

### Agriculture Innovation: Agenda of New Government

The newly elected Pakistan government, committed to revolutionizing the agriculture sector, can take the lead here. In crops, they need to promote deep placement of fertilizers and popularize the use of farm management software. In vegetable cultivation, they need to promote tunnel farming and introduce the concept of high-roofed greenhouses. In the livestock sector, they need to set up as many dairy hubs as possible and adopt new animal feeding systems.

Besides, in each of these areas, smarter use of mobile apps has become the order of the day. To implement these things they require a proper policy on agricultural innovation.

The country had a countrywide agricultural innovation programme in the last PML-N government. But that was a programme, not a policy. Managed by the Agricultural Research Council of Pakistan in collaboration with several international organizations, most notably the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the programme has been somewhat helpful in boosting farm productivity. But such innovation programmes cannot substitute for an innovation policy.

Our national food policy designed towards the end of the PML-N government calls for innovating agriculture. But now is the time to develop an agricultural innovation policy, based on the premise provided in the national food policy, devised jointly by all provinces with active support from all stakeholders and the federal government.

The purpose of such a policy should be to bridge the yield gaps in all major and minor crops in the minimum possible time, economize the use of water and arable land for agriculture, enhance livestock productivity and sustainability, ensure fuller exploitation of horticulture, strike a balance between productivity boost and its short- and long-term environmental impact, and increase the per-unit value of agro-based exports.

Experts say and officials admit that the work should begin from developing



technology-based system for gathering and collating data for each segment of agriculture. In particular, they emphasize the need for completing the much-needed animal census.

Once we have more reliable data, its analysis through big data management devices and techniques can be carried out along several lines of objectives. The results can be used for developing to-do lists for each segment of agriculture where innovation is needed.

For example, dairy hubs cannot be set up unless we exactly know the current district-wise population of the livestock. For deep placement of fertilizers, it is necessary to know in which districts crops suffer more due to a lack of fertilizing agents, agriculture experts say.

Pakistan is currently facing a foreign exchange crisis and boosting export earnings is one of the most sustainable ways of keeping our external account in shape. Innovation in agriculture can bring about some required structural shift in foreign trade account. The food trade deficit, for example, closed at \$1.4 billion in the last fiscal year despite a big \$1bn decline in it due to a rise in food exports. "Much larger export surpluses of grains, fruits, vegetables and seafood can become available if we move towards innovative crop raising, horticulture development and fishing," says an official of the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan.

### Rescuing our Agrarian Nation

As Pakistan is still an agrarian country the role of the agriculture sector is vital in its economy. Moreover agrarian products provide raw material basics for our industrial sector is as well- making it a vital source of national income. The agriculture industry provides employment to a large portion of the labour force in Pakistan. More than 45 % of the labour force is thought to be directly associated with this industry, while more than 66.7 % of the rural population is dependent on agriculture. Agriculture has played an important role in the reduction of unemployment and disguised employment.

A country prospers and develops economically when its GDP increases. At the time of Independence in 1947, agriculture was the largest contributor to the GDP of Pakistan but as time passed, the service industry took over. Now agriculture has the third largest contribution in the GDP of the country. Livestock and fisheries are also a huge part of this sector and it not only provides employment to the people of Pakistan but also exports to several countries.

Livestock accounts for 40 % of this economic sector and 9 % of the GDP. Pakistan is considered to be at the fifth position in the Muslim world and ranked at the twelfth position worldwide for farm output. It is the world's fifth largest milk producer.



### Mango Gala is US gov't project to strengthen Pakistan's agriculture sector

As part of the United States' government's efforts to strengthen Pakistan's agricultural sector, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) has been working with the Pakistani government and private sector since 2009 to expand the market of Pakistani mangoes globally.

Stakeholders organized a Mango Gala in order to celebrate this long-term partnership and its many achievements. USAID/Pakistan Mission Director Jerry Bisson, Pakistan Agricultural Research Council Chairman Dr Yousaf Zafar, Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry President Ghazanfar Bilour and mango growers from all over the country attended the gala.

Addressing the mango sector stakeholders, Jerry Bisson said, "The US government, through USAID, is proud to partner with the Pakistan mango sector in developing new markets, while ensuring compliance with international grading standards and export protocols. We want to ensure that Pakistani mangoes are competitive on the international market. We are confident that by facilitating infrastructure upgrades, introducing new technologies and promoting market opportunities, we will increase exports to high-end markets, improving revenues for

Pakistani mango farmers and exporters."

The event brought together stakeholders from the public and private sectors to investigate trends and opportunities recognize local farmers' innovations in and reaffirm USAID's commitment towards uplifting Pakistan's mango sector.

USAID launched the US-Pakistan Partnership for Agricultural Market Development in February 2015 to improve the marketing capacity of four Pakistani value chains; meat, high value and off-season vegetables, mangoes and citrus.

Since 2009, USAID has supported mango farmers in upgrading fruit processing technologies and addressing export protocols more efficiently. Under the project's grant programme USAID has provided 13 state-of-the-art mango graders. These graders became operational in 2017 and will be utilized during the 2018 production season to grade export quality mangoes.

