

Farmer Report

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Conflict paralyzed agriculture desperate for support

Agriculture is the most important livelihood resource in conflict zone

Soil and climatic conditions make Swat valley and the adjoining districts a perfect agricultural tract. The districts of Swat, Buner, Shangla and Lower Dir along with Malakand Agency, now known as war zone, are famous for their specialized agricultural produces all over the country.

Fewer other districts of NWFP are at par with Swat valley in terms of agricultural production. Swat's fertile land and abundant water suit almost every crop from almonds to onions and wheat to lintel. It specializes in many commodities like peaches and has placed itself well in the other niche markets like its tomatoes and onions arrive in markets

when supplies from other corners of the country are short. Buner and Lower Dir are also known for their minor cash crops while Malakand and Shangla produce good quantities of maize and paddy too.

Three in every five peaches that Pakistanis enjoy come from Swat. One in three pears and every seventh apple and plum also come from one of the five districts that fall in the conflict zone. Swat leads the other four in production of fruits by a big margin. The five districts are also the main source of persimmon (*Japani phal* or *amlak*). All of these fruits are highly perishable commodities that can last for only days under normal conditions.

Swat valley is the vegetable and fruit basket for the entire country. The share of this conflict belt in national production of tomatoes is 18

per cent. Swat alone produces 13 per cent of total national production of this commodity that is used daily in almost every kitchen. Vegetable supplies from the troubled five districts to other parts of NWFP and other provinces are crucial as 37 per cent of the all vegetables grown in the province are contributed by these districts. Swat on its own produces one fourth of the total provincial production of vegetables. The troubled belt contributes an enormous three fourth to the province's onion production.

Little less than half of the paddy grown in NWFP comes from the troubled region.

Malakand, Swat and Lower Dir are the centers of paddy production in NWFP. The conflict region cumulatively produces almost a quarter of the total wheat of the province. The region's production though is just enough for the half of the population of these districts. The same districts also produce more than one fourth of the total maize of the province that is the second staple food after wheat in the area.

Hundreds of farming families of Lower Dir and Buner districts are attached to the cultivation of pulses especially *mash* and *mung*. Dir alone contributes 27 per cent to the total provincial production of *mash* pulse. Tobacco is a major cash crop for Buner district. Three in every 20 kgs of tobacco produced in country come from Malakand, Buner and Swat districts.

Displacement has wasted ripe crops, made sowing of next ones doubtful

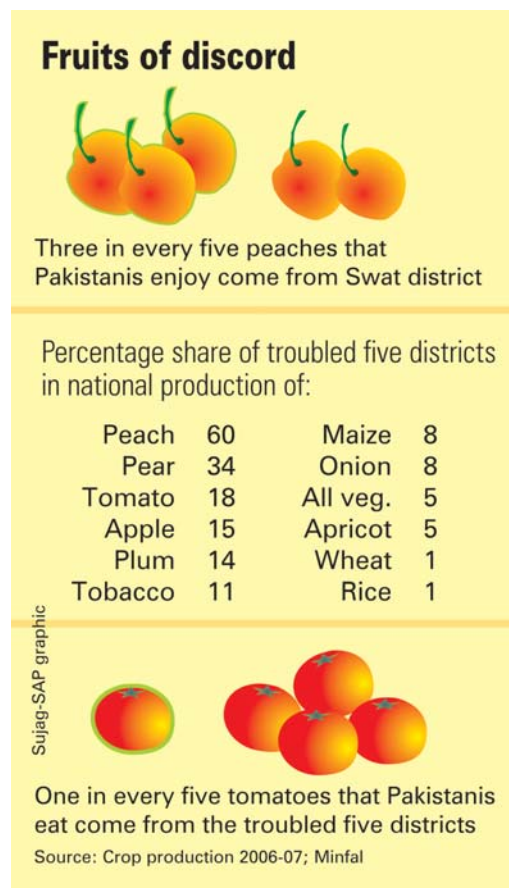
The four districts and Malakand Agency host a population of around four million people. Some reports suggest that around three million of these have left their homes so far due to the ongoing conflict between the forces and Taliban. The districts of Swat and Buner are almost de-populated. This massive displacement is a big humanitarian crisis. The nature of the occupation of the most of the IDPs and timing of their displacement makes it even

