistics in general. Attempts have been made to bring as many cash crops as possible within the ambit of statistical estimation and similar estimation of fruits and vegetables are under contemplation. Improvement is also noticed with regard to price statistics. The 20-point economic programme announced by the Prime Minister has stressed upon the urgency of arresting inflation and holding the price line. Governments are making sincere efforts to bring down the price of agricultural commodities by regulation, control, procurement, imports and public distribution system. Agricultural Statisticians should keep pace with the programmes and provide adequate and timely measures against any adverse situation. Nevertheless, there has been marked improvement in all fields of agricultural statistics. But all these improvements should not lead to complacency, as improvement to agricultural statistics, or for that matter in any field of science, is a continuous and never-ending process and you have still miles and miles to go to find a permanent and lasting solution to the problems connected with agricultural development.

I am glad that so many distinguished persons, agricultural scientists, planners, statisticians from all over India have come to our State for this Conference. I on behalf of the Reception Committee extend a warm welcome to all of you and wish that during your three-day stay in our State, you will not only discuss and deliberate on specific problems selected for this Conference, but will have occasions to acquaint yourselves with this land and the people of Orissa more intimately than what you already know from statistics.

I wish your deliberation all success.