INTRODUCTION

Agriculture plays an important role in India’s economy. It provides gainful employment to a large section of population of the country, particularly, the rural population. It contributes to the socio-cultural development of the farming community. The land holding provides them the confidence and strength to stay and survive in the society. In view of the importance of agriculture, Government of India has been conducting comprehensive Agriculture Censuses for collection of data on structure and characteristics of agricultural holdings, as part of World Census of Agriculture Programme since 1970-71. Operational holding, being the basic unit of decision-making in agriculture, detailed data on structure of agricultural holdings and its characteristics are necessary for formulation of any meaningful and effective strategy for agricultural development.

Agriculture Census is carried out by States/Union Territories under overall technical guidance and administrative support from Ministry of Agriculture. It is a Central Sector Scheme being financed by Government of India. The fieldwork is carried out by Primary Reporting Agencies of Revenue Departments in most of the States. In some of the States, primary staff of Agriculture Department/Directorate of Economics & Statistics are also deployed on this job. Supervision of the fieldwork is done by supervisory officers of the Revenue/Agriculture/Statistics Departments of the State Governments.

For collection of Census data, States have been grouped into two categories viz., Land Record States and Non-Land Record States, wherein different statistical techniques are adopted for data collection and estimation. About 85 percent of operational holdings are covered by Land-Record States.

Present Report on Agriculture Census 2005-06 is eighth in the series. The report gives a perspective on historical background, organization of Agriculture Census besides concepts, definitions, sampling design, estimation procedure, limitations of data with brief analysis at All India and State levels.

The number of operational holdings has been consistently increasing since the first Agriculture Census in 1970-71. The number of holdings, which stood at 71.0 million in 1970-71 went up to 81.6 million, 88.9 million, 97.2 million, 106.6 million, 115.6 million, 119.9 million and 129.2 million (excluding Jharkhand State) in successive Censuses from 1976-77 to 2005-06. Thus the number of holdings have shown a compound annual growth rate of 1.73 percent during the period 1970-71 to 2005-06.

The operated area which was 162.1 million hectares in 1970-71 increased to 165.5 million hectares in 1990-91 and thereafter gradually declined to 158.3 million hectares in 2005-06.
The share of operational holdings managed by females increased to 11.70 percent in 2005-06 against 10.83 percent in 2000-01 indicating rising participation of females in management and/or operation of agricultural land.

The small and marginal holdings (below 2.00 ha.) constituted 83.29 percent in 2005-06 against 81.80 percent in 2000-01 having corresponding operated area as 41.14 percent and 38.86 percent. The semi-medium and medium operational holdings (2.00 ha. – 9.99 ha.) formed 15.86 percent with operated area of 47.04 percent in 2005-06 with respective figures of 17.17 percent and 47.93 percent in 2000-01. The large holdings (10.00 ha. & above) were only 0.85 percent of total number of holdings in 2005-06 with operated area of 11.82 percent as against respective figures of 1.03 percent and 13.21 percent in 2000-01.

The average size of holdings had shown declining trend. In 1970-71 it was 2.28 hectares, which came down to 2.00 hectares in 1976-77, 1.84 hectares in 1980-81, 1.69 hectares in 1985-86, 1.55 hectares in 1990-91, 1.41 hectares in 1995-96, 1.33 hectares in 2000-01 and further declined to 1.23 hectares in 2005-06.

In the report, an attempt has been made to present the data in objective and compressed form. It is hoped that policy makers, researchers and others concerned with agricultural development would find this report useful. The data is also available on the Department’s website http://agcensus.nic.in for public use.

The Agriculture Census Division, Department of Agriculture & Cooperation in collaboration with State Agriculture Census Units did a commendable job in finalizing the Census data in shortest possible time.

I am happy to place on record my sincere thanks to officers and staff of Agriculture Census Division at the Centre and in States/Union Territories for their effort and cooperation in expeditiously completing the work. The assistance rendered by National Informatics Centre, New Delhi/DOEACCs in computerizing the Agriculture Census 2005-06 data, is also appreciated.

(Vidya Dhar)

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