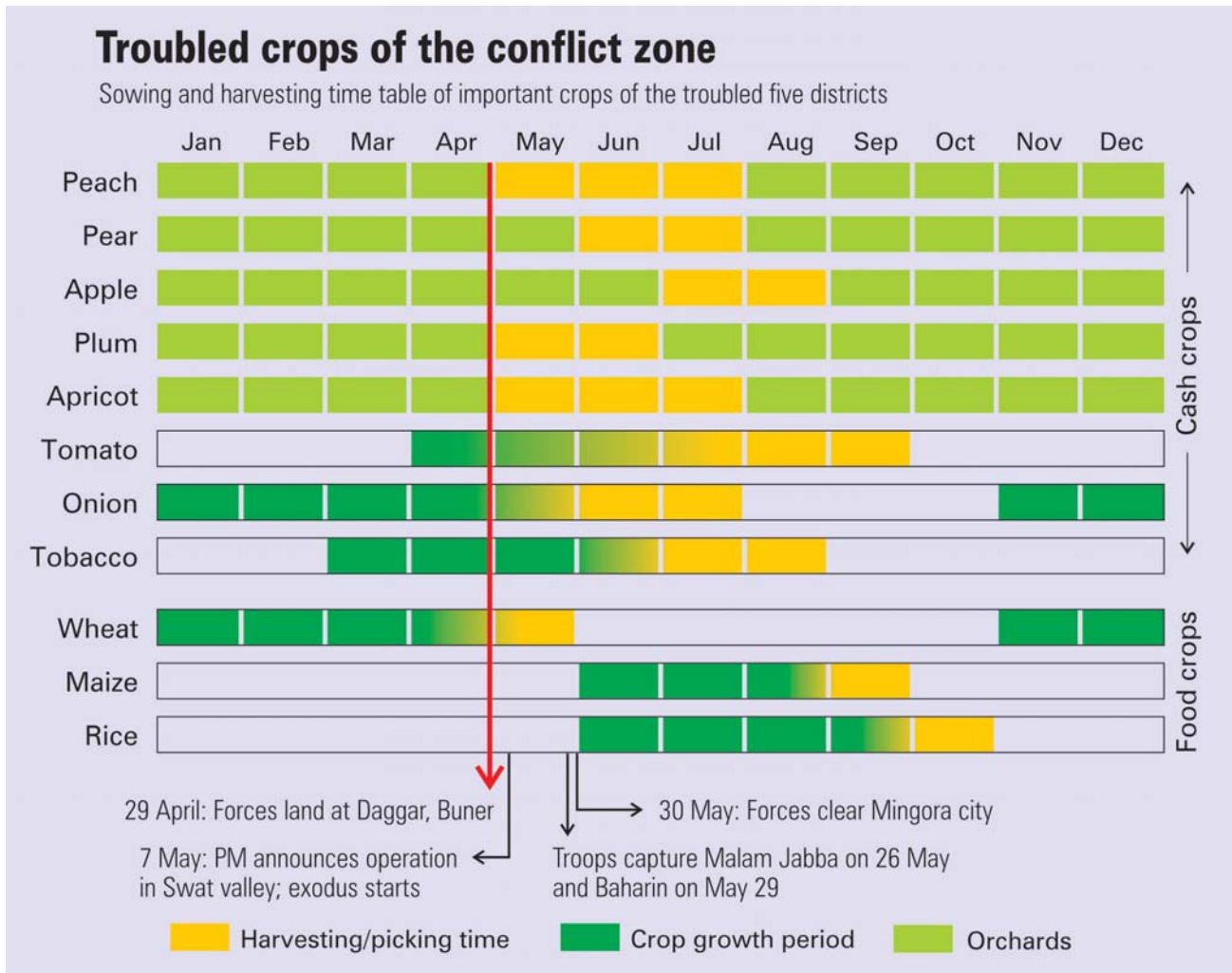
worse as they had to leave just when their orchards and agricultural farms needed them the most.

According to Agriculture Census 2000, the livelihood of 226,000 families in the five districts is dependent on farming. On an average, a family in Malakand division has 8.7 members. It can be safely said that the livelihood of around 2.3 million people of this conflict region (six in every 10 persons) is directly linked to agriculture. This of course does not count the landless inhabitants of the area that partly or fully depend upon farm labor for living.

