

Crop Resources and their Role in Mountain Agriculture

Wheat, rice, and maize are the major food crops in the mountains and the yields are generally very low. But, with suitable improved varieties, along with proper management, there is good scope for increasing the crop yields. The PARC has established a few research institutions in the mountain regions. The Arid Zone Research Institute, in Quetta and Baluchistan, and Research Stations at Gilgit and Kaghan are conducting research to improve agriculture in the mountains.

Citrus fruits have the potential to change economic conditions in certain mountain areas. Tangerines and sweet oranges, in the low to middle mountains of Swat, Hazara, and Dir, have augmented the income of the farmers. Citrus cultivation, if expanded further in the mountain regions, will help to improve the economy.

The middle to high mountains of Pakistan have good potential for temperate fruits such as apples, apricots, walnuts, peaches, and plums. The areas of Quetta, Ziarat, and Loralai (Baluchistan), as well as Swat, Dir, and Mansehra (NWFP) have the great potential for apple production. Planned orchards with improved apple varieties, such as Red Delicious and Golden Delicious, have benefitted the farmers a great deal and have played a vital role in improving the economy of the areas.

The areas of Gilgit, Hunza, and Skardu, at altitudes above 2000 m, have a lot of potential for the production of apricots, apples, grapes, cherries, and almonds. The commercial cultivation of these fruits, with planned orchards and proper management, will certainly bring about an economic revolution in the area.

Apricots will be the leading resource, in the Skardu and Hunza areas, if proper facilities for drying, manufacturing, and marketing forest products are made available. In Gilgit and Hunza, sulphur treatment for drying apricots has increased the quality and price of dried apricots. Planned plantations with proper management and the establishment of fruit processing units will certainly bring about economic stability and prosperity.