

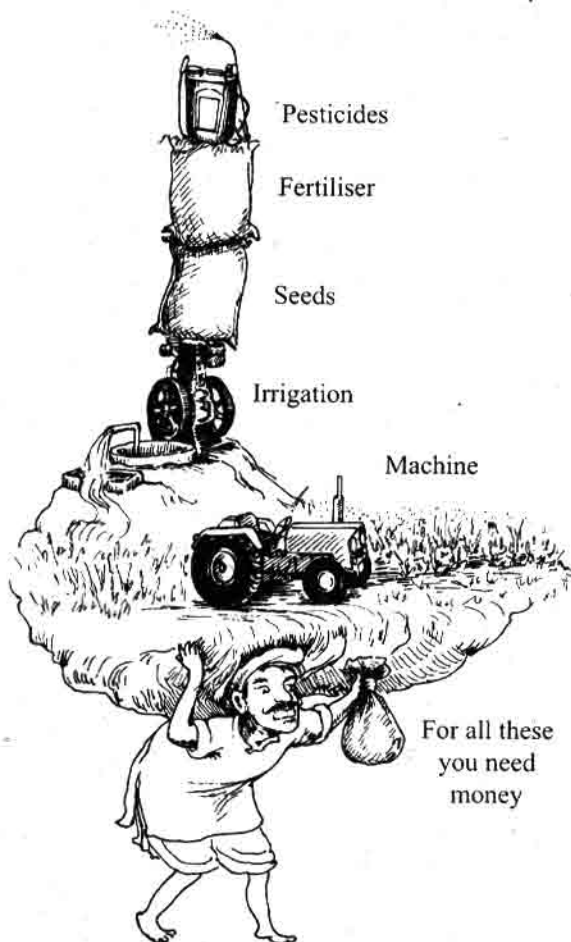
5. FARMERS AND LABOURERS

In this chapter we will talk about small, medium and large farmers and labourers. What do you know about people who live in villages and practice agriculture? Discuss.

MODERN AGRICULTURE

You learnt about villages of the plains, plateaus and mountains and about their agriculture in Geography. We had also compared these villages. In this chapter let us go to a village and talk to large and small farmers and labourers and learn about the changes taking place in agriculture these days.

In the last few years, many changes have taken place in agricultural methods. Earlier, there was the persian wheel or the *rehat* to draw water from wells and irrigate small fields. Today, dams and canals can irrigate thousands of acres. Even a pump installed in a well can irrigate 10 - 15 acres. Thus a lot of land has become irrigated.



Earlier, the seeds used for different crops had low yields. Farmers used cow-dung and other natural manure. Now hybrid, high-yielding seeds, chemical fertilisers and pesticides are used. Earlier ploughing, sowing, harvesting and threshing were done with human and animal power. Machines like tractors and threshers have replaced them in many places. You may have seen harvester-combines working in the fields.

Modern agriculture has some special features. It becomes necessary to arrange for a number of inputs **simultaneously**. New high-yielding seeds cannot be used without irrigation. In order to cultivate high-yielding crops properly and get the maximum yield, it is necessary to add chemical fertilisers in right quantities. These crops are also more prone to diseases and insect attacks. Hence it is important to spray them with pesticides at regular intervals.

New seeds, chemical fertilisers, pesticides, machines and irrigation, all require a lot of money. Earlier, farmers would keep aside some of their own seeds for the next sowing, and use the dung of their cattle as manure. Hence they did not have to invest much money.

Adopting modern methods of agriculture does increase yields, but their repeated use over a long period of time may ruin the soil. You will read about these problems in the coming classes.

- *Discuss with your teacher the changes which have come about in agricultural practices in your region.*
- *Why is it more necessary to spend more money in modern methods of agriculture?*

Let us see what effect these new practices have had on different kinds of farmers.

RAMU, A MIDDLE FARMER

One day, we went to Bhedagaon. Like Kotgaon, Bhedagaon too is a village in the plains. Bhedagaon is mostly irrigated by canals. When we reached the fields near Bhedagaon, soyabean was being harvested. Ramu spotted us from his field where he was working, and called us over. "Have some water," he said, "You must be tired!"

We knew Ramu well. We walked towards his field, where the crop was quite thick and dense. The pods of soyabean, too, were nice and full. Walking towards his hut I said, "Looks like you have a good crop this year. You'll get about 30-35 bags of soyabean this time."

