

Debate over Food Target Proposals

We agree with the following remarks of Dr. Swaminathan made in his Presidential Speech at the 63rd Session of Indian Science Congress held in Visakhapatnam, 1976.

"The small Farmers - Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labourers Development Agencies aim to generate more opportunities for self-employment through a diversified farming structure".

There is "the absence of a close linkage between the available avenues of employment on the one hand and the training on the other", though agriculture, forestry and fisheries account for the employment of over 80% of the labour force".

Resulting in the lacuna of "training for self-employment" we need, an employment guarantee scheme as an integral part of an over-all resource utilisation strategy, a rural drinking water and fuel supply policy and scientific plant-animal-man food chain policy for each agro-ecological area based on long term considerations of the fertilizer, feed, water and land requirements of each production area.

We also appreciate his call for organising "the social support necessary for the effective adoption of a tech-

nological innovation" and for a "link between those who move society and those who move science and technology".

We have yet to obtain, as he says "more intensive work on the preparation of an integrated inventory of land, water, mineral and other natural resources, area by area and also what he calls "Cultural energy" and "digestible energy" and control of "triple alliance of of pests, diseases and weeds", a "national grid of small, medium and large fertilizer plants and compost units and an expanded soil testing service" and "post-harvest technology". So much more in so many directions has to be done before Scientists and administrators can justifiably ask peasants and legislators to think of the need for Compulsive, regulatory demands to be fulfilled by our self-employed peasantry.

We agree with this eminent Scientist in saying that "all groups must accept the concept of productivity without proposed compulsions".

OUR POINTS OF DISAGREEMENT

But we are unable to join him in demanding "Agricultural Productivity Regulations (A.P.R.) amounting to fixing and enforcing prescribed minimum production targets, on pain of displacing peasants from their holdings for failure to satisfy the targets".

We fear that his Prescription for "obligations on the Part of State Government" corresponding to "obligations of farmers under Agricultural Productivity Regulation",

(A.P.R.) are not likely to be fulfilled and cannot be enforced either by affected peasants or by legislature and therefore, Sri Swaminathan's proposals would only result in enslaving peasantry to the new A. P. Regulations.

We are sorry to say that we cannot endorse Dr Swaminathan's suggestion that "Minimum Production target will have to be fixed and a farmer who does not achieve the target continuously for a few years without valid reasons should stand every chance of losing his land. Minimum target such as 3 tonnes per hectare per year from two crops on irrigated land and 1 tonne per hectare per year in areas with over 1000 mm rainfall are neither ambitious nor unrealistic if proper institutional arrangements are made for supporting farmers. Appropriate Agricultural Productivity Acts by our State Governments could provide the social compulsion for co-operative efforts in areas like soil and moisture conservation and pest control. As an ingredient of such legislation, consideration deserves to be given to minimum limits to operational land holdings below which the holding should not be fragmented as a unit of management, whatever be the ownership pattern". What a painful and frightful prospect for the crores of old-time small-holders (357 lakhs in 1971) and tens of lakhs of new land-holders arising from the gifts of small-pieces of land in the wake of land ceilings legislation.

Dr. Swaminathan has failed to appreciate fully the principal purposes for which the national policy favours the trend "towards an increase of small holdings", which is being intensified by the distribution of surplus

lands arising from the implementation of Ceilings Acts among maximum number of hitherto landless Harijans, tribal people and backward classes. These purposes are both the diffusion of landed property among the largest numbers of agriculturists and also providing small holdings to the hitherto landless agricultural workers to serve as the source of economic independence and field for the display of their initiative and enterprise and plough in all their own surplus labour and that of their dependents in the production of kitchen garden products at the lowest. Therefore to suggest legislation to set "minimum limits to operational land holdings, below which the holding should not be fragmented as a unit of management, whatever be the ownership pattern", to go against "the national policy on size of holdings"- which Dr. Swaminathan accepts in another breath. More, over, when such suggestions are made from such a prestigious platform by so eminent a President, Government and Parliament have to realise how great can be the sense of insecurity and loss of incentive to work their utmost and invest all the capital and labour that they can command and achieve maximum crops, whether they be food or industrial or kitchen crops. It is because of our conviction, borne out by the achievements of our own small-holders and also those Communist small-holders to whom Communist regimes all over the World have grudgingly allotted kitchen-garden holdings upto $2\frac{1}{2}$ hectares for family. We have been championing for decades the cause of these crores of small-holders to own and gain self-employment on their own holdings.

