

Editorial Note

Performance of the agricultural sector has always been the most important vehicle for sustaining livelihoods of the people of Punjab and the north-west region in general. Even prior to the partition, Punjab had begun to play a crucial role in providing food security and export revenues. This role – as granary of India - continued in the post-independent period but with the spread and diffusion of new agricultural technologies to some other parts of India, Punjab's strategic importance had begun to decline. Further, after nearly forty years of adoption of the green revolution strategy, the agricultural sector is in an acute state of crisis, raising serious questions about future sustainability in output and livelihoods. This crisis manifests itself in a number of ways: stagnating crop yields and farm incomes, build up in the levels of indebtedness amongst the farmers, general economic distress, leading some small and marginal farmers to commit suicide and the environmental damage – both water and soil – caused by the relentless pursuit of the wheat-paddy crop rotation system. The latter has also disturbed Punjab's water table with potentially serious long-term implications for the availability of this scarce resource.

This special issue of the *JPS* brings together articles from eminent scholars of agricultural economics of Punjab. These articles offer diagnoses of the problem, its genesis, and potential ways forward. They address the major issues and debates pertaining to challenges facing Punjab agriculture today: sustainability of wheat-paddy crop rotation versus crop diversification, alleviating economic distress of farmers and procurement prices, the role and pitfalls of contract farming, effective water management and the importance of shifting labour away from agriculture towards non-agricultural rural employment and rural and urban industry. The policy implications to deal with the crisis have been clear for some time but poor governance structures have meant that the crisis has continued unabated, causing an undercurrent of unrest and resentment.

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