

INAUGURAL ADDRESS*

BY SHRI N. V. GADGIL

It is a welcome opportunity for me to inaugurate today here in Chandigarh the 15th Annual Conference of the Indian Society of Agricultural Statistics. As you all know we in the Punjab have been concentrating not only on the collection of statistics but in achieving progress in agriculture and this truncated State which once threatened to be deficit in foodgrains, soon after partition, has done a lot to redeem the fair name of the pre-partition Punjab which was known as the granary of India. We here have been doing all that we could to reduce to a minimum our dependence on foreign foodgrains and are keenly aware that we must do a lot more. Not only the tremendous increase in perennial canal irrigation as a result of the nearing completion of the huge Bhakra Dam but also as a result of further efforts in the wide use of chemical fertilizers, better seeds, more manure, better ploughing, etc., we hope to exceed the Third Plan target for the agricultural production. As you all know, the country is pledged to produce 30 per cent. more in the agricultural field during the Third Plan period, which is of the same order as increase during the last two Five-Year Plans. This is by no means particularly difficult to achieve, given the necessary application of the farmer and the guidance of the expert and the provision of facilities by the Government. As is well known, several countries in the world produce about four times as much per acre as we do in India and if we are to overcome our dependence on foreign aid in the matter of agricultural produce and are also to build a progressive economy which will be proof against the vagaries of nature we cannot afford to neglect agriculture. I think that agriculture remains the pivot of our economy till India is self-sufficient in the matter of food. For a properly graduated progress in the field of agriculture statistics are important both for evaluating progress and also for planning it. I shall not go into the details of the kind of statistics required for this purpose as I am sure you would be discussing various aspects of the matter in your meetings. Suffice it to say here that statistics, whether agricultural or otherwise, are not meant primarily for quarterly and

* Inaugural Address by Shri N. V. Gadgil, Governor, Punjab, at the Fifteenth Annual Meeting of the Indian Society of Agricultural Statistics in Chandigarh on December 26, 1961.

annual reports of the governments and the various statistical organisations, nor for citations in articles for journals and magazines, nor for mugging up by university students taking their examinations but for a formulation of policy and evaluation of progress as already stated. There is in certain quarters a deplorable tendency to go on collecting statistics for the sake of statistics as if they were an end in themselves. Sometimes those engaged in this task as well as those who dip into the compilations of statistics lose sight of the fact that statistics are data on which certain policies and actions must be based, decisions must be taken and warnings read before the threatened calamity comes. For this reason it is essential that those who collect statistics should be honest and accurate and those who interpret them should also be honest and sensible if the old familiar charge is to be lived down that by statistics you can prove anything and that there are three kinds of lies, (i) lies, (ii) damned lies, and (iii) statistics.

2. Agricultural statistics should help us in deciding dispassionately what kinds of crops must be produced, in what proportions, how many crops should be produced in different areas in a year, what is the necessary area for optimum yield in the present set of conditions which have to be progressively improved and what means are necessary and what are the priorities for improving the yield in different kinds of soils for different crops in different parts of the country. Statistics must be mathematically interpreted and the correct conclusions drawn after sound and reliable experiments have been tried. For instance, we are all aware of the diminishing returns from fragmented holdings but the laws of inheritance being what they are holdings would continue to be fragmented even after consolidation. Thus consolidation and fragmentation of holdings seem to be continuous processes that must fight against each other. It should be borne in mind that we are pledged to co-operative farming, not as a fad but as a necessity if the limited resources of the small holders are to be utilised to the maximum. In this connection, it would be worth considering whether the administrative energy and the tax-payers' money expended on work of consolidation of holdings are best utilised when we should be having co-operative farming. It is difficult to understand, if there is to be co-operative farming as there must be with increasing understanding on the part of all those concerned, how consolidation of say 500 holdings into a hundred would improve matters if all these holdings should be constituted into one co-operative farm. It is immaterial for a co-operative farm comprising a certain area whether originally it consisted of five hundred holdings or a hundred consolidated holdings. The time and money, spent on the work of consolidation of

holdings, progressively being undone by fragmentation, would obviously be better spent on educating the people on the advantages of co-operative farming which would entail co-operative marketing and other fields of co-operation. There would be possibility of using better methods and greater resources on larger fields to produce optimum results, with the aid of mechanical devices. Then there is the question of using least expensive improvements to produce maximum yield and the question arises of relative priorities on account of cost involved for better seeds, improved irrigation, insecticides and pesticides, better agricultural implements, chemical fertilizer and manures. It is true that all these things are necessary for obtaining best results but a poor farmer may not be able to afford more than one of them perhaps at a time and would have to stagger the means with his improving economic condition. There is the question also of price incentive to people who often produce only subsistence crops. There can be no question of their reacting to the price mechanism generally when what they produce is barely enough for their needs. There is the danger of essential foodgrains being neglected at times in favour of cash crops. There is also the question of crop insurance to provide some protection to the poor farmer particularly in lean years. In this field statistics can be of much help and the importance of accurate statistics would have close bearing on the liabilities of those who have to pay for the insurance and also the extent of relief to be given in the event of failure, partial or complete. There will be the question of subsidy from the State and this has to be weighed against the present mode of help in times of distress such as the advances of taccavi and other loans, remissions and relief from the State. It should be carefully considered how far we can go in the matter of crop insurance and ensure that misuse and fraud will be reduced to the minimum and that the ordinary citizen or tax-payer will not be further burdened without getting better returns. Besides, those farmers who are well-off do not need to insure or at any rate should not be entitled to subsidy, if not also relief, to the same extent as a small holder badly hit by the natural calamity or a plant disease. If they are all to be treated alike, specially in the matter of subsidy, then the large-scale farmer would be gaining at the cost of others; without crop insurance he has been managing fairly well, putting by money when the crops are good and having enough to fall back upon when they do not come to expectations. But in the case of small farmers the story is altogether different. In the best of years he may be having barely enough for his living and when nature is harsh on him he may face starvation. So the two can hardly be equated with fairness. Further, about three-quarters of population in this country is dependent on agriculture and