The successive Land Cellings Acts, have brought down maximum land-holdings, first on the basis of

every person in a family entitled to hold property and now, only on the basis of the whole family as a Unit including man, woman, and minor children.

According to the present Ceilings Acts the male members of a farmers family having two minor sons will soon be reduced to having four to six acres of wet-land, for each of them on their attaining majority. Therefore such small farmers will come to form atleast 80% of all self-employed small or marginal farmers by 1985.

Government and Parliament, scientists and sociologists have to devise such agricultural policies as to suit the small-holders, engaged in self-employment and buttressed by service-Co-operatives and shed their earlier prejudices or predilections against land-holders of pre-Indira era. and learn to hail all the agriculturists as helpful, non-exploiting Co-partners in building our Socialist Commonwealth.

We dare not agree to "legislative measures for integrated rural and urban development designed to promote the symbiotic growth of the village and the City" and setting up "minimum limits for land productivity and operational holdings for irrigated land in each area to provide the social compulsion for co-operative endeavour and proper use of land." Why?

Because these proposals for legislative and administrative compulsions to be imposed upon crores of our self-employed peasants, most of whom own less than five acres of land per family are likely to spell the end or erosion of the basic content of Freedom; in displaying

to get on, with impunity, without fulfilling even a modicum of such responsibilities. Is it ever possible for peasants to get the Government Officers to pay any penalties for their failures or to persuade them to confess their failures and make suitable amends by reducing the targets, without demanding too heavy bribes or individual satisfactions.

How are they to estimate the minimum or average target of production for each crop? Dr. Swaminathan has suggested 3 tons of rice minimum per hectare. Was it based on the achievements over 10 or 15 years of Government farms, in the States or of the Central Government? Is it of the new varieties of food crops or old crops which prevail over 50% of the cropped areas?

Who are to be engaged in making these estimates? Are they to be merely agricultural officers or Samiti Presidents or Revenue Officials or all combined? Surely these estimates have to be based on reliable data collected, checked and cross checked by both the Revenue, Agricultural experts and compared and contrasted with the experiences of actual average-type farmers of small, medium-sized holdings, and not merely the few abnormal Krishi Pandits.

Are these estimates to be made over the whole District or Delta or on the basis of Samiti areas or Taluks? Do we have enough of well-trained and independent officers at Taluk-levels to make such estimates? Does not that procedure lead to corruption from the nervous public or Zhulum from agricultural or revenue authorities from the Ministries to District levels, since their non-

fulfilment would spell disaster to tens of thousands of peasants in each Taluk or quickening the governmental policy of evicting the so-called inefficient or incompetent or recalcitrant peasants?

Neither Dr. Swaminathan nor Mr. Shinde has taken care to consider whether it would be possible for the governments in States and at the Centre to create the requisite agricultural infrastructure and industrial equipment to ensure adequate and regular production, distribution of tested seeds, manures, pesticides? They have so far failed to detect and remove the growing menace of adulteration in every one of these inputs.

Government has not been able to devise a suitable mechanism of adequate and regular flow of money supply to agriculture, without rushing into frenzies of credit squeezing or withdrawing credit to Banks and Co-operatives. While complaining against usurious rates of interest charged by private money-lenders, Banks and Co-operatives are being encouraged to charge 18 to 24% interest for agricultural credit, thus starving peasants for their most fundamental or basic input, that is credit.

These protagonists of agriculture - targets say that only if and when their conditions of supplying both the requisite quantities of inputs within the stated periods of agricultural activities and seasons are satisfied, the enforcement of penalties for peasants' failure to fulfil them would arise. But there can never be any guarantee that once the legislative powers are given to administration, the officers who are pressed for higher and higher production from the Secretariat and who have to save their skins would not make out their case only to impose

penalties on peasants, while ignoring or excusing the failures of the concerned administrative authorities in their part of the bargain. There is also no guarantee that in enforcing Central Government's Policies the State Ministers would not collude with the officers to oust as many peasants as possible from their holdings after castigating them as incompetent or obstructive, and unproductive food producers.