### Punjab agriculture department to provide assistance to farmers

Punjab Agriculture Department is to provide financial and technical assistance to farmers under a project to

develop the irrigation system on modern lines in non-canal areas of the province.

The department's spokesperson, Najaf Abbas said that assistance will be provided to those farmers who have sufficient quantity of water and their irrigated area is at least five acres, reported Radio Pakistan.

He said that application forms for registration in the scheme can be obtained from the office of the Deputy Director or Assistant Director, Water Management or downloaded from the website [wm.agripunjab.gov.pk](http://wm.agripunjab.gov.pk).

### China keen to accelerate cooperation in development of Agri-sector

A Chinese delegation comprising on scientists and agriculture experts here on Friday visited Pakistan Agriculture Research Council (PARC) and expressed their keen interest in cooperation and joint ventures in the fields of research and development in order to uplift the agricultural sector of Pakistan.

They held a meeting with Chairman PARC Dr Yusuf Zafar, who is also the chairman for Pak-China Collaboration in Agriculture Sector, said a press release. Speaking on the occasion, Chairman, PARC acknowledged the support of China in various projects of PARC and gave a detailed presentation about PARC,

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its mission and vision to achieve sustainable food security and poverty alleviation through knowledge and innovation in agriculture sector.

Yusuf Zafar also briefed the delegation about PARC and its role in the country's agricultural system and discipline of research including plant sciences, natural resources, animal sciences, agricultural engineering and social sciences.

He also highlighted the Pakistan Agricultural scenario and PARC major achievements in the development of different seeds varieties and engineering goods for the innovation of agriculture sector.

In the meeting, Pak- China experts also exchanged the agricultural information and discussed the areas of mutual interest to accelerate the development of agriculture sector.

The Chinese delegation appreciated the PARC's role for collaboration with international partners for the development of agricultural sector in Pakistan. The Chinese delegation was of the view that this meeting would definitely prove fruitful to further strengthen existing collaboration between the both countries. They also visited Land Resources Labs and Climate Smart Training and L

### Ministry seeks budget proposals to safeguard dairy farmers

The federal Ministry of Food Security and Research has sought budget proposals from stakeholders on regulation of milk powder imports, as it adversely affects domestic production of fresh milk.

The ministry has sought budget proposals to safeguard the interest of dairy farmers, which will be presented in a meeting scheduled to be held soon in Islamabad, the official said.

In this regard, the ministry has asked representatives of Pakistan Dairy Association (PDA) and Corporate Dairy Farmers Association (CDFA) to attend the meeting, which will be chaired by Minister for Food Security.

Apart from these two bodies, other stakeholders, including dairy farmers,

industry and academia will present their respective point of views on regulating import of milk powder. The meeting is a follow up of an earlier meeting, in which Pakistan Dairy Association presented budget proposals for 2018/19. Apart from other proposals, PDA highlighted the issue of lowering duty on import of milk powder and whey powder, which stands at 45%.

Commenting on the development, an official said, import of milk and whey powders has been on the rise for the last several years at the cost of local dairy farmers, who are unable to sell fresh milk due to availability of low-cost competing commodities.

Despite having one of the largest animal population-base and huge local production of milk, imports of powders indicate manipulation in the value chain, resulting in net economic loss for producers and consumers alike.

The use of skimmed milk and whey powders in the dairy processing industry, dairy products, biscuits, sweet making, confectionary industry and tea whitening segment has deprived the local farmers from getting right price of the milk.

Such unwanted trend, the official said, ultimately proved an unwelcoming development for the dairy farmers.

Availability of unregulated cheap powders have deeply penetrated in the dairy sector, especially in the loose milk segment that is neither organized nor regulated with any quality checks, leading to severe food safety and public health issues for the consumers.

The farming communities and the stakeholders have been raising their voice to highlight this situation and urging the government to take necessary steps by

imposing 100% Customs duty on the import of milk and whey powders to protect local dairy farmers like India and Turkey.

This vicious circle would increase rural unemployment and weakening food security in the country in addition to compromising the kids' nutrition that were already malnourished due to less availability of quality fresh milk.

### UAE CG participates in Pakistan Poultry, Dairy expo

President Mamnoon Hussain of Pakistan has attended the opening ceremony of the Pakistan Poultry, Dairy and Livestock Expo 2018 with the participation of Nasser bin Huwaidin Al Ketbi, UAE Consul General in Karachi. Addressing the inaugural ceremony, the President said there existed a huge potential for local production of poultry, dairy and livestock in Pakistan and the foreign investors could benefit from the most flexible and investment friendly policies of the country. The ceremony was attended by members of the diplomatic and consular corps accredited to Karachi, businessmen and heads of companies.

#### 600 Poultry Units given to farmers

Livestock department provided 600 poultry units to farmers at subsidized rates in the Dera Ghazi Khan district. According to additional director Livestock Dr Tauseef Tahir, each unit contains a cock and five hens which was given to farming families at the rate of Rs 1200. He said the Livestock department had sought applications from farmers and the poultry units were given at farmers doorstep. Deputy Director Dr Aatif Haseeb and others were also present. ♦

