

# Journal of the Indian Society of Agricultural Statistics

---

---

Vol. XV]

1963

[Nos. 1 & 2

---

---

## DR. RAJENDRA PRASAD

THE Indian Society of Agricultural Statistics was founded in 1947 with the object of promoting the science of statistics with special reference to agriculture and other biological fields. At that time Dr. Rajendra Prasad was the Minister for Food and Agriculture to the Government of India. Considering that nobody was then in a better position in this country than he to appreciate what this Society could do to promote agricultural statistics, the founders of the Society approached him with a request to be its President. It was very fortunate for the Society that he readily agreed to pilot the Society's affairs as its President. He continued to be the Society's President till the end of 1962, when because of his illness it was thought proper to relieve him of the burden and he was elected an Honorary Member of the Society, the highest honour that the Society could accord him, in appreciation of the valuable services he rendered to it. Shortly before his death on 28th February, 1963, he had conveyed his acceptance of the Honorary Membership of the Society.

During the tenure of his Presidentship he took a personal interest in the activities of the Society. First as the Minister of Food and Agriculture and later as President of India he was fully conscious of the role of statistics in agricultural planning and development. In spite of heavy preoccupations of the high position that he held, he made it a point to attend the Society's annual conferences whenever possible, and members will recall that he addressed almost all such conferences that were held in Delhi. On other occasions when he could not be present he sent messages of encouragement. Reading through his addresses and messages one is impressed with his profound grasp of the major practical problems of agricultural improvement in India and his judgment as to the direction in which the agricultural statisticians could make fruitful contributions towards their solution.

When the Society held its first meeting in 1947 he expressed the view that the essential prerequisite of any planning is the knowledge about the existing position which can be obtained only with the help of statisticians. He, therefore, looked upon the work of the Society as being of immense importance for the future of the country. While addressing the Society in 1948, he stressed the point that the lack of reliable statistics was a great handicap in planning for food production in the country and asserted that statistics must be made the foundation and basis for future planning. In this context of the paucity of accurate data he commended the method of random sampling for the estimation of crop production in this country as a great advance, as reliable estimates could be secured with its application without having to visit every field and thus avoiding the necessity of a very large organisation for the purpose of collection of production statistics. He suggested that similar sampling methods may be developed for estimating the cost of production of crops and for procuring correct data in regard to livestock numbers used for draught purposes and also for livestock products.

In a subsequent address in 1950 he expressed gratification that correct statistics were being collected in respect of the two main food crops, paddy and wheat; and recommended the extension of coverage of this method to other crops, as the information regarding food production would not be complete until all other foodgrains were covered. He suggested further that the programme should be enlarged to include the collection of comprehensive statistics of not only food supplies but also of food requirements.

The Government was then spending large sums of money through its Grow More Food campaign for providing improved seed manures and fertilizers, more irrigation and improved methods of cultivation. He urged agricultural statisticians to devise a method for assessing how far the campaign was serving its purpose in increasing food production. He also suggested a critical examination of other factors that affected food production, as for example diversion of land from food to non-food crops, the influence of size of holding on crop yields, etc.

On another occasion, in 1951, he suggested that the village records collected by the patwaris were a mine of information which could supply answers to such questions as whether large holdings were better than small holdings, what proportion of land was held by agriculturists

and by non-agriculturists, how the nature of ownership affected production, etc., and recommended that the village records should be utilized fully. He further recommended that there should be a census of agricultural holdings within the framework of the programme drawn by the F.A.O. in order to supplement the information already available through village records.

In 1954, he expressed his appreciation of the publication by the Society of Dr. P. V. Sukhatme's book on *Sampling Theory of Surveys with Applications* and felt gratified to learn that the sampling techniques devised in this country for crop estimation were being adopted in other countries as well. He further commended the method of formulation of yardsticks for different improvement measures which are required for setting up targets in planning, from the results of experiments conducted in cultivators' fields which represented farmers' conditions far more closely than the government experiment stations. In the same address he again suggested the study of the effect of fixing ceilings of landholdings on agricultural production, a subject in which he was deeply interested and to which he had referred in his earlier addresses also in one form or another.

In 1956 he called upon agricultural statisticians to collect for each small area in this country information on the basic structure of agriculture such as number and size of holdings and their characteristics, the condition under which land is held and worked by the farmers, the pattern of land utilisation, availability of animal power and the state of agricultural employment. This was a reiteration of his earlier recommendation that an agricultural census should be taken in the country. With the progress of the five-year plans he also emphasised the need for an objective assessment of the physical achievement of the plans.

In a message on the occasion of the 10th Annual Meeting of the Society held in January 1957 at Lucknow he said that availability of accurate agricultural statistics was only a shade less important than the actual tilling and bringing up of fallow land under the plough and as the Indian Society of Agricultural Statistics aimed at filling up of this gap of making available accurate statistics, he was following its progress from year to year with interest.

In his last address which he delivered on the occasion of the 14th Annual Meeting of the Society in 1961 he again emphasised that detailed planning requires detailed data on the structure of agriculture in each

small area. He was aware that it is not an easy task to collect the detailed data pertaining to agricultural holdings, their number, fragmentation, size, tenure, cropping, irrigation, availability of human labour, etc., and hoped that special efforts would be made to collect these data and trusted that these problems would receive the priority they deserve in the deliberations of the Society.

With his death an important epoch in the career of the Indian Society of Agricultural Statistics has ended. We have his teachings to guide us in the future and the best memorial, that the Society could set up to him, would be to provide that his teachings are followed steadfastly in the development of the science of statistics and its contribution to the development of Indian agriculture.