

essays are not in any specific order. He suggests that you dip into it at random. Yes, indeed. It is an excellent arm-chair book for both professionals and amateurs.

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The State of Food and Agriculture 2000 – FAO Agriculture Series No. 32. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome. 2000. 329 pages. Price not mentioned.

This annual report issued by Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) contains authentic data on trends in food production in different parts of the world. It serves as a monitor of progress and problems. The problems considered relate to both natural factors like climate and political factors which determine public policy.

The year 2000 report points out that world agricultural production during 1998 and 1999 registered only modest growth. There is a general slowing down of agricultural growth in developing countries. Yield plateaus in major cereals and a steady decline in factor productivity (such as response to fertilizers) are widespread.

Besides providing data and analysis relating to the current agricultural situation, the year 2000 report contains a comprehensive chapter on the progress made in world food and agriculture during the 50-year period, 1950–2000. The progress made during each decade is discussed. On the positive side, it is evident that in spite of the increase in population by 2.5 times between 1950 and 2000, food availability and intake have shown significant improvement. Progress has, however, been uneven in various regions of the world, with sub-Saharan Africa registering the slowest growth rate.

Since 1970, the number of undernourished has doubled in Africa, while it has been halved in east and south-east

Asia. Overall, more than 800 million people are still chronically undernourished. Nearly 30% of them are in India. In addition, over 2 billion suffer from hidden hunger caused by micronutrient deficiencies, particularly iron.

The report clearly brings out that development strategies that emphasize on agricultural growth have proved to be cost-effective in providing the poor with entitlement to food. The 'technological capital' of a country plays an important role in determining the pace of progress in crop husbandry, animal husbandry, fisheries and forestry. However, the threat to progress in a country like India, which is endowed with a rich technological capital, comes from the serious damage caused to the ecological foundations essential for sustained advances in biological productivity. There are still no regulations in India which can prevent either prime farmland from going out of farming or the unsustainable exploitation of groundwater. The indiscriminate application of chemical pesticides and mineral fertilizers and lack of attention to micronutrient deficiencies in the soil are other factors which threaten the future of agriculture. Production agriculture still suffers from integrated attention to soil health care, water management, based on the principle 'more crop per drop', control of pests, pathogens and weeds and post-harvest technology.

The report concludes with the statement, 'It is humankind that is responsible for having imposed hunger on itself for so long, but humankind is also capable of eliminating this burden. There can be no greater challenge than this'. The report also refers to the 'window of opportunity' opened up by globalization. However, all the evidence since 1994 when the World Trade Agreement came into force indicates that the Agreement on Agriculture has resulted in an unfair and unequal trade bargain. OECD countries have been increasing domestic support to their farmers, providing export subsidies and restricting market access through both tariffs and sanitary and phytosanitary regulations. The Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) component of the agreement is resulting in a rapid expansion of proprietary science and shrinking of public good research supported from public funds.

Indian agriculture is now at the crossroads. Without attention to sustainable natural resources management and to improving crop productivity and post-

harvest technology, it may be difficult to sustain the economic viability of farming. At the same time, agriculture is the backbone of the livelihood security system of the country, since 70% of the population depend on agriculture for income and employment. External threats include competition for important foods and transnational super-markets, expansion of proprietary science and potential changes in climate and sea level caused by global warming. We should develop packages of technology and public policy to address these issues.

The report refers to the impact of the far-reaching agrarian reforms introduced in China in 1978. China is unique in developing an integrated strategy for on-farm and non-farm employment. Over 100 million agricultural workers were provided with employment opportunities in Rural Township enterprises. This reduced the pressure of population on land. India can benefit from the Chinese experience and develop a strategy for providing 100 million workers belonging to landless labour families, opportunities for skilled livelihoods in the off-farm sector. This will call for well-planned efforts in farming systems intensification, diversification and value-addition.

FAO is to be complimented on the design of these annual *State of Food and Agriculture* reports. They are both descriptive and prescriptive. In addition to a critical analysis of the available data relating to agricultural production and food security, one or two topics of general interest are taken up for more detailed attention. This year's special chapter provides a synoptic account of global agricultural evolution since 1950. The technological and public policy landmarks are flagged. The report is user-friendly. The report also included a SOFA 2000 diskette containing time series data for 150 countries in English, French and Spanish. The diskette includes FAOSTAT TS softens to ensure easy access and use.

All institutions interested in food and nutrition should possess a copy of this valuable report.

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