When such an eminent scientist as Dr. Swaminathan could contemplate even from such a prestigious pedestal as the Science Congress, the minimum target of 3 tons, even when the equally prestigious Agricultural Commission of which he is a member could only hope for 60% of that, right upto 1985, how can we be sure that the type of greenish experts over crop-cuttings and yield-counters would not prove to be the devils against self-employed peasantry?

We told these two high-powered friends that neither in communist countries nor in democratic countries, are such minimum targets fixed and enforced upon agriculture.

They may wish that we should not read such dire possibilities into their so-called scientifically simple and economically essential suggestion. But is not their suggestion of fixing minimum or average targets tied to their plea for legislation for their enforcement?

Therefore it is that we have thought it fit to protest against this new manoeuvre of minimum or average targets and the suggested legislation for their enforcement.

We are convinced that the bulk of peasants are intelligent, hard-working and bent upon maximising the production from every bit of their holdings. Even the Prime Minister has praised them for having doubled the production within these decades. It is the Governments which have so far failed so miserably to assure them even minimum of protection or supply the needed inputs. No other industry continues its production as agriculture does, after paying 24 to 36% for the supply of Capital. More than 100 mills in Textile industry are being taken over by Government and run at a cost of Rs. 5 Crores per mensem, in order to maintain a few lakhs of workers, whereas self-employed agriculturists-crores and crores-are being threatened with such an attractive veneer of scientific approach.

On the other hand, Government has not even equipped the bulk of our peasants with elementary education. Can Radio propaganda be an adequate substitute for elementary schooling in Three R's? Are peasants to be penalised because they do not go on strike and refuse to work on land as a protest against governments' failures as partners in production or to assure economic prices for the products of their self-employment?

It has nowhere been demonstrated that any substantial numbers of self-employed peasants of even the avowedly under-developed areas in our States have declined to adopt whatever demonstrably improved methods, implements and crops have been placed before them with the assured supplies of credit and unadulterated inputs and remunerative prices. It is only now some efforts are being made by authorities to assure some supplies of

some inputs with some assurance of purchasing whatever is offered at the procurement or support prices; that too in a few areas within fairly advanced States.

Once the proposed targets come to be imposed through legislative authority, for each area, and "Show Cause Notices" are allowed to be served on such peasants as are said to have failed to produce upto the targetted minimum or average yields, not only the concerned administrative officers but also groups in villages who are opposed to other groups of peasants will be tempted to get such notices issued against each other, just to wreak vengeance for personal, or village factional purposes. Only rarely will that come to be done in the interests of greater and better production. Some who are keen on gaining land for self-employment may also ask for such Show Cause Notices. Thus a new avenue will be made available for further divisions, disputes among peasantry and disruption of Civic and agricultural occupation harmony. The mere threat or fear of such notices being issued would be enough to inhibit incentives, enterprise, and the elixir of the highest productive effort, inherent in self-employment.

Whoever has carefully noted the mischief caused by Panchayat elections can easily understand the evil potency of this proposal for further weakening of rural social harmony. Surely agricultural Scientists and Sociologists and those who value social Ecology as a principal force for greater production and social advancement cannot view such evil possibilities with any sense of equanimity.

One of the best means to exhort peasants to do their best in implementing the advice and utilising the

official and social aid proffered to the utmost is to offer them bonus, by way of cheaper and larger quantities of inputs for every additional quantity of production achieved over and above the local average as their Contribution to the total national or State-wide Production. Self-Employment is the acme of democratic aspect of Socialism and it ought not to be mistaken for the earlier conception of isolated peasants, refusing to have anything to do with outside World whom Dr. Swaminathan seems to have in his view. Governmental assistance and protection—so belatedly being offered—ought not to be turned into suffocating, freedom-killing and baby-coddling tyranny and punishing rod in the hands of power-hungry officials.

Is it a scientific approach to jump from a few tentative results from such isolated experiments not only to the contemplation of enforceable targets of production but also the need for passing special legislation to penalise those peasants who fail to achieve these targets? And what targets? One authority thinks of minimum targets. Another, politically oriented deigns to suggest only average targets and is willing to absolve smallholders from this impossible and impracticable halter.

