

Data Gaps in Agricultural Statistics: Some Issues

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The agricultural sector in India, though dominant in terms of employment, suffers from stagnation and under performance. This calls for policy intervention. However, prior to formulating policy, it is necessary to audit this sector which requires data on a large number of variables. While agricultural statistics has matured over the years, data gaps do exist which are a constraint to useful statistical analysis. This paper attempts to reveal certain gaps in continuous data on an annual basis for important variables such as cost of production, agricultural wages, retail prices, etc. Availability of this data will facilitate more meaningful and precise analysis of the agricultural sector.

1.1 Backdrop

The importance of agricultural sector as an economic activity for the Indian economy is well established. However, despite this sector being dominant with more than half the workforce engaged in it, the sector suffers from underperformance and stagnation. Its growth rate is far below the overall growth rate of the economy and the target growth rate is hardly ever achieved. This naturally calls for interventions and policy issues to be addressed so as to revitalize not only this sector but the overall growth rate of the economy. Therefore, a sound and consistent data base on all major variables impacting this sector is required over a long period of time so that appropriate statistical analysis can be carried out. This will facilitate policy intervention and corrective steps.

The framing of policy in order to stimulate growth in agriculture calls for an urgent need to audit the performance of this sector. It may however be mentioned that in India, the discipline of agricultural statistics has matured over the decades and data on a large number of variables pertaining to various aspects of the agricultural sector is available. The data collection in India is decentralized. At the state level, the data is collected and compiled by State Agricultural Statistics Authorities and the State Directorates of Economics and Statistics. At the central level, the Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Ministry of Agriculture is the main agency for compilation of data. The Census and National Sample Survey Organisation are also important agencies involved in data collection. Thus, huge efforts have been made by the government to build up a strong data base for