

# Wheat: Staple food for the people

by Prof. Dr. Noor Ahmed Memon, Dadabhoj Institute of Higher Education.

The government allowed duty-free import of 300,000 tonnes of wheat to ease an enormous price hike. Under the ECC decision, the wheat will be imported by the private sector by withdrawing regulatory duty to the extent of the approved quantity. The wheat to be imported under the ECC decision would be allowed in the country until 31st March 2020 to ensure that the local wheat to be available from the start of April is picked up at the right price from the market.

The government had before July last year allowed export of about 693,000 tonnes of wheat, in which about 48,000 tonnes were exported to Afghanistan in October last year.

National food security and research ministry said in ECC meeting that about 4.2 million tonnes of wheat stocks were still available in the system. The quantity is enough for two months of domestic consumption 2.1 million tonnes per month, while fresh crop would also start coming to the market by the middle. On the other hand Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet has raised the minimum support price of wheat from Rs 1350 to Rs 1365 rupees per 40 kilograms.

Agriculture contributes 18.5% to country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and provides 38.5% employment to national labour force but it remains backward sector of the economy while high

Area, Production and Yield of Wheat						
Year	Area		Production		Yield	
	(000 Hectares)	% Change	(000 Tonnes)	% Change	(Kgs/Hectares)	% Change
2013-14	9,119	6.2	25,979	7.3	2,824	1.0
2014-15	9,204	0.1	25,086	-3.4	2,726	-3.5
2015-16	9,224	0.2	25,633	2.2	2,779	1.9
2016-17	8,972	-2.7	26,674	4.1	2,973	7.0
2017-18	8,797	-1.9	25,076	-6.0	2,851	-4.1
2018-19	8,740	-0.6	25,195	0.5	2,883	11

Source: i) Pakistan Economic Survey 2018-19.  
ii) Pakistan Bureau of statistics.

performing agriculture is a key to economic growth and poverty alleviation. Over the last decade, the performance of agriculture sector has fallen short of desirable level, mainly because of stagnant productivity of all important crops. Cropped area of the five traditional crops has also largely remained unchanged. Climate change also poses a serious challenge to Pakistan's agriculture and threatens country's water availability and food security.

Wheat is the major staple food crop in Pakistan and cultivated on the largest acreages. Its importance is evident as it constitutes 60% of the daily diet of common man in Pakistan. With per capita consumption of about 125 kg it occupies a central position in agricultural policies of the government.

## Production

At present wheat accounts 8.9% value added in agriculture and 1.6% of GDP. In Pakistan, wheat is grown in different cropping systems, such as; cotton wheat, rice wheat, sugarcane wheat, maize wheat, of these, cotton-wheat rice wheat systems together account about 60% of the total wheat area whereas rain-fed wheat covers more than 1.50 million hectares area. Historically, wheat production in Pakistan can be divided into three distinct periods: 1947-65, prior to the release of semi-dwarf wheat; 1966-76, the Green Revolution" period when High were rapidly adopted on about two thirds of total wheat area; and 1977 to date, post green revolution period in which HYVs with disease resistance continued to cover the major wheat area through coordination effort at national level.

During 2018-19 wheat crop showed marginal increase of 0.5% to 25.195 million tonnes over last year's production of 25.076 million tonnes but fell short of the target by 4.9% . The area under cultivation declined by 0.6% (to 8,740 hectares over last year's 8,797 thousand hectares). This nominal decrease in area over previous year was due to shifting of area to oilseed & other competitive crops. According to the initial data received from the provincial governments of current season (2019-20), during current crop sowing had been completed over 87% area as against the set targets. It was expected to further strengthened as grain sowing in Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan had witnessed tremendous increase.