We can assure our scientists and legislators and over-paid urban masses demanding cheap food supplies that self-employed peasants are not at all the Work-shirkers or anti-progressives. It is the ever-swelling ranks of administration and the urban-based politicians and their proteges, the industrialists, merchants, distributors etc. who have yet to learn to discharge their minimum duties towards the Crores of self-employed peas-

ants and help them to concentrate on their principal task of nursing, feeding and coaxing the Mother Earth which reaches them through their prized small holdings to yield the best and the largest possible crops by assuring them all the supplies of inputs at the proper times and insure them from the vicissitudes of seasons, man's made adulterations and fluctuations in Prices.

We therefore appeal to our Scientists, administrators and authority-oriented politicians not to hold this new threat of fixing and enforcing targets of production, as the Democles Sword from Swaraj Governments, over our self-employed peasant proprietors. Let them not upset the security of peasant proprietorship, assurance of economic freedom and social independence which are, the hall-marks of self-employment on their holdings through this undemocratic and coercive and corrosive atom-bomb.

Indian peasant Institute
Nidubrolu (A.P.)
Rural Peoples Federation

N. G. RANGA,
15-5-76

H. Sayoji Rao, B.E., Retired Chief Engineer President.
G. N. Rao, M.B.A., (U.S.A.) Secretary.
P. Rajagopala Naidu, B.A., M.L.C.
Y. Venkatrao, M.L.A., B.A., B.L.
P. Koteswara Rao, M.A., B.L.
H. S. Dwivedi, M.A., LL.B.
S. V. Pantulu
A. Iswara Reddy, M.A., EX. M.L.A.
Dr. V. V. Gopalakrishna, Ph.D.
T. Ieswar Rai, B.Sc., (U.S.A.) Patna.

HAPPY NEW YEAR

NIDUBROLU,

6-1-76

My dear Dr. Swaminathan,

I hope you remember that I sent you Congratulations when you were offered the MAGSAYSAY award and membership of the Royal Society (F.R.S). I admire your achievements in Agricultural Research and its practical results I am glad your services are being utilised by the National Planning Commission.

I wish now to draw your attention to the economic untenability and political unsuitability and impracticability of fixing and enforcing "minimum limits for land productivity" that is "minimum targets such as three tonnes per hectare per year" and passing "appropriate agricultural productivity acts" by State governments providing social compulsion for co-operative effect", as suggested by you in your Presidential speech at Visakhapatnam in the Indian Science Congress.

When the Agricultural Commission of which you are also a member could visualise only an average production of 1.6 and 2.1 tonnes per hectare by 1985, how could we aim at the minimum of 3 tonnes? Even supposing we expect 2 crops to be raised, I am afraid your estimate for the minimum production is too high, under whatever possible combination of facilities that we can develop, such as extension of irrigation, tapping underground water.

I dare say you are aware of the incidence of what are so far inescapable vicissitudes of seasons. For in-

stance, the yields of paddy under the deltas of Godavari, Krishna, Nagarjuna Sagar have suddenly slumped during Nov-Dec. 1975 from the expected 15 to 25 bags per acre to 5 to 10 bags, just because of unseasonal or excessive rains, poisonous winds from the Bay only 2 to 3 Weeks before the reaping period. The fate of peasants raising crops from rain-fed lands is much worse, not only because of unseasonal rains, or their total failure but also the increasing damage being caused by old as well as new Pests. You know how areas like Rayalseema, Rajasthan, Belgaum, Dharwar, Ratnagiri are subject to frequent droughts and several areas in Gangetic valley are liable to be flooded periodically. So to think of imposing minimum targets cannot be statesman-like. Neither Soviet Union nor Peoples China, not even U.S.A. have so far surmounted such unforeseeable and incalculable disasters.

If however you still feel convinced of the need for "appropriate agricultural productivity acts" and imposing "minimum targets". I hope that as a scientist, you would agree to await the results of experiments to be made on the "Government owned, managed farms" such as the Suratgarh State Farm for atleast five years before you expect government to undertake the coercive "social compulsion for co-operative effort to achieve "minimum targets".

