**[Crop challenges](https://www.dawn.com/news/1779408/crop-challenges)**

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THAT Pakistan is a land of opportunities, is not mere rhetoric but a reality. Unfortunately, flawed planning, misplaced priorities, the weak writ of governments and thoughtless actions to attain short-term gains have pushed this country into a state of disarray.

Pakistan’s agricultural hands form nearly 42 per cent of its entire workforce and consume almost 90pc of water. This sector is a major support base for the textile industry, which forms the backbone of Pakistan’s exports. Maize, cotton, rice, sugarcane and wheat are our five major crops; these consume a major portion of land, labour and water in the agrarian sphere. But, despite this, their growth rate is negligible — just 1.1pc in the last two decades.

A low crop yield, non-availability of seeds, inadequate storage facilities, lack of infrastructure and the minimal to virtually nonexistent use of technology are key issues that plague the country’s farming belt. The regular and forceful impacts of the relatively new climate change phenomenon have also emerged as formidable challenges for this vital zone.

Furthermore, government intervention regarding some of the crops is also proving detrimental for agriculture. Wheat is a glaring example of the state’s intrusion as it is the only crop that the authorities purchase from farmers. The government did set a support price of wheat to benefit the agriculturalists but, unfortunately, due to the powerful presence of middlemen, the real farmers remain deprived of the value they deserve. Hundreds of billions of rupees are borrowed by the government to obtain and store wheat, which is then sold to flour mills so that the poverty-stricken can get cheap flour. Additionally, the government subsidises flour further at the utility stores level. Therefore, such excessive intervention from the administration has led to a wheat yield that is stagnant at around three tonnes per hectare, which is a fraction of global quantities. On the other hand, the maize and rice produce are free of direct executive interference and these are turning out to be the jewels of Pakistan’s agriculture zone as their high growth rate surpasses that of the other crops.

The corporate world should step in to help Pakistan’s farmers.

A deep dive into the farming sector reveals that cultivators in most parts of the country use seeds of poor quality, which is regrettable as the result is a low yield and an inability to withstand harsh weather conditions. Moreover, growers have limited or no access to modern techniques. As for water, much of this precious commodity goes to waste in the absence of any serious effort to introduce solutions that will help reduce its consumption.

To turn around the fortunes of Pakistan’s agriculture sector, the corporate world must come forward to play an active part by investing in the acquisition of high-quality seeds and provide the needed finances and support to upgrade equipment and machinery. Corporate participation will also free this sector from feudal clutches, and close coordination with the farmers will contribute significantly to an increase in the yield as well as ensure the well-being of those tilling the soil. Major organisations can also help restructure the sector and aid the government in generating revenue in the form of taxes. They will also create better storage facilities so that farmers can store the harvest as opposed to throwing it into the river when the desired prices are denied.

The involvement of corporates in dairy farming can serve as a benchmark — packaged milk companies working closely with dairy farmers collaborate with both large herd owners and those with two to three milk-producing dairy animals. Hence small herd owners can earn from the excess milk produced by their domestic animals, instead of having to dispose of it due to the lack of storage. This sector also contributes to the national exchequer and is set to export dairy products.

The induction of corporates is one solution, but I am sure there are numerous others too. Globally, agricultural land is shrinking because of the rise in population and increased industrialisation. Many countries are now buying land in Africa and other places to cultivate crops for their people. As the food crisis is expected to climb, Pakistan too has the potential to evolve into a leader in global food supplies by revamping its food production. The time is ripe for those at the helm of affairs to recognise the importance and benefits of making Pakistan a food-surplus country and lawmakers should strive on a war footing to achieve this goal.

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