Farming families mainly rely on two crops a year. The timing of the military operation has unfortunately coincided with the advent of harvesting of Rabi crops that is followed by the sowing of Kharif ones.

For farmers, the beginning of summer in this hilly tract is the most-awaited season as their months-long labor is paid off during this time.





Wheat harvesting is of paramount importance for all farmers as this is the opportunity to secure staple food supply for the entire year. This is also the time when harvesting of fruits, the precious crops of Swat valley, starts. The sale of fruits makes the farmers of this valley financially secure and able to invest in Kharif crops. Besides harvesting and sowing, some standing cash crops like tobacco and tomatoes need more attention in the months of May and June, the harvesting of which are due in July-August.

The wheat harvesting is severely disturbed due to the ongoing conflict and the standing crops are decaying putting at stake the food security of the local people. Food security is further threatened by the fact that timely sowing of maize and paddy also seems impossible. There is no question of vegetable supplies from

this region at this time, which will start becoming more visible in the form of soared prices and low availability of these commodities in coming days. Especially an unprecedented hike in tomato prices is likely to be witnessed from July to September, when the Swat tomatoes are scheduled to reach the country's major markets.

Onion harvesting shall also start in the coming few weeks. Besides a huge loss to the onion farmers of Swat and Lower Dir districts, the prices of this produce will skyrocket in the market especially in the northern parts of the country, which rely on Swat for supply of onion.

On fruit front, except for the apples, all the fruits are ripening these days and should have already hit the country's markets. But would they at all this time? Mass exodus from Swat

and blockage of roads and means of transport has hampered fruit picking. In fact the fruit picking and packing contracts are brokered in April and May. If the conflicts prolongs for a few more weeks, the fruits will rot and that will not only destroy the current crop it will also damage the orchards undermining the most important livelihood resource of the local people in medium to long term.

The market prices of peaches, pears, plums and apricot will be out of reach for most of the Pakistanis due to trouble in Swat and adjoining districts. The other likely scenario is that the market will be glutted with these over ripe fruits available at throw away prices. This would happen only if the transportation resumes in next few weeks and the desperate farmers attempt to retrieve whatever value they can from their rotting orchards. Thousands of

farmers, traders and laborers, whose livelihood is attached to this business will anyway be deprived of a decent return. They can do nothing except to mourn the rotting of the fruits and destruction of their orchards while sitting in hot tents. This deprivation is going to haunt most of the IDPs for years, even if they return in near future.

Overwhelming majority is of very small or subsistence farmers

Of total 226,000 farming families of the five districts, a whopping 85 per cent are small farmers, who on average have access to mere 1.7 acres. This simply means that more than 1.7 million people (or 42 per cent of the total population) of these districts seek their livelihood from a piece of land, which is smaller

Unattended animals

Livestock is among the major economic activities of the troubled region. The displaced people of the area have left behind their animals unattended.

According to Livestock Census 2006 the number of families rearing milch animals in four districts and Malakand agency stands at 232,000 compared with 226,000 farming families. If it is assumed that all the farming families rear milch animals, there are at least 6,000 landless households that rear livestock herds.

Swat and Lower Dir are the districts of troubled region that host more animal population. Swat in fact tops the list of NWFP districts having more cattle population. 253,790 cows and bulls were enumerated in the district at the time of census. Lower Dir is the third largest district with respect to more cattle population. Shangla district is also among the top ten cattle herders. Around 14 per cent of total cattle population of the province is in the troubled region. One in every five buffalos of NWFP is in these areas that have around 350,000 buffalos.

Some 145,000 families rear goats in the region with average herd size of seven animals. There are fewer sheep rearing families here. In Buner district there were 2,094 camels. The population of camels in entire region stands at 3,085, according to Livestock Census 2006. There were 9,756 mules and asses in the region at the time of census, the majority of which was from Swat and Shangla districts.

Swat and Lower Dir are second and third largest districts to host more domestic poultry in the entire province.

