

CHAPTER 3

Subsistence and Commercial Agriculture

Objectives : At the end of this chapter, students should be able to:

explain the meaning of subsistence and commercial agriculture.

• enumerate the characteristics of subsistence and commercial agriculture.

• list the problems of subsistence and commercial agriculture.

3.1 Introduction

Agriculture provides food for the teeming population in most developing countries like Nigeria. Food is a prime necessity of life. Food shortage or its scarcity

is a major problem facing the developing countries. The ultimate role of agriculture is to devise methods by which the gap between food production and the food needs of the population will be reduced.

Adequate all-year-round food supply has remained a serious problem in most developing nations. Also, the demand for raw materials by local industries and for international trade is a major challenge which makes agriculture very important.

Continuous existence of industries depends absolutely on agricultural raw materials.

The type of farming system adopted by farmers determines the quantity of crop produced.

2 Meaning of Subsistence Agriculture

This is a system of farming whereby a farmer cultivates crops and rears animals in order

to produce food for himself and his family. Most often, the purpose of farming by the

subsistence farmer is not to sell the crops he produces but to use them as food. He

grows only food crops and not cash crops. He may not be prepared to risk growing

cash crops because if there is crop failure, he may not have the money to buy food to feed his family. For example in Nigeria, subsistence small holder farmers cultivate

about 0.01 to 2.0 hectares of food crops that is scattered over wide areas. Labour

is provided by the farmer and his immediate family and they make use of crude

implements like hoe, cutlass, diggers and many others. Comparatively little capital is

required to practise this type of farming and their yield is usually very low.

3.3 Meaning of Commercial Agriculture

Commercial agriculture is a type of farming that is done on a large scale. It involves

growing of cash crops such as cocoa, oil palm and rubber as well as domestic animals on large areas of land. A farmer requires huge capital and large areas of land to grow the cash crops or to provide a range land or specialized units for the domestic animals. Commercial agriculture involves mechanization and usually requires the use of heavy machines. Due to large quantity of output, storage and processing are required. It also requires good record keeping.

TABLE 3.1 Differences between subsistence and commercial agriculture

Differences		
	Subsistence	Commercial
1	The farmer does not specialise in any one crop but grows as many crops as possible to meet family needs.	There is a high level of specialisation. He produces a particular crop or animal or animal product.
2	The farmer makes use of simple farm tools.	This type of farming involves high level mechanisation using heavy machines such as tractors and harvesters.
3	Adoption of improved practices is minimal.	Improved practices are widely adopted.
4	Farm production is usually small and on scattered plots.	Production is usually on a large scale and on large area of land.
5	The operators have very low level skill and usually rely on traditional forms.	The operators have high level skills as there is adoption of modern farm inputs.

(continued)

TABLE 3.1 Continued

Differences		
	Subsistence	Commercial
6	Production output is comparatively low.	Production output is comparatively high.
7	Little capital input is required.	Huge capital input is required.
8	Rely heavily on rain and natural factors making the farmer dependent on seasons.	Does not necessarily depend on weather as production is not directly left to natural factors. For example, irrigation may be put in place.
9	Sell surplus primary product without any value added.	There is some level of value addition to primary products before sales such as packaging, processing.
10	Proper records of farm activities are not strictly kept.	Farm records and accounts are well maintained and sometimes well audited.
11	Rely on family labour and this makes the farm output to low.	Rely on hired labour and employ people with skills.
12	Mixed cropping system is common.	Sole cropping that allows mechanisation is common.

Following are some of the problems associated with commercial agriculture.

1. This type of agriculture requires large areas of land. This becomes a problem where land tenure system is a major issue.
2. This type of farming also requires huge capital outlay to start and it is very expensive to practice.
3. It is highly risky and in case of failure, the sole dependence on the specialized crop is dangerous. Such failure could result from disease or pest outbreak.
4. This type of farming also requires intensive and skilled management of pests and diseases. Sometimes the cost of pest control may be high in times of outbreak or the drugs may not yet be available or scarce.
5. Mechanisation of farming activities may lead to unemployment of those that would have been gainfully employed on the farm.
6. Sometimes skilled personnel like pest control specialists may not be available.
7. Use of heavy machines may lead to soil compaction and other soil related

problems such as erosion.

8. This type of farming also encourages the use of agrochemicals. Yet, most agrochemicals that are used in commercial farming are not environmentally friendly and may lead to pollution.

9. Mono-cropping encourages building up of pest and diseases in an environment.

10. Storage can be a problem for commercial farms.

11. Marketing of the products from the farm can also be a problem where there is no ready source of market.

Activity 1: Make a visit to a local farmer and a nearby commercial farm around you. It

could be a commercial poultry, piggery or rabbit farm. List the major farm implements as well as the major equipments that you can see in both farms.

Place a value on each of the farm tools and report on the farming system that is most capital intensive.

REVISION QUESTIONS

Essay Questions

1. Define subsistence agriculture. List six problems that are associated with subsistence

agriculture.

2. Define commercial agriculture. List six problems that are associated with this type of farming.

3. List four characteristics of (i) subsistence agriculture. (ii) commercial agriculture.

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4. Enumerate five problems that are commonly encountered in subsistence farming.

5. Enumerate five problems that are commonly associated with commercial farming.

6. In a tabular form, state six differences between subsistence and commercial agriculture.

Objective Questions

1. Food shortage or food scarcity is a major problem facing

(a) developing countries.

(b) developed countries.

(c) undeveloped and developed countries.

(d) European countries.

2. The following are problems associated with commercial agriculture except

(a) it requires huge capital and is very expensive to practice.

(b) it requires intensive and skillful management of pests and diseases.

(c) it makes use of modern equipment such as tractors and combine-harvesters.

(d) it is not highly mechanized and this may lead to employment.

3. A type of farming system whereby a farmer cultivates crops and rears animals in order to produce food for himself and his family is described as

- (a) commercial farming.
- (b) subsistence farming.
- (c) small-scale farming.
- (d) vocational farming.

4. A type of agriculture that is done on a large scale is described as

- (a) commercial farming.
- (b) subsistence farming.
- (c) small-scale farming.
- (d) vocational farming.

5. The following are some of the problems associated with subsistence agriculture except

- (a) quantity of crop produced is barely enough to feed immediate family.
- (b) inability to adopt modern farming methods.
- (c) modern implements and tools are used.
- (d) attacks by pest and diseases are not controlled.

Answers to Objective Questions

1. (a) 2. (d) 3. (b) 4. (a) 5. (c)