"Yes, this time I was lucky to get a loan from the **co-operative society**. So I was able to use enough fertilisers and pesticides when they were needed. That is why the crop is good this year," replied Ramu.

Ramu owns five acres of land and a pair of bullocks. He is a middle ranking farmer, neither too poor, nor too rich. Ever since canals began irrigating the lands of Bhedagaon, Ramu has been able to raise two crops on his lands - soyabean in the rains and wheat and gram in the winter. The yields of all crops have gone up due to irrigation and chemical fertilisers.

Ramu, his wife and three children, were all working on his fields. Besides them, there were some hired labourers, too. Ramu's wife left her work and came towards us. "How come you're here today?" she asked, giving us water to drink.

"Oh, we just came visiting. How is your work getting along?" Ramu's wife answered, "We are still gathering the harvest. We have borrowed a thresher so that we can quickly remove the seeds from their pods. This time we could get only two labourers, so all work is getting delayed. And then we have to sell our crop immediately."

Middle farmers like Ramu do not use labourers for works like ploughing, sowing and weeding. They manage with their family labour. But at the time of harvesting soyabean



and wheat, they need the help of hired labourers.

At the time of harvest, the demand for labourers increases, and so do the wage rates. Middle farmers like Ramu cannot afford to pay such high wage rates and have to manage with fewer labourers than they actually need.

Ramu is in a hurry to sell his soyabean. He said, "I have to sell the soyabean immediately as I have to repay the loan that I took from the co-operative society for seeds and fertilisers. Unless I repay this loan, I will not get a loan for the next crop."

Middle farmers like Ramu have only small landholdings. The earnings from the land are enough to support their families, but do not leave them much money for anything else. Of course they do not need to work on anyone else's fields to make both ends meet. But neither do they have enough money to buy seeds, fertilisers and pesticides. Every year, they have to take loans, either from the co-operative society or from the money lender.

We had been chatting for some time. We wanted to meet some more people in the village, and Ramu wanted to continue with his harvesting. So we said goodbye to him and made our way to the village.

- What reasons did Ramu give for his getting a good crop this year?
- Identify the false sentences and correct them:

- Ramu's family doesn't work on others' fields.
 - Ramu took a loan for fertiliser and seeds.
 - Ramu's land is very little, so to make both ends meet his family has to work outside as well.
- If you live in a village:
- How many acres of land does a family need to be able to live off their own land and not have to work for others? Find out this minimum amount for irrigated as well as unirrigated land.
 - How many such families are there in your village? (Assume that one family has an average of 6-7 members.)

GANGU - A SMALL FARMER

Near the village, we met Gangu. He was returning from the town after selling soyabean. We sat on his bullock cart and went towards the village. On the way we began talking.

"Where are you coming from?" we asked Gangu.

"I had gone to the co-operative society to sell my soyabean," he replied.

"Why did you sell your soyabean so early? This is just after the harvest and prices are very low. What was the hurry? If you had waited a little you would have had a much better price," we said.

Gangu was silent for a while. Then he said, "Yes, my soyabean sold very cheap and I did not get much money out of it. But what could I do? I needed the cash. I can't manage to support my family on the earnings from my fields. I

had to borrow even for my food during the last month. With cash from the soyabean, I'll pay back my debts."

Gangu owns only two acres of irrigated land. He does not even have the minimum equipments necessary for farming. He has to borrow a plough and bullocks for preparing his land. He also has to borrow money to buy seed, fertiliser, pesticides, etc. Since canal irrigation has come to the village, he takes two crops a year. But he has to sell his crops as soon as they are harvested. As he is often short of money, he cannot wait for the prices to go up. Sometimes, he is forced to sell his crop to his moneylenders. They buy it at a rate even lower than the current market price.

On both sides of the road were luxuriant fields of soyabean. "How was your crop this time?" we asked Gangu.

He replied, "This year the crop was not so good."

We were surprised to hear this. "Others have had such a good crop, how is it that you haven't done so well?" we queried.

Gangu answered in a tired voice, "I couldn't use enough fertiliser, because I wasn't able to borrow all the money needed for it. I got only six quintals of soyabean on my two acre field."

Small farmers like Gangu often do not get adequate loans from the co-operative society in time. As a result they have to borrow from moneylenders at higher rates of interest. They have only a little land, so they earn very little. Under these conditions, small farmers like Gangu are unable to use the new agricultural methods, which require a lot of money.

We could understand Gangu's problems. "What will you do now? How will you manage for the whole of the year?" we asked him.

