

The growing food crisis in the Kashmir Valley article published on the Greater Kashmir News paper by **MUDDASIR ALI** Srinagar, Publish Date: Feb 6 2017 11:05PM

In absence of any policy to stop random conversion of agricultural land, J&K's crop fields are vanishing fast, resulting in growing shortfall in the produce. In past little over a decade the state's food grain imports have grown by almost 50 percent from 50000 metric tonnes in 2002 to 760000 metric tonnes in 2016 with all signs in the sector showing "discouraging" trends.

While J&K's annual food grain production hasn't grown beyond 19 lakh metric tonnes, the demand has already crossed 26 lakh metric tonnes. In 1980, the gap in the production was just two lakh metric tonnes (23 percent)

"Though the shortfall is met through imports the worrying factor is that the gap between the production and demand is only growing," said a senior official.

The worry, as per the latest economic survey, was also that the yield of principal crops – rice (staple food) wheat and maize hasn't seen significant improvement despite introduction of advanced technologies.

What has set alarm bells ringing for the planners is that J&K agriculture is already "overburdened" with experts opining that one of the major weaknesses of the sector was stagnant yields, which is lower than most of the states and less per hectare yield compared to all India level.

Some problems of permanent nature are "compounding" the problem. The State cannot afford to increase the arable land as it would result in reduction of forest areas which is "already less"—19.95 percent than desirable percentage of 21 percent in plains and 66 percent in hilly areas.

The poor Seed Replacement Ratio (SRR) was another factor for the growing food grains shortage apart from the declining interest in the agriculture has been seen another threat to the longevity of the agriculture.

The number of cultivators has come down from 9.49 lakh in 2001 to less than 6 lakh and the state has witnessed a fall in both the number of holders as well as the area under agriculture.

In 2000, at least 14.43 lakh operational holders were operating on 9.62 lakhs hectares of land but the numbers have fallen to less than 13 lakhs operational holders operating on 9.23 lakhs hectares. The low production in the sector has now cast its effect on the JK economy. The share of the agriculture to the State Gross Domestic Product has witnessed a steep fall from 56 percent in 1970 to 19 percent in 2013.

Some years ago the government had decided to come up with a law to stop conversion of agriculture land for commercial and non-agricultural purposes. The proposal hasn't seen any progress.