Wheat sowing in Sindh increased to 27%, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 5.3% and Balochistan 16.08% respectively. However, wheat sowing in Punjab during the period under review remained sluggish as it went down by 2.71% as compared the sowing of same period of last year, delay in wheat sowing in province were late start of sugarcane crushing and some other issues. However, production increased due to better crop yield and healthy grain formation. Wheat yields in Pakistan remain low, lagging behind those in other countries with comparable agroclimatic conditions. However, any policies and support programmes aimed at increasing wheat productivity must take into account existing constraints in the wheat supply chain, especially the lack of storage facilities. Wheat area, pro-

duction and yield during the last 5 years are given in **Table-1**.

Some of wheat varieties are Sehar-06, Farid-06, Saasi-06, Khirman-06, Faisalabad-08, Mairaj-08, Lasani-08, Pirsabak-08, Hashim-08, Nia Amber-IO, Nia Sunehri-10, Millat-1 1, NARC-1 1, Punjab-1 1, AARI-i 1, Bharabi-i 1, Nia Sunder-il, Galaxy-i 3, Benazir-i 3, Nia Sarang-1 3, Pirsabak-l 3, Shahkar-i 3, Lalma-13, Pakistan 13 and Ujala-15. Due to disease-resistant wheat varieties are not used effectively by all farmers. Only a fraction of them take proper care at each step of wheat growing and harvesting. Sources in Parc say that in collaboration with CIMMYT international wheat and maize improvement centre, the local wheat research programmers are exploring varieties for not only higher yield but richness in nutrition value too. Wheat crop demands an urgent need to accelerate its production in Pakistan either by increasing the area under cultivation or by enhancing the productivity per unit area through the adoptions of improved production technology.

At present wheat crop is grown in large irrigated and rain fed areas of the country. Pakistan is basically an agricultural country, where 60 % of the population depends direct and 16 % indirectly in agriculture.

## Wheat Support Prices

Recent government to safeguard growers' interests. The increase wheat support prices comes after a gap of five

**Table 2: Largest Wheat Production Countries 2018-19 (000 Tonnes)**

Rank	Country	Production
1	China	134,340,630
2	India	98,510,000
3	Russian Federation	85,863,132
4	U.S.A.	47,370,880
5	France	36,924,938
6	Australia	31,818,744
7	Canada	29,984,200
8	Pakistan	26,674,000
9	Ukraine	26,208,980
10	Germany	24,481,600

Source: FAOSTAT

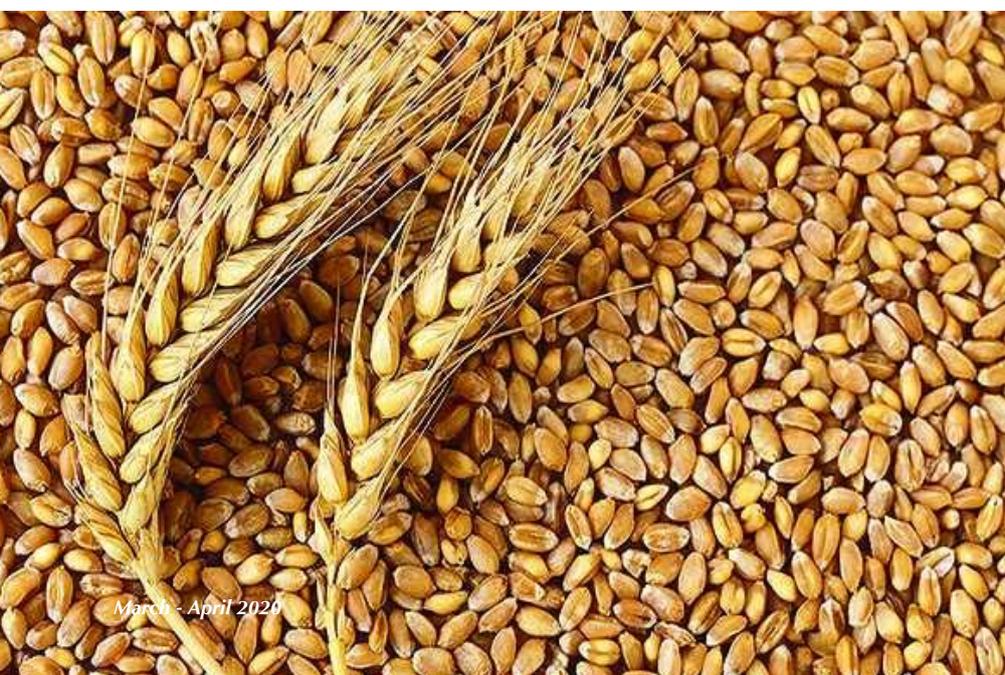
years, as the government last raised wheat support prices by Rs100 to Rs1,300 for 40kg bags back in 2014.