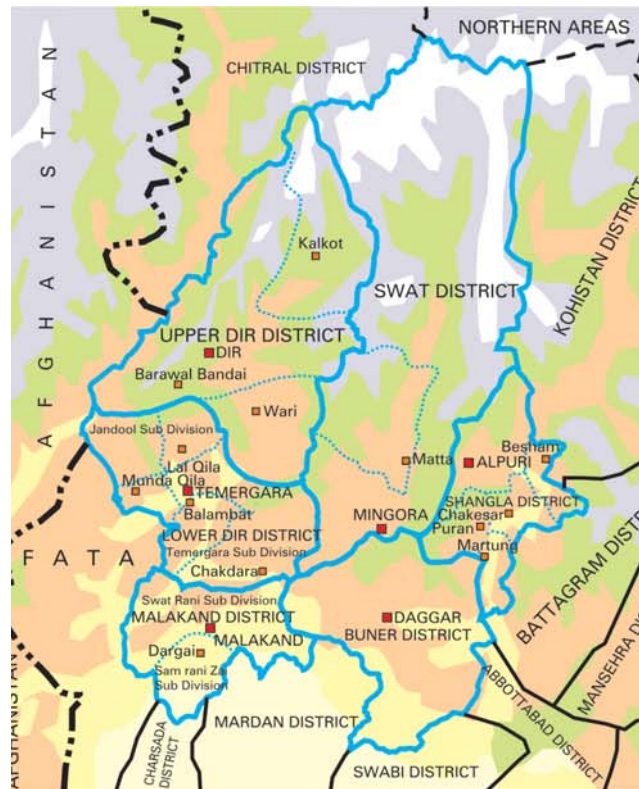
Like agricultural farming, an overwhelming majority of the livestock holders in the region falls under the category of small livestock holders. Around 95 per cent of the total livestock holders have average ownership just of two milch animals. The rest of the five per cent of livestock holders come under medium category with average ownership of 9 milch animals. There are only 900 families, which rear large herds with average size of 34 milch animals. Of the total milch animals, 78 per cent are reared by small, 17 by medium and 3 per cent by the large livestock holders.

than two acres.

Only 14 per cent farming families are medium farmers, who on an average have access to 8.2 acres of land. This stratum of farmers is also unable to bear the cost of this crisis. Only one per cent (more than 1800 families) farmers are privileged enough to enjoy an average access to 52 acres of land. This tiny majority of farming community has access to 15 per cent of the total arable land.

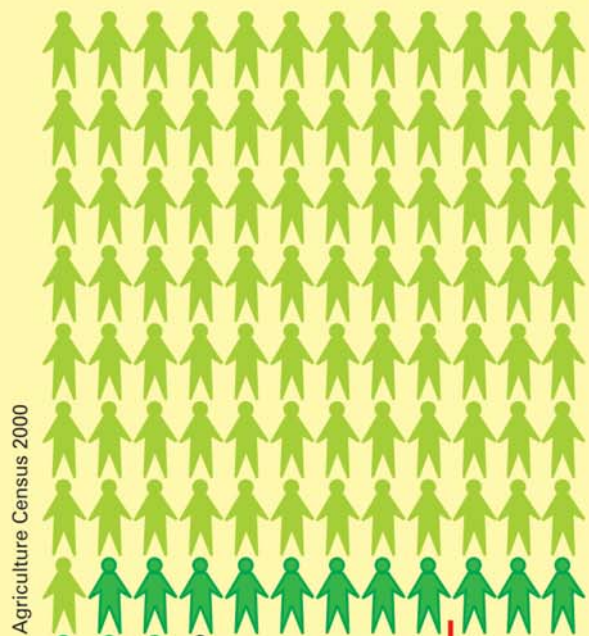
Of the farming community, 3 in every 25 farmers of this region are tenants who don't have ownership access to the land. They become 27,000 families. The plight of whom is much more than the land owners as they will be unable to resume farming since they will have nothing to pay to the landlords as land rent. What will be the source of the livelihood for the 230,000 members of tenant farmers' families on their return?