"I also work as a blacksmith," Gangu said. "But these days, I do not get enough work. So, from tomorrow, I will go to other people's fields to



- **Ramu's family doesn't work on others' fields.**
- **Ramu took a loan for fertiliser and seeds.**
- **Ramu's land is very little, so to make both ends meet his family has to work outside as well.**
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 - **How many acres of land does a family need to be able to live off their own land and not have to work for others? Find out this minimum amount for irrigated as well as unirrigated land.**
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"I also work as a blacksmith," Gangu said. "But these days, I do not get enough work. So, from tomorrow, I will go to other people's fields to

harvest soyabean. I'll now have to work as a labourer to make both ends meet."

Gangu is a small farmer. Small farmers cannot make a living and support their families from the income of their land alone. They do get food from it for a few months. To survive the rest of the year, they have to work as labourers on other's fields. They have to borrow not only for meeting the expenses of farming, but for household expenses as well.

• **Complete the sentences-**

a. **The reasons for Gangu's bad crop were _____**

b. **It was necessary for Gangu to work as a labourer because _____**

c. **In order to pay back his debts Gangu had to _____**

• **If you live in a village, find out -**

a. **How many acres of land must a person own to be able to keep a pair of bullocks?**

b. **Where can farmers get loans to buy fertilisers and seeds? When and how do these loans get repaid?**

HARNARAYAN - A BIG FARMER

Harnarayan is another farmer of Bhedagaon. He owns twenty five acres of irrigated land. There are other farmers in Bhedagaon who have more land than Harnarayan- more than 50 or 100 acres. They get a large harvest every year.

When we met Harnarayan at his house, he was supervising labourers unloading sacks of soyabean from the tractor trolley. "Jai Ramji," we greeted him. "You seem to be storing your soyabean. Are you not going to sell it in the mandi this year?"

"Of course I will! But what's the hurry? The prices are low these days. Let the prices go

up. That's when I'll sell."

This was the time of the soyabean harvest. You may know that at harvest time, the market is flooded with grains as farmers try to sell their produce. Therefore prices go down. Harnarayan did not need money immediately. He also had enough room to store his soyabean. So he could comfortably wait for prices to rise.

After getting all the soyabean unloaded from the trolley, Harnarayan called us inside. He asked his daughter to quickly bring us some tea.

"You seem to be in a hurry," we remarked. "Do you have to go somewhere?"

"I have to go to the town," said Harnarayan. "I am thinking of buying five acres of land. The owner of the land lives in the town. I have to discuss the price of the land with him, and also buy some things from the market."

We chatted with him over tea. He told us several important things about his fields. He said that he had bought many things by taking loans from the bank - a diesel-powered pump, a thresher, and then a tractor. Now he had paid back all the loans and was thinking of buying some land with his own money.

As we left his house, we were thinking about big farmers like Harnarayan. They make a good living off their land. They use seeds, fertilisers and pesticides in the right quantities. They do not have to take any loans for these purposes. They make so much money that they can even think of buying more land. They manage to buy expensive equipments required for today's agriculture like a pump, thresher and tractor.



RAJJU BAI - A LABOURER

Big farmers like Harnarayan can afford to get all their agricultural work done by labourers. Neither they nor their family members have to work in the fields. Actually, they have so much land that even if their family did work in the fields, they would still need lots of additional hands.

Large farmers employ some regular labourers for the entire year. These labourers are called 'harwahas'. Besides harwahas, large farmers also employ labourers on daily wages at peak periods of work when they need to sow, harvest or weed their crops.

• **Complete the following sentences -**

- a. Harnarayan wanted to sell his soyabean crop later because —
- b. Harnarayan does not have to borrow money for cultivation because —
- Why can't middle farmers like Ramu save money like Harnarayan to buy more land?
- Do farmers like Ramu need to keep harwahas?
- Explain the difference between Harnarayan and Gangu's families.
- If you live in a village find out how much land should a farmer own to be able to buy seeds, fertilisers etc., without taking any loan from a moneylender or bank?

Families of all the labourers in Bhedagaon were busy working. We went to a field where soyabean was being harvested. When the soyabean is ripe, it has to be harvested immediately. Or else, the soyabean pods begin to burst open and the seed gets scattered. This is why a large number of labourers are necessary to harvest soyabean.

When we reached the field, it was time for the mid-day meal. A number of labourers were eating their food under a tree. We went and sat next to them. "You must be very busy these days," we said casually.

"Yes, it is the harvest season and that too soyabean - a very busy time indeed," said Rajju Bai, one of the labourers.

