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2. Agriculture and Fisheries

Some 23.4 per cent of the Mexican labour force was employed in the agriculture and fisheries sectors in 1990, numbering almost 5.5 million workers, as compared to 45 per cent in 1970.

The Mexican territory occupies 197 million hectares, but only an estimated 17 per cent is suitable for cultivation. The area under annual crop cultivation is about 23 million hectares, producing a diversity of grain, oilseed and horticultural commodities. However, because of periodically adverse climatic conditions, agricultural sector growth has not been able to match population growth. During the past two decades, population growth has averaged 2.6 per cent annually, while the increase in agricultural crop production between 1980 and 1990 was less than 1 per cent per annum. Recurring difficulties in crop production, due mainly to shortages of water in irrigated and rain-fed areas as well as severe climatic conditions, have forced the government to significantly increase imports of basic commodities. In 1990, imports of agricultural products including corn, sorghum, beans, oilseeds, wheat, barley, fresh and dried fruits, reached