

UNIT 2 IMPORTANCE OF AGRICULTURE

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is not only basic to human existence but also an important factor in determining the complexity of the global socio-economic change from the original, simple and primitive hunter-gather cultures. While the latter ancient practices ensure a subsistent food and fibre supply, intensive and industrial farming guarantees large-scale supplies of raw and processed foods, feeds, fibre, fuel and other goods for community consumption and incomes, and foreign exchange earnings for national development as well as global advancement. The role of agriculture in human development can therefore, not be over-emphasised.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit is expected to:

- discuss the various ways through which farming sustains human existence
- identify the contribution of the agricultural sector to Gross World Production (GWP) in general, and Nigeria's economic development in particular.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Roles of Agriculture

- i. Provision of the basic food requirements of human populations.
- ii. It is the predominant occupation of the working population, especially in agrarian nations.

- iii. An important way of life, culture and custom of the people. Customs and festivals are observed in consonance with agricultural seasons, activities and products in most rural communities. Hunting on both agricultural and wild areas is a way of life, and hobby, in rural settings.
- iv. The major source of income, especially for the rural populace.
- v. Provision of raw materials for manufacturing industries, such as feed mills, textile factories, vegetable oil mills, packaging, biopharmaceuticals, industrial chemicals and leather.
- vi. Agricultural exports are of great importance in foreign exchange earnings and government revenue.

3.2 Global Contribution of Agriculture

About 42% of the World's labourers are employed in agriculture, thus making it by far the most common occupation. In spite of this, agricultural production sector accounts for less than 5% of the Gross World Production, GWP (i.e. 5% of the aggregate of all national Gross Domestic Products, GDP).

3.3 Sectoral Contribution of Agriculture in Nigeria

- i. Nigeria still remains an agrarian economy, in spite of the growing importance of oil. Subsistence agriculture is most important in the provision of staple foods (especially rice, maize, beans, taro/cocoyam, yams, cassava, sorghum, millet) for the teeming Nigerian populace. However, limited excess quantities of the harvested produce are sold in local markets for little incomes. The groups of agricultural crops grown in Nigeria are shown below (Table 1):

Table 1. Groups of crops grown in Nigeria.

Group	Crops
Cereals	Guinea-corn, millet, maize, rice
Roots & Tubers Irish)	Cassava, yam, cocoyam, potatoes (sweet,
Grain legumes & pigeon pea,	Cowpeas, locust bean, soyabean, groundnut,
Other legumes	Bambara nuts
Oil seeds & nuts	Melon, benniseed, kolanuts, coffee
Tree crops	Cocoa, oil palm, rubber
Vegetables & fruits	
Vegetables:	Onion, African spinach, Indian spinach, pumpkin, sweet Pepper, hot pepper, waterleaf, carrot, lettuce

Fruits: Pineapple, pawpaw, mango, banana, plantain, citrus, guava.

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- ii. Generally, agriculture employs about 70% of the active labour force of the population, and this serves to augment the earnings from local produce sales. The raising of livestock (principally goats, sheep, cattle and poultry) and artisanal fisheries are also significant for income generation.
 - iii. New yam festivals and most traditional wedding and customary ceremonies are usually observed during farm seasons.
 - iv. Several industries use local agricultural products in their production operations. These include textile factories (cotton), oil mills and soap factories (groundnut, soyabean, and palm oil), packaging (jute, sisal), biopharmaceuticals (legal, illegal drugs), industrial chemicals (starch, sugar, and alcohols), plywood factory (timber), paper mills (timber), beverage industries (cocoa, coffee, and tea), canning factory (tomato, sweet peppers, beef), leather factory (hides) and tyre factory (rubber).
 - v. The agricultural sector remains the largest contributor to the Nigerian economy. The World Bank estimated an annual growth rate of 2.9% for agricultural GDP in Nigeria from 1990-1998. In 1998, the agricultural sector GDP contribution to the economy was 32%. Figures for the sectoral contribution and growth rate of agriculture GDP to the Nigerian economy for 1999-2006 are shown in Table 2:

Year	Sectoral contribution (%)	Growth rate (%)
1999	43.45	43.45
2000	42.65	42.65
2001	42.30	42.30
2002	42.14	42.14
2003	41.01	41.01
2004	40.98	40.98
2005	41.21	41.21
2006	41.95 (estimate)	7.17

4.0 CONCLUSION

Agriculture is fundamental to human existence, not only at the individual and community levels but also at the global level, where international agricultural and associated trade fosters food security.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learned that

- agriculture gives food, employment, income and clothing,
- exported crops and crop products give foreign exchange for national development,
- agriculture makes significant sectoral contribution globally, and locally with respect to the Nigerian economy.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. State two roles of agriculture.
2. Why is the agricultural sector an important source of employment in Nigeria?
3. List four raw materials and the corresponding industries using the raw materials in Nigeria.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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