Although, the move will benefit local wheat growers, it is expected to push up prices of rotis which have already increased two times in the last twelve months owing to rising flour and gas prices. However, a Ministry of Food Security official claimed the new minimum support price would not translate in any increase in the price of rotis.

He said the minimum support will encourage wheat production in the country while adding that the revised price is also lower than the Pakistan Agricultural Storage and Services Corporation (Passco) official rate of Rs1,375 on which wheat is being released to provinces situation, cost of production, export-import parity and domestic producer prices.

It was estimated that the cost of production of wheat had risen in 2019-20 to Rs1,349.57 per 40kg in Punjab and Rs1,315.72 per 40kg in Sindh, as per findings of the Agriculture Policy Institute. The meeting was also told that the global wheat price hovers around Rs1,575 per 40kg and Rs1,440 per 40kg excluding duties.

The ECC also approved release of 200,000 tonnes of wheat at the rate of Rs1,375 per 40kg from the Passco stocks to the USC to compensate vulnerable



segments of the society and discourage hoarding and profiteering. The financial implications of Rs1.314bn on account of price differential and incidental charges will be absorbed by the Finance Division.

### Export of wheat

The federal government has turned down a proposal for an immediate ban on the export of wheat despite damage to 5% of the staple crop in recent rains. Pakistan Flour Mills Association (PFMA) had approached the government, seeking an immediate ban on the export of wheat. However, the government dismissed the proposal keeping in view current wheat stocks in the country.

The Federal Committee on Agriculture (FCA) estimated wheat production in the crop year 2018-19 at 25.51 million tons. However, due to recent rains, hail, and windstorms, the wheat production is expected to go down to 24.26 million tonnes because of a 5% loss.

In order to create physical and fiscal space, the federal government had allowed the export of wheat in the last three consecutive years. On January 29, 2019, the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) permitted the export of 0.5 million tonnes of wheat from the stocks held by Pakistan Agriculture Storage and Supplies Corporation (Passco).

The ECC now decided that due to sufficient availability of wheat in the country, there was no need to impose a ban on exports and directed the Ministry of National Food Security to strictly monitor wheat availability in the country.

**Table 3: Exports of Durum Wheat and Melsin from Pakistan**

Quantity: Tonnes  
Value: Rs. 000

Country	2018-19		2017-18	
	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value
Afghanistan	47,162	1,576,624	8,330	219,865
Bangladesh	26,600	714,751	--	--
Indonesia	60,276	1,918,729	--	--
Malaysia	45,257	1,332,984	23,823	351,901
Sri Lanka	76,681	2,339,497	16,400	378,445
U.A.E.	13,456	393,056	604	13,703
Vietnam	5,707	145,448	18,881	257,207
Thailand	3,398	85,383	12,525	39,137
All other	8,167	265,143	10,548	395,926
<b>Total</b>	<b>286,704</b>	<b>8,771,615</b>	<b>70,015</b>	<b>1,656,184</b>

Source: Federal Bureau of Statistics.

Export of Durum Wheat and Meslin from Pakistan increased from 182 thousand tonnes worth Rs. 4.198 billion in 2017-18 to 684 thousand tonnes worth Rs. 20.124 billion in 2018-19, thus showing an increase of 380% in term of value. Country-wise export of Durum Wheat and Meslin from Pakistan are given in **Table-2** and **Table-3**.

#### World Production

Wheat is one of the most important crops to humankind as it is a staple of many diets around the world. According to FAOSTAT, China produces more wheat than any other country, followed by India, Russia, and the United States. The top 10 wheat producing countries in the world collectively account for almost 510 million tonnes of the global wheat production. The global wheat market is dominated by China as it is among the top wheat pro-

ducing countries in the world. The top wheat producing countries are significant contributors to the global food supply as they are also the top wheat exporting countries around the world.

It is estimated that the developing economies consume almost 75% of the global wheat production and wheat constitutes around 25% of the total food grain production across the world. On analyzing global wheat production by country, it is seen that the first three top wheat producing countries together comprise almost half of the total wheat production in the world. The World's top ten wheat-producing countries 2019 are given in **Table-4**.

### Future prospects

Wheat crop is grown in large irrigated and rain fed areas of the country. Pakistan





is basically an agricultural country, where 60 % of the population depends direct and 16 % indirectly in agriculture. To feed a hundred million people, about 4.0 million farmers grow on 9.2 million hectares of wheat every year, representing 37 % of the total cropping area. The wheat crop is beset a variety of problems, reducing the yield to a national average of 2.9 t/ha. The most intractable of all the problems affecting wheat is that of weeds. As 37 species of harmful weeds grow in wheat field in different cropping systems; the most troublesome being *Philtres minor*, *Chenopodium album*, *Convolvulus arvensis*, etc. New projections released by the United Nations say Pakistan is among 5th out of 10 largest countries in the world. At present, the country's population has been estimated to be around 2020 million. Pakistan's population is expected to climb to 403 million by 2050, as per United Nations (UN) report.

Punjab government has decided to step out of the World Bank's US\$ 130-million programme named "Strengthening Markets for Agriculture and Rural Transformation (SMART)", a five-year contract launched in 2018 to slash official wheat purchases up to 2 million tonnes among other agricultural reforms. It is aimed at arresting the runaway flour prices and keeping farmers and other stakeholders' interest in the crop.

According to scientists, post-harvest wheat losses range from 2.5 % to 15.3 % depending upon the handling and storage conditions as these are high in private

**Table 4: Exports of Durum Wheat from Pakistan**

**Quantity: Tonnes  
Value: Rs. 000**

Country	2018-19		2017-18	
	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value
Afghanistan	1,775	46,530	2,302	58,735
Bangladesh	76,448	1,915,843	317,906	7,063,304
Indonesia	94,026	2,471,191	244,218	5,680,141
Malaysia	57,154	181,009	91,664	2,100,285
U.A.E.	36,977	1,396,338	18,459	439,600
Oman	105,774	2,858,056	181,903	4,143,035
Sri Lanka	21,073	765,523	35,560	820,562
Qatar	525	12,734	23,462	530,990
All other	3,062	1,705,312	204,115	4,615,724
<b>Total</b>	<b>396,814</b>	<b>11,352,536</b>	<b>1,119,589</b>	<b>25,452,376</b>

**Source: Federal Bureau of Statistics.**

sector due to the unawareness about pest management protocols and uncertain storage and marketing system.

A considerable amount of foreign exchange is spent on the import of pesticides which can be avoided by utilising our domestic natural resources. Moreover, Codex Alimentarius Commission of the WTO recommended organic control of insect pests to make food products according to the International Standards Organization. Keeping in view the demands, it was decided to orientate the research towards organic management of pest insects in stored wheat and selected local botanicals.

The situation depends on huge quantity of wheat grain to feed the population. The development of improved

variety with high yield, good quantity and wide adaptation will fulfill the requirements and uniform the socio-economic conditions of the country in ground and forming community in particular. To become self sufficient in wheat, Pakistan has all the required basic ingredients such as fertile land, sufficient irrigation water, hard working farmers, certified seed varieties of local and foreign origin and modern technology.

### References:

1. Agricultural Statistics, of Pakistan.
2. Pakistan Bureau of Statistics.
3. Trade Development Authority of Pakistan.
4. Pakistan Economic Survey-2018-179 Ministry of Finance. ♦