

6.3 FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY

6.3.1 FOOD

Food security implies a situation where everyone has access, at all times, to the food needed for an active and healthy life. Thus, the essential elements of food security are (a) adequate availability of food, (b) efficient distribution through trade or public distribution system, and (c) availability of adequate purchasing power in the hands of the people.

2. Judicious combination of domestic production and food trade can provide a reasonable degree of stability in food availability, specially in a situation where food production is characterised by seasonal and annual fluctuations. Seasonal and annual instability in domestic supplies can also be reduced through buffer stocking operations involving accumulation and off-loading of public stock of food grains in years of good and bad harvests respectively.

3. Procurement of paddy (in terms of rice) during the 1999-2000 kharif marketing season (from September 16, 1999 to April 10, 2000) was higher at 15.21 mn. tonnes compared to 10.28 mn. tonnes during the same period of the previous year. Procurement of wheat during the 1999-2000 rabi marketing season (from April 1, 1999 to March, 30, 2000) was also higher at 14.14 mn. tonnes compared to 12.65 mn. tonnes during the previous year.

4. Total stocks of foodgrains with the Government at the end of February, 2000 stood higher at 29.74 mn tonnes compared to 22.75 mn. tonnes during the same period last year. The stocks of rice and wheat were placed at 15.23 mn. tonnes and 14.51 mn. tonnes, as compared with those of 11.98 mn. tonnes and 10.77 mn. tonnes, respectively a year ago.

5. A good record of food grains production over a period of years combined with a high level of procurement has led to a huge stock of food grains which is largely in excess of the requirements. The situation points to the fact that the farmers are by and large satisfied with the procurement price fixed and an undue increase in minimum support prices will lead to further accumulation of food grains stocks with FCI for which there may not be adequate demand. The problem on the food front today is one of dealing with excess stocks rather than one of scarcity. The quantum of food grains distributed to the poor under the targeted public distribution system has been enhanced from 10 kgs per month to 20 kgs per month which is expected to result in some offloading of the surplus stocks being held by the Food Corporation of India. It could also be considered whether some of the surplus food stocks can be utilised for running food-for-work programmes aimed at building rural infrastructure facilities.