dealing with agricultural produce which is responsible for about half of our national wealth. To indulge in crop insurance on a large scale and offer subsidies generally would have little practical sense as the country would virtually be subsidizing itself and that is not the way of progress. Anyway, it is little different from general price increase which, you will agree, is not a measure of development or prosperity. Once again, the remedy may be in co-operative farming. To begin with, they may be assisted by State service stations which may eventually pass on to the co-operatives. They can also have better storage facilities which can make up for a part of our deficit as food saved from destruction is as good as more food produced for consumption.

3. Agricultural statistics should also be helpful in determining the success of policy of securing land tenures. Sometime people have grumbled that after the upper limit of holding was fixed at say 30 standard acres in the Punjab, those tenants who were dispossessed were to be secured tenancy on surplus areas of others and this has amounted merely to reshuffling, change of landlords and tenants in many cases and the net result is not believed to be much different by some who have been critical of this policy. Studies in agricultural statistics should be able to throw light on the problem and silence criticism one way or the other and where it is found justified better methods must be devised not only for the reshuffling of tenancies but also for improving the agricultural yield, which should be our primary consideration.

4. While here we are concerned with agricultural statistics we must remember that improvement in agricultural produce is not possible without simultaneous industrialisation and that an economy based primarily on agriculture is a stagnant economy. If we are to improve the standards of living of the people we must industrialise and it is not possible to industrialise a country merely on the basis of income from traditional agriculture. As the country industrialises agricultural consumption increases and for industrialisation heavy industry is essential if we are not to remain at the mercy of the foreigners. This means more iron and steel, more power, more minerals, more coal, etc. Without more iron and steel we cannot have better agricultural implements and without industrialisation we cannot have fertilizer plants. It is a truism to say that it is much cheaper to produce your own foodgrains with the help of fertilizers than to import them, and it is much cheaper to manufacture your fertilizers than to import them, it is much cheaper to manufacture your own fertilizer plants than to import them, and to manufacture your fertilizer plants and other machinery it is necessary to have heavy industry, iron and steel, coal and hydroelectric power,

etc. The same applies to insecticides and pesticides, to tractors and harvester combines. Thus those who say that we should concentrate on agriculture and forget industry are completely in the wrong. We cannot have better agriculture without better industry just as we cannot go on importing the necessary foreign plants and factories if we have to go on spending money on imports of foodgrains and it is immoral to live on dole. If we have to have foreign exchange for our industrial development, we must be able to cut its expenditure on import of foodgrains and that we can do by producing more foodgrains in this country, meanwhile we must resort to some regulations and rationing and State trading in foodgrains.

5. While we are anxious to have reliable and more detailed statistics of all sorts, including agricultural statistics, in this country, we should not forget that we can learn a lot from the experiences of other countries better organised and more developed, both for agricultural production and otherwise. It would at times be unnecessary repetition to conduct experiments and interpret statistics on facts already well established and to determine lines of action already well settled and well founded. For instance, it is well known that certain kind of fertilizers are good for certain kind of crops in certain kind of climates and soils and it should be possible to go ahead with our development without waiting to re-establish these well-known facts by experiments and statistics here. But where certain differences are known on account of different conditions prevailing in this country it would evidently be necessary to have the required data and statistical returns before formulating a line of action. My only point in this connection is that we should guard against a tendency of piling up statistics and statistics without realising beforehand what we are to do with them when they become available and how far we can dispense with a certain set of collections, how far a substitute would do and what is the cost in terms of money and effort compared with the utility of the results expected. For example, we need no statistics to tell us that for a good part of the year an average family of a farmer is idle and that subsidiary occupations which do not interfere with the work of agriculture would be a great help in improving the economic conditions and the general level of the people. We need no statistics to tell us that malaria must be eliminated if working days are not to be lost and if the farmer is to be prevented from being forced to neglect his work through ill-health. It would be enough to know that malaria exists and it would be essential to eliminate it without collecting accurate statistics about the number of days lost in illness or the number of deaths caused by malaria. It is more important to know whether living in

a village continues to be as unhygienic as in the ages past and not so important to know how many battery radio sets farmers have in a particular village. It will be more pertinent to know how many fields are properly irrigated, what is the consumption of manures and fertilizers, than to know what was the average size of a corn cob in a field, for given the better seeds, irrigation and manures and fertilizers and freedom from plant diseases, it can safely be predicted that the yield would be better.

6. While the aim of collecting and improving agricultural statistics should be the improvement of agriculture, we must not forget that agriculture is meant to provide enough good food to human beings and cattle. As you all know, the population of human beings is fast increasing and the quality of cattle has been deteriorating. To a certain extent the question of feeding human beings and cattle raises a certain kind of competition for the sort of crops that should be grown and how many cattle could be usefully kept alive on the available fodder. Some people have inferred from this that before long vegetarians would increasingly be driven to change their food habits and taking meat and fish and eggs. I do not wish to go into this matter here but must say that we should improve the live-stock both in quality and in quantity to the maximum extent permissible by our resources. As far the multiplication of human beings the outlook seems to be dismal if we go on increasing at an ever-increasing rate and do not step up our food production rapidly. It is a hard job maintaining even the present low level of nutrition for the increasing population and we must do all we can to help family planning and to improve our living standards both in matters of diet and general conditions.

7. I now formally declare the Conference open.