

BOOK REVIEWS

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Handbook of Agriculture in India. By Shovan Ray. New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press (2009), pp. 231, £12.99 (paperback), £18.99 (hardback). ISBN-13: 978-019806251-6 and ISBN-10: 0-19-806251-6.

India is a vast country with diverse population and ecological zones. Agriculture there has undergone tremendous transformation in the past seven decades. At the head of all sciences and arts, agriculture was considered the noblest and the saviour of mankind. This book with eight chapters contributed by nine authors from four institutions in India focuses on agriculture and 1) economic policy, 2) environment, 3) poverty reduction, 4) food security, 5) rural urban migration, 6) changing agrarian systems and rural urban linkages. The first chapter is an overview of the book. The last chapter challenges: 'How rural is rural India? Rethinking options for farming and farmers'. Since the main emphasis is agriculture and socio-economic issues, the title could have been 'Handbook of Agriculture in India: Economic and social perspectives'.

The authors acknowledge that the green revolution was a boon to India since it averted widespread famine and almost eliminated food imports. However, the benefits of green revolution did not reach all farmers. Continuous exploitation of the farmland resulted in loss of soil fertility, depletion of the water supply and pollution of the environment, and displaced farmers who sought better opportunities elsewhere. Almost all the authors discuss the pros and cons of various government policies, emphasizing that to undo the damage caused by continuous cropping, new vision and new policies are needed. Is it too late to resolve the problems of the farmers, and rural poor in India? Case studies from Punjab and Uttar Pradesh have been presented to depict the acuteness of the problem. This book poses challenging questions to scientists, policy makers and politicians to save agriculture and villages, and to ensure sustainable food and nutritional security in India.

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Economic Analysis of Diversity in Modern Wheat. Edited by E. C. H. Meng and J. P. Brennan. Enfield, NH, USA: Science Publishers (2009), pp. 192, £62.00. ISBN 9-781578-085750.

It is now well understood that if we wish to maintain food security in a rapidly changing agri-environment then plant genetic resource (PGR) conservationists must provide breeders with the broadest range of diversity to help them address the growing challenges of human over-population, climate change and rapidly evolving consumer demands, not to mention the specific challenges facing wheat cultivation, such as the virulent stem rust Ug99. Critical to addressing these challenges is the maintenance of diversity of landraces because they contain the greatest proportion of adaptive diversity. As such the text aims at reviewing the economic costs of maintaining adaptive diversity, models competing options and is targeted at professional PGR conservationists, breeders and researchers. However, overall the text has a narrower main focus looking at the economics of continued landrace production and whether there is a trade-off between diversity and immediate production objectives. The text is divided into 12 chapters, with a brief introductory chapter on the role of economics in crop genetic diversity, then a chapter reviewing the conceptual framework for estimating crop diversity and measurement, followed by nine chapters addressing economic aspects of wheat cultivation and breeding in Australia, and finishing with a chapter that provides an economic overview and lays out the associated policy implications. I valued the information provided, but wondered at whom the book is actually aimed; it lacks