In an ordinary Pakistani village, almost half of the population does not have access to land whatsoever. A small portion of villagers is attached to trade, private and public sector jobs and other professions while a huge portion of landless people are farm or menial labor. Agriculture Census figures suggest that around 9,000 laborers in Malakand Division are permanently engaged by the farmers. Majority of farm laborers, however works under temporary arrangements with farmers. In the post-crisis scenario fewer farm employers will be in a position to pay the laborers. Farmers of the conflict zone will have to surmount huge problems before they could get back to their normal lives. The first challenge that they would face immediately after returning is how to secure food for the family for the period required to rehabilitate themselves. In fact for many returning will become an option only when they are assured food security.



Farmers of troubled districts

Small farming families: 192,277
(85 percent of all farmers)
Average access: 1.7 acres



Medium farming families: 32,281 (14%)
Average access: 8.2 acres

Large farming families: 1,827 (1%)
Access: 55.5 acres

Source: Agriculture Census 2000. Sujag-SAP graphic

The second challenge would be to clear their fields of the wasted crops and reclaim the land back to its previous productive level. This will be a labor-intensive job and labor might be short and resultantly wages too high.

Everybody will be busy attending to his own farm and damaged house.

Third challenge will be how to deal with the moneylender pressing for a pay back of his loan. Private moneylenders with limited capital base are the champions of agriculture financing. Agriculture Census 2000 tells us that 34 per cent of the farmers belonging to Malakand Division are under debt. Money lenders generally operate under two types of agreements.

One is cash-for-cash arrangement meaning that farmer borrows money and returns it with interest after selling his produce.

Second is cash-for-crop arrangement in which the farmer is bound to sell his produce, at the market rate, to his moneylender who pays him back the balance after deducting his loaned amount and interest. These moneylenders are generally the agents of big dealers of commodities in urban markets. In any case the farmers of the conflict zone won't be able to pay back the moneylender this time and the amount will carry forward as unpaid debt in his account.

The fourth challenge for the farmers will be how to secure finances for the next crop.

Agriculture financing moves in cycles. Farmers get loan for buying inputs for one crop, pay back at harvesting and then secure finances for the next. The cycle for the most farmers of the conflict zone is broken. Since they are unable to pay back the loan secured for the wasted crop, they won't be able to get the money for the next. If the moneylenders are very resourceful and afford to lend again without receipt against the previous, the farmers will be under huge debt and would be paying huge sums in debt servicing.

Stories from camps



Shaukat Khan is a resident of Madina Colony of Tehsil Matta in Swat district. He along with his 8-member family had left home three weeks ago for

Jalala Camp in Takht Bhai. Shaukat owns five acres of land back in his village. He cultivates wheat on a small portion of his farm as rest of the farm is occupied by apple and peach orchards. His peach crop was almost ready to be harvested when he had to leave his home. "I sell fruit (peach) for Rs 200,000 every year but the Operation gave me no time to strike a deal with the contractor," Shaukat said. Being the sole breadwinner of the family, he is extremely worried about his orchards. "The rehabilitation of orchards will be a gigantic task as rotten fruits and shelling had damaged it severely. A relative of mine finances my orchards as I don't accept *riba* based bank loans. I owe him an amount of Rs 300,000," he said. He calculates his total losses at Rs 400,000 and laments that there is no way he will be able to start a normal life in near future.



Wali-ur-Rehman is a resident of Pir Baba Darra area of Buner district. Now living in Jalala Camp of Takht Bhai, Wali owns 7.5 acres of arable

land in his village. The major portion of his land was under wheat cultivation, which was ready to be harvested when the operation began. Pir Baba was the stronghold of Taliban, therefore forces resorted to aerial attacks and heavy shelling, which forced the local population to leave. Wali, the head of his huge 40-member family also left his home and standing crops, which according to him were

severely damaged by the bombardment. “We live here in pathetic conditions in tents and our life will not be better once we return to our homes as we have lost our crops, livestock and homes to the conflict. Our main source of income is wheat crop. We do not sell wheat in a large quantity yet the hay separated from grain is a substantial source of income for us,” he told. Disappointed to the core, Wali blames Taliban for his miseries. “We used to give (alms) to poor and now we are beggars due to these people (Taliban). I have to repay a loan of Rs 500,000,” he said and added that no government package can rehabilitate us. “If government gives us even a million rupee, we will not be able to reconstruct our homes in short term as we have nothing to eat for the entire year.”