Labourer families like Rajju Bai's, have no land of their own to cultivate. Such labourers are called landless labourers. As they don't possess any land there is no question of being able to grow their own food. They earn their livelihood by working on other people's fields.

We asked Rajju Bai, "Now that the land in this village is irrigated, you must be getting work all round the year."

Rajju Bai replied, "With canal irrigation, agricultural work has definitely increased. Now we can get work during the harvest season within the village itself. We don't have to go outside during the harvest season. But this is only during this season. We still do not get work all round the year."

Due to facilities for irrigation, it is now possible to grow two crops a year, and therefore, the likelihood of finding work also increases. Yet, work is not available all round the year. There is a lot of work during the two sowing and harvesting seasons, and less at other times. Sowing and harvesting are the seasons to earn some money. In



spite of irrigation, families like Rajju Bai's cannot earn enough for the whole year. They often have to borrow money.

After finishing their meal, the labourers got up and returned to the fields. We, too, went back towards the village. On the way, we met Harnarayans's elder son. He had just finished harvesting his fields. He told us that he had got some of his fields harvested by a harvester-combine, which he had taken on rent.

It was a bit expensive, but the work has finished very quickly. Moreover, labourers are difficult to get during the harvest season. So, Harnarayan's son thinks that he'll get all his fields harvested by the harvester-combine next year.

Harvester-combine is a machine, which not only cuts the crop, but also threshes and winnows it (separates the grain from the chaff). The harvester-combine can harvest, thresh and winnow twelve acres of soyabean in a day. If human beings were to do the same work, many people would get employment. If everyone got their harvesting done by combines, a large number of families of labourers would be unemployed.

- **Discuss with your teacher- How many labourers' work does a harvester-combine do in one day?**

The next day the weekly market (haat) was held in Bhedagaon. A number of labourers had also come there. We met Rajju Bai buying groundnut oil in a little bottle. "You must have got the money from the harvest, that's why you've come to buy things for your family" we observed.

"Oh, all the money's been spent in buying millets (Jowar)," said Rajju Bai. "Jowar is cheap these days, so I bought enough for two or three months. I had thought, I would also buy a blanket for the winter, but I have no money left for it."

Landless labourers are usually very poor. Since they have no land, unlike Gangu, they cannot even grow a few months' grain for themselves. Sometimes they get some grain as wages, but they usually have to buy grain

at a very high rate from the market. It is true that the income of people like Rajju Bai, too, has gone up. But they still have to borrow from the moneylender for their daily needs.

- **Why are wages higher during the harvest season?**
- **If you live in a village, can you tell what kinds of work that labourer families do all round the year?**
- **What difference could the harvester-combines bring in the lives of labourers and farmers?**

FARMERS AND LABOURERS

We have met members of four families at Bhedagaon village and have seen the impact of irrigation and the new methods of farming on different types of farmers and labourers.

The majority of the people in our country live in villages and practice agriculture. We will find small, medium and large farmers in almost every village of our country.

There are many landless labourers like Rajju Bai who have no land at all. They somehow have to make both ends meet by working in others' fields.

There are also many small farmers like Gangu. They cannot fulfil all the requirements of their families with income from their own land, and have to do some amount of work outside.

Out of the remaining people involved in agriculture some are medium farmers like Ramu who can manage on their own land, but are unable to save much money.

There are only a few like Harnarayan - large farmers who make enough money from their lands to be able to save and invest it.

There are government schemes to help landless labourers and small farmers to increase their income. We will read about these schemes in later classes.

EXERCISES

1. What are the similarities and differences between Rajju Bai and Gangu? Discuss their respective incomes, land and labour.
2. One year Ramu sowed his soyabean after a couple of good showers. But after that it did not rain for many days. All the little plants in his field died and it was necessary for him to sow soyabean again if he wanted to have a crop that year. What do you think he could have done?
3. Read page 193 and answer- What were the three main reasons for Harnarayan having a good income?
4. Why can't labourers like Rajju Bai earn enough to make both ends meet? Give three reasons.
5. You have learnt in this chapter about different kinds of farmers and how they practice agriculture. Fill in the table given below:

	Land	Agricultural implements	Loans	Labour	Sale of Harvest
Medium farmers like Ramu	5 acres enough to live on		For manure and seeds		
Small farmers like Gangu					sells immediately after the harvest.
Big farmers like Harnarayan				employs labourers	
Labourers like Rajju Bai	None				