I am convinced that our democracy even when fortified by unending "Emergency" cannot succeed to impose the minimum targets per hectare per annum, if it is to co-exist with our peasant proprietorship and self-employed social economy of our more than hundred

million peasants. So far Soviet Union, Peoples China have not succeeded in achieving minimum targets from their collectivised or co-operativised agriculture. And they are obliged to insure satisfactory response from their agricultural masses working on their farms by conceding such incentives as half to 2½ hectares of land as individual or family holdings, freedom to own a few dairy or other animals and market their surplus private produce. Need we lose our peasant self-employed economy, to come back to Peasant economy only by back-door, as in Communist Countries? Can we not learn from their bitter, inhuman experiences of destroying millions of self-respecting, hard-working peasants in that cruel process of social compulsion and dragooning them into Collectives?

We can achieve so much more agricultural progress and social uplift by utilising the results of the excellent researches you are all making through persuasive and demonstrative means. Indeed, have we not achieved remarkable results during this past decade in enhancing the average yields and total production of long-staple cotton, jute, paddy, wheat, potato, hybrid maize, tobacco, coffee, tea etc.?

Dear Doctor, self-employed peasantry are the bull-work of our democracy and kernel of Socialist society and service Co-operatives should be utilised to the maximum extent to supplement the work of our peasants; Ecology is what we need and if State administrations can be induced to work as sincerely and soulfully as our peasants-men and women-are actually doing, we can achieve as good as, if not, better results from our agri-

culture, thanks to the unbreaking contributions from our agricultural scientists.

I request you to move about these socio-economic measures as you do with your scientific experiments. After all, we have to move in a democratic manner.

Democracy, self-employment and free peasantry, all functioning within the ambit of freedom buttressed by Socialist discipline and social justice are as important as bigger and better production and I hope you will find it possible to re-orient your drive towards maximum production in harmony with Indian social institution of self-employment and ecology.

Yours affectionately,
(N. G. RANGA)

NEW DELHI,
21-1-76

My dear Prof. Ranga,

I am very grateful to you for your kind letter of the 6th January, 1976. I appreciate your generous sentiments.

I fully agree with you that minimum productivity limits cannot be achieved unless the farmer is helped very actively. I have dealt with this in my address, a copy of which is enclosed. Probably your comments are based upon the portion which appeared in the newspapers. In fact, my primary purpose in suggesting such a procedure is to ensure that State Governments render all the necessary help to small and marginal farmers. An yield of 1.5 tonnes per hectare of rice is quite low and hence it is not difficult to get 3 tonnes from two crops in a year wherever there is assured irrigation. Whatever I have stated is based upon a very large volume of data we have gathered from national and other demonstrations conducted in farmers' fields during the last ten years. I shall be grateful if you could kindly advise me as to what you feel is feasible after reading the full text of the address.

The recommendations of the Science Congress are now being printed and I shall send you a copy soon.

I once again thank you most sincerely for sharing your thoughts with me.

With my best regards,

Yours sincerely,
Sd/ M. S. SWAMINATHAN

18-3-76

My dear Shri Shinde,

I am unhappy over your statement, made in the course of your Convocation address that such peasants who are self-employed on their own holdings below the Ceilings who fail to produce the prescribed minimum produce-whether food grains or Commercial Crops-have to make way for others, thus losing their holdings and the privilege of self-employment, thereon.

When Dr. Swaminathan made a similar suggestion in his Presidential speech to the Science Congress, I drew his attention to the impracticability of such prescription of minimum production levels and inhumanity of dispossessing the concerned peasants who fail to produce the targeted minimum production. I also warned against resulting extension of official control, pressures and corruption over the dwindling but highly valuable sphere of self-employment and economic freedom of Crores of Peasants. Studies of results of achievements on Government and co-operative farms indicate how such minimum targets cannot be practically realised in the light of incalculable vicissitudes of seasons, visitations of pests etc. nor can they be attained over any considerable area and for any length of time-so varying are the soils, seasons, inter-twined cycles of pests, even supposing all the temperamental, educational or traditional matrix of peasants and their workers can be ironed out by strictest training and fears of losing their holdings etc. In reply he said that he only hoped that

such targets would and could be prescribed and enforced, when all other suggestions he had made regarding adequate supplies of inputs, co-operation from agronomists and other scientists, administration etc. are all made available as per the honestly implemented plan etc.

I also warned him that even in U. S. S. R. Peoples China and other communist countries, such minimum targets are not fixed or enforced or even contemplated. I dare say you are fully aware of the growing rate of unemployment and persistence of under-employment among the rural population and feeling of insecurity among our kisans regarding their land-ownership and freedom to work on their holdings. If we now proceed to create this threat of depriving them of their holdings, self-employment and their need for kow-towing to all sorts of officers in order to prove to them that their calamities caused by fall in production are not due to their willful negligence or inefficiency, then, I am afraid, we would be inhibiting their natural incentives to work hard, protect their soils, seeds and crops and fight against the incalculable natural calamities. We would indeed be destroying their spirit of enterprise and creative incentives.

In our impatience to make India self-sufficient in atleast foodgrains, fibres and other industrially useful raw products, let us not lose our patience with the goose that lays the golden eggs, as Communists did in other Countries, during the first 2 decades of their power.

We are going out of our way, at huge costs, to create self-employment for mere tens of thousands of

unemployed engineers etc; to prevent lay-of labour by industrialists, to find small holdings for a few lakhs of agricultural workers. Please consider at the same time whether it is statesmanlike to think of such coercive measures and to hold out such terrible threats to the crores of self-employed peasants who only ask Government to appreciate their self-reliance. They are already suffering from unremunerative priadns, unconscionably low support prices and high costs of fertilizers, pesticides, which are so often adulterated, rising power-rates and petrol, diesel oil-price hikes and ever rising taxes on irrigation, drainage etc.

It is in your power to take decisions which affect the destinies of these hundreds of lakhs of voluntary contributors to our national wealth and well-being.

I hope you will try to reassure our peasants that their economic freedom and self-employment and ownership of holdings will not be jeopardised by the government's belated drive for productivity which indeed has been the traditional motive-force of self-employed peasantry.

Yours Sincerely,
N. G. RANGA

NEW DELHI,

1-4-76

My dear Prof. N. G. RANGAJI,

I have your letter dated 18-3-76. I am glad that you have written to me about the subject referred to in your letter. I can appreciate your feelings for farming community having spent whole of your life for championing their cause.

Recently I was in Depoli (District Ratnagiri) in connection with the convocation function of Konkan Krishi Vidyapith (Konkan Agricultural University). In my address I did refer to this aspect of the problem. I do feel very strongly that land is valuable national asset and nobody has a right to misuse these resources. I can understand a small farmer who is unable to have adequate credit or inputs not being in a position to produce even the average quantity but there is no justification for others to produce less than the average unless there are factors beyond the control of the individual farmer. You know better than me that the average production in our country is very very low. The entire effort has to be concentrated on increasing productivity. I do appreciate your concern for small property holder. But I look to the problem from a different angle. My own feeling is that the greatest danger to the property rights of millions of peasants is likely to arise if productivity of Indian agriculture remains low and food & agriculture crisis gets out of hand. Therefore to my mind this point should be debated at all levels and the purpose of such debate should not be to frighten the farmer but enable him to raise the productivity and therefore in that very speech of mine to which you are referring I have mentioned

that the pilot scheme of attaining higher productivity which was tried by Maharashtra Govt. this year is better alternative to what I have suggested. But this part was not reported by the press. My speech was a printed one but in Marathi otherwise I would have sent to you the copy of the Text.

This year Maharashtra Govt. made a very interesting experiment of guaranteeing minimum production of the quintals of wheat per acre and not only that but Maharashtra Govt. gave a guarantee to the farmers that they would be compensated by the State Govt. if the production is less than 10 quintals. This pilot scheme was taken up in about 80 blocks and covered about 80 thousand acres of land. This guarantee of Maharashtra Govt. was based on two major assumptions Farmers have to carry out all instructions regarding agronomic practices including the type of seed to be used, etc. And Maharashtra Govt. was to ensure the supply of inputs in time. The scheme was an outstanding success and there had been no case wherein State Govt. is likely to shoulder the responsibility of making compensatory payment.

I wish the newspapers should have reported my argument in full instead of reporting part of it. Then there would not have been perhaps any occasion for any misunderstanding by you.

I hope you are keeping good health.

With deepest respect.

Yours Sincerely,
Annasaheb P. Shinde.