Rahim Gul is a farmer from Barthana village of Swat district near Matta town. He is living with his family in Sheikh Yaseen camp of Mardan. He had to leave his village at the start of the military operation. Rahim Gul owns 7.5 acres of land. Besides looking after peach and apple orchards he also grows tomatoes and onion on his farm. Gul says that peach crop was ready to be harvested when they were displaced. “The clashes between Taliban and the military caused a severe damage to standing crops and houses. We used to earn our livelihood from vegetables and fruits. The tomato crop alone would give me Rs 100,000 income every year but this season the crop is destroyed,” he said. He told that he is severely under-debt. “I owe Rs 25,000 to bank while Rs 70,000 to a friend. I spent the entire money on crops to get nothing at the end. My friend, a couple of days ago came to my camp and demanded repayment of loan. I told him that I am penniless and can't afford purchasing even a packet of *niswar*.”

“I request government to please seriously take action against Taliban and wipe them out of our area once and for ever. The fallacious (military) actions only enhance our worries. It is very hard to leave homes and live the life of displaced persons.” He demanded of the government to announce a special rehabilitation package for the IDPs and help them reconstruct their homes.



Shah Zaman, 44, belongs to Maidan Zaimdarah village of Lower Dir district. He feeds a family of ten by cultivating two and a half acres of owned land.

Like other small farmers of his area he cultivates onion and vegetables besides some maize and wheat. His onion crop was ready to be harvested when the military operation started and Shah Zaman and his family had to leave his village for Mardan. Now the family is living with a relative in Kandaroo village near Takht Bhai.

Shah Zaman had struck a deal with the dealers of Kambar Bazar for the sale of his onion produce. His onion has given him Rs 50,000 in previous years but for this season, he was to get around Rs 70,000 due to better market prices of the commodity. But all his plans were hit by the Operation and he had to leave ripe onion and wheat crops behind.

Zaman is extremely worried about his future. “Our crops are destroyed. My home is also damaged due to shelling. Going back home is out of question as we have nothing to feed our children. I have to repay a loan of Rs 40,000,” said dismayed Zaman while wandering around in Jalala Camp. “I have come to visit the camp in-charge to know who will compensate us for the damages. Government should announce a support package of at least Rs 500,000 for each affected farmer as Rs 25,000 will serve no purpose at all.”

What should a rehabilitation plan entail?

Farmers of the conflict zone will be in a desperate need of a comprehensive rehabilitation plan on their return. In fact a well-worked rehab plan could serve as an incentive for them to return and resume their normal pursuits as soon and as quickly as possible. A farm to farm survey of physical damage to farms and orchards and financial obligations of farmers should be urgently conducted.

The plan shall focus on three main areas.

1 FOOD SECURE FARMERS: The returning IDPs should be assured food security for as long a period as would be required for the resumption of normal cycle of production. The country currently has more staple food stored in its godowns than it actually needs. A food rationing system should be instituted for the affected population. The food may either be distributed monthly or the entire calculated amount can be handed out as one tranche. There is a need to centralize and coordinate the efforts of various national and international relief organizations to avoid duplication and unnecessary overlap. This is a learning from the October 8, 2005 earthquake that the powerful few are better able to exploit the relief resources while the really deserving poor had to line up in endless queues.

2 FACILITATE FARMERS TO RECLAIM WASTED ORCHARDS AND FARMS: Farmers need support to clear orchards and fields of the un-harvested and damaged crops. It is important that this major livelihood resource is rehabilitated fully and as quickly as possible. Farmers will have to employ machines for some jobs while most of the work will be done by the labor. Labor demand in the area during this period will be high resulting in short supply and higher wages. Yet completing this arduous task as early as possible is of utmost importance for the local farmers.

3 HELP FARMERS MEND THE BROKEN CROP FINANCING CYCLE: Government intervention will be required to mend the broken financial cycle of the local farmers. It can be achieved through a package of grants and loans. Unpaid debt incurred through damaged crops should be covered through grants. Recently announced debt waiver for the farmers of conflict zone by the Prime Minister means little as most of the farmers do not seek finances from the banks. Instead of attempting a skin deep cosmetic measure, the government needs to go deeper into the issue and offer the people a helping hand. Grants in lieu of unpaid debt shall be supplemented with loans for the next crop.



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