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Q13

Explain the changes in cropping pattern in India in the context of changes in consumption pattern and marketing conditions.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · GS III · 15 marks · Indian Economy

Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Core demand of the question

- Explain changes in India's cropping pattern
- Link them to changes in consumption and in marketing conditions
- **Recommend a better match:** millets, pulses, oilseeds, horticulture

Revision summary

India's cropping pattern shifted toward rice, wheat, sugarcane and some horticulture, and away from millets.

Diets added oil, vegetables, milk and packaged food, while PDS still props rice and wheat.

MSP and procurement are the loudest market signal; pulses, oilseeds and millets often lack that lift.

e-NAM, FPOs and cold chain help where they actually operate.

A better pattern needs paid procurement for millets, pulses and oilseeds and honest water pricing for paddy.

Introduction

A **cropping pattern** is what is sown, where, and in which season. In India it has moved from mixed coarse cereals toward **rice, wheat, sugarcane and some horticulture**. That shift followed **what people eat, what the mandi and the Food Corporation of India buy, and what water and power made cheap**. The three do not always point the same way.

Body

How the pattern changed

- Green Revolution irrigation and seed locked **Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh** into paddy-wheat.
- **Sugarcane** expanded where mills and State advice guaranteed a cane price.
- **Coarse cereals (millets)** lost area for decades even where they fit the rainfall.
- **Horticulture** - fruit, vegetable, spices - gained as cold chain and cities grew.
- **Oilseeds and pulses** remain short of domestic need; edible oil imports stay large.
- 2023 as the **International Year of Millets** and new millet procurement were an attempt to turn the pattern back a few degrees.

Consumption

- As incomes rise, households buy **more milk, oil, vegetables, sugar, and some meat/eggs**, and a smaller cereal share of the calorie plate.
- Public Distribution still leans on **rice and wheat**, which keeps demand for those two grains politically hard to cut.
- Urban packaged food and online grocery raise demand for **uniform, branded, and perishable** lots, not for a mixed rainfed basket.
- Nutrition policy now asks for millets and pulses; the plate has not fully followed the pamphlet.

Marketing conditions

- **Minimum Support Price** and **assured procurement** for wheat and paddy (and sugarcane's State price) are the strongest market signal. Farmers sow what the State will lift.
- Thin procurement for pulses, oilseeds and millets in many districts leaves those crops to a volatile trader price.
- **e-NAM (National Agriculture Market)**, Farmer Producer Organisations, contract farming, and export windows help horticulture and spices where quality and logistics exist.
- Cold storage and processing are still short, so perishable area cannot expand as fast as diet change.

Better alignment

- **Shift incentives toward** millets, pulses and oilseeds **in rainfed belts**: procurement, seed, and a real MSP that is paid.
- Keep rice-wheat where water is honest; do not pay with free power for paddy in a falling aquifer.
- Match horticulture to **cluster cold chains**, not to a one-year price spike.

Flow diagram

Consumption diet -> Cropping pattern
 Marketing MSP mandi -> Cropping pattern
 Cropping pattern -> Rice wheat cane
 Cropping pattern -> Horticulture
 Cropping pattern -> Lag pulses oilseeds millets
 Marketing MSP mandi -> Lag pulses oilseeds millets

Conclusion

Cropping moved to rice, wheat, cane and some horticulture because consumption urbanised and because MSP-procurement and mills paid for those crops. Pulses, oilseeds and millets lagged both the plate and the import bill. Pattern will follow diet only when marketing pays for the crops nutrition policy names.

Facts & figures

Paddy-wheat lock-in

Assured FCI procurement and irrigation in the north-west made the two-cereal rotation the rational farm choice.

Edible oil gap

India still imports a large share of edible oil because oilseed area and yield did not match rising consumption.

International Year of Millets 2023

UN year, pushed by India, to restore millets in diet and in cropping; procurement is still thinner than for rice and wheat.

e-NAM

National Agriculture Market: electronic mandi linkage; useful when assaying and lots exist.

Horticulture share

Fruit and vegetable output has risen with urban demand; post-harvest loss remains high without cold chain.

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