

THE LAND, THE FARMER, AND THE FUTURE

A Soil Fertility Management Strategy for Nepal



Brian Carson

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Brian Collins

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July 1986

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Top Right : The Farmer
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Foreword

Acknowledgements

This paper on soil fertility management puts the problem of declining soil fertility in Nepal within the context of the economic, demographic, and geological perspective. In doing so, the author has produced an extremely useful text that will be of immense value to policy-makers and development practitioners working not only in Nepal but also in other similar environments.

The importance of the author's perspective stems from the nature of the problems facing the farmers of Nepal. Human and livestock populations exceed the carrying capacity of the subsistence farming economy, and economic necessity has led to seasonal, and even permanent, out-migration. The traditional subsistence farming system is static and labour intensive. Soil fertility maintenance measures, which require additional time, money, or risk, are not feasible for the subsistence farmer. By and large, the new techniques introduced during the preceding decades have ceased to bring about any meaningful gains.

Nepal's farmers will be faced with a decline in productivity against the background of increasing population pressure until small farmers engage in commercial, market-led agriculture. There is no doubt that also, with or without a directive policy for the commercialisation of agriculture, this change has begun to take place and the trend will continue. It is within the context of this transition that the soil fertility strategy presented in this document was formulated.

The author has drawn on his work experiences in Nepal to present an in-depth evaluation and perspective on the land and the farmer and has provided a soil fertility strategy for the future. The manuscript was first prepared for USAID, Nepal, and the present version, in the ICIMOD Occasional Paper series, is published under the auspices of ICIMOD's Mountain Farming Systems' (MFS) Programme.

Both organisations share the author's continuing concern for the degradation of available land resources in a region for which agriculture is the dominant sector of the economy, and it is within this context of shared concerns that the paper is now being published as a joint USAID/ICIMOD publication. We have no doubt that this work will be of considerable use to policy-makers, government planners, and development experts who are involved in the formulation of soil fertility strategies. It is hoped that, in the long run, the ultimate benefit will accrue to the farmers themselves, for it is they who can claim to be the most concerned of all.

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This paper is a compilation of the research findings and observations of the author based on 6 years' work and travel within Nepal over a 14 year period. The author thanks the USAID for providing him with the opportunity to put these ideas on paper and, in particular, Chuck Strickland and Rob Thurston for their enthusiastic support throughout the paper's development. Thanks are also due to ICIMOD, particularly its Farming Systems' group, for reviewing the manuscript and making useful suggestions.

The formal and informal nurturing by my colleagues in Nepal, America, Europe, and Canada were essential to the development of this present level of understanding. Any credit to new ideas must be shared among them, while I alone am responsible for any errors and omissions.

Finally, to the farmers of Nepal, I salute your ability to manage the lands as you do, in the face of tremendous odds. I thank you for the patience and humour you have shown me over the past decade as I struggled to understand your ways. Namaste.

Brian Carson

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