

PRESENT STATUS OF SERICULTURE IN PUNJAB

BY

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Sericulture is a labour intensive cottage industry, capable of significant contribution towards easing the employment problems and improving the socio-economic of the rural masses. The export of silk can also be an excellent source of foreign exchange earning due to its enormous demand world over.

Sericulture was introduced in Taxila locality of Punjab immediately after independence in 1947. Subsequently, it was introduced in and around the irrigated forest plantation where mulberry was available in abundance to support the silkworm rearing programme. Since then it made a slow but steady progress in Punjab. Presently, sericulture is one of the major cottage industries in rural areas of the province. The activity is mainly concentrated around irrigated forest plantations of Changa Manga, Daphar, Chichawatn, Kamalia, Khanewal, Bhagat, Kundian and Jauharabad. Besides it is scattered on a small scale in various other parts of the province viz: Shakargarh, Sialkot, Gujranwala, Kasur, Sharkpur, Faisalabad, Rajana, Gojra, Sargodha, Soan Skasar Valley, Taxila, Okara, Pipliphar, Multan Chishtian, Bahawalpur and Rahim Yar Khan area.

It is assessed that about 8,000 families are engaged in silkworm rearing activity throughout the Punjab province. They carryout rearing of 20-25 thousand packets of silk seed which is supplied partly by the department and partly by the private enterprise through import of seed from Japan, China and Korea. It leads to the production of about 600 tons of silk cocoon during spring and post spring rearing seasons. The farmers earn a handsome income of about Rs. 30 million annually from the sale of their cocoon crop.

The silk reeling and silk weaving is also well developed as a cottage industry. About 1500 persons earn substantial wages from the assembling, trading and reeling of cocoons. The annual yarn output ranges from 60-65 tons which is used for the manufacture of a variety of silk fabrics with about 5000 looms working in various parts of the country. It is, however, estimated that only about one third of the country requirement of silk yarn is met through the indigenous production. The deficit is met through import.

Punjab Forest Department besides supplying silk seed to the farmers is also lending other facilities to improve silk production and farm income. Training and demonstration centres have been established to train farmers and female workers. Fast growing and better yielding mulberry varieties have been developed which are being

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propagated and cultivated both in forest plantations as well as on farm land, on large scale, to support the silkworm rearing activities in the province.

The Pakistan Forest Institute and Punjab Forest Department their research efforts to evolve improved silkworm races and mulberry varieties. A number of improved mulberry varieties have already been introduced which are being cultivated on large scale for the development of silk production. The Pakistan Forest Institute is also providing silkworm races and silk seed to the provinces to facilitate the development of sericulture in the country. The supply of silk seed to the farmers is, however, not properly organized. It is being done both by the government agencies as well as private enterprise without any co-ordination. The import, production and supply of seed can be better co-ordinated by a government agency like Pakistan Forest Institute, Peshawar.