GREENING OF THE FALLOWS

bringing fallows into cultivation

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In view of the concern to provide food security to the burgeoning millions in India, there is a need to close the prevailing gap between potential and actual yields in the major farming systems in the country. The area under cultivation in India, in proportion to its geographical area, is among highest in the world- 143 million hectares as compared to a total of 328.6 million hectares[1], so instead of harnessing more land, emphasis need to be given on improving the productivity of land currently under agriculture through measures which can help farmers overcome technological, financial, institutional and management constraints. This would involve optimisation of productivity of farmers land through effective planning and increased flow of financial and managerial resources to villages.

The complexity and diversity of fragile environments and how they are managed, means that it is difficult to design policies that are successful in improving productivity. A prerequisite for successful interventions is that policies should address the needs and priorities of those who use degraded and marginal land. A major handicap of Indian agriculture is the unproductivity of the fallow lands. The untapped potential of the fallow areas if harnessed would enhance food production and provide greater benefits to the poor and marginal farmers.

LAND USE PATTERN INDIA (1983-84)

TYPE	AREA
Cropped Area	43.2%
Forest Land	20.5%
Culturable Wasteland	4.8%
Fallow Land	7.1%

[1] Basant Patro, Bijoy From Waste To Wonder, Wasteland News, Vol. XIII, No. 3, 1998.

Non -Agricultural Land	24.4%

Source : Sowing the Seeds for our Future, Report of the Second Asian Development Forum, 1993.

In 1950-51, fallow lands accounted for about 24 thousand hectares comprising of 17445 thousand hectares of land *other than current fallows* and the remaining 10679 thousand hectares of *current fallows*. While in 1982-83 about 23636 thousand hectares of land was classified as fallow land which was about 7.8% of total represented area. Andhra Pradesh occupied 15.48% of the total fallow land of the country while Punjab accounted for only 0.01% of the fallow land.[2]

Land is left fallow for a variety of reasons, namely - poor condition of farmers, inadequate supply of water, silting of canals and rivers, extreme weather conditions, soil erosion and low rate of returns. In many regions, land is left uncultivated as a normal crop rotation. This is an inefficient use of productive natural resources. Sometimes the land possessed by farmers is encroached and the farmer is unwilling to invest in it. The poor encroachers are generally unable to develop the degraded land due to financial constraints and tend at most one crop under zero purchased input conditions[3]. The land remains fallow for the remaining part of the year. Productivity of such lands could be as little as 10-20 kgs. of grain per acre and are no better than fallow lands.

In individual privatisation of common property resources, there is often a huge gap between the intention and reality of land distribution. A large proportion of the common land often

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[2] Joshi BH, Problems of Indian Agriculture - a state-wise study.

[3] Mishra, VK, Administrative and Procedural Hassles in Greening of Wastelands in Agriculture, Wasteland News, Vol. XIII, No. 2 1998.

went to the non-poor, and non-poor families tended to receive larger parcels of land. Furthermore since the newly received land was too poor, unproductive and difficult to develop without complementary resources that were unable to the rural poor. (Jodha, 1986)[4].
A large proportion of acquired land in such cases is left fallow.

Collective efforts need to be made to contain the problem presented by the formation of fallow lands by putting them back to agricultural use. Recurrence of such fallows vastly affects agricultural production. Extent of land left fallow lands may be reduced with the introduction of new crops, intelligent crop rotation, technical improvements of land and use of fertilisers and supply of irrigation facilities. Further, utilisation of fallow land for fodder production by planting forage grasses and legumes need to be encouraged besides using rhizobium cultures to improve their productivity. Organic matter recycling through turning waste biomass into compost and using it on farms and replenishing the micro and macro nutrients in the soil by mineral sources such as gypsum, pyrite and rock phosphate also need to be promoted. In a matter of few years, the productivity of such lands would vastly improve to take up cultivation of other crops.

On the other hand, government needs to introduce specific programs to help small and marginal farmers cultivate the land left fallow and improve the household food availability. Small farmers often own land on the top of the watershed, and such lands are degraded and plagued by problem of soil erosion. Only a small portion of such land can be brought under cultivation. The poor farmers are unable to invest in making their lands productive. The land is therefore left fallow or under cultivation of forage grasses. The farmers however do not state about land left fallow on record for the fear that fallow land might be interpreted by the government as the owner's incapacity for cultivation and therefore reclaimed for distribution to other landless. Therefore many people record their land as under cultivation even though in actual fact it might be a fallow land. Further, farmers possessing land on the upper reaches

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[4] Jodha, NS, Common Property Resources and the Dynamics of Rural Poverty in India's Dry Regions, Wasteland News Vol. XII, No.2 1998.

of the watershed are not be able to benefit as much from water conservation measures as those in the lower reaches. The land and water development schemes are more intensely taken up in the middle and lower reaches of the watershed where land titles and uses are clear. The small farmers are therefore marginalised from benefiting from such schemes.

Voluntary bodies and non-governmental organisations need to be involved in the task of greening of the fallows. Deccan Development Society, a NGO working in Medak district of Andhra Pradesh with rural association of *dalit* women initiated a "Community Grain Fund Program" through reclamation of 1000 hectares of fallow land spread over 30 villages which now produces almost 800000 kilogram of grains. The fallows were deeply ploughed for the first time and farm yard manure applied to increase their productivity. Cultivation of the fallow lands therefore ensured food security of the local community.

The government also need to encourage panchayat institutions to assign priority to activities aimed at minimisation the extent of land left fallow under their individual jurisdiction. They need to be moulded to play the lead role in motivating farmers to adopt measures for enhancing the productivity of the fallows.

Table 1 Land left fallow over the years (Thousand Hectares)

YEAR	FALLOW LAND
1950-51	28124 (9.9)
1960-61	22819 (7.7)
1970-71	19357 (6.4)

1980-81	24609 (8.1)
1982-83	23636 (7.8)

Source : Joshi, BH Problems of Indian Agriculture - a state-wise study.

Development of Fallow Lands ensures enhanced farm productivity and provide greater economic benefits to the farmers.

TECHNICAL INTERVENTIONS

Intelligent Crop Rotation

Improvement in quality of land.

Irrigation Development

Soil Nutrient Management

Research and Development - forage grasses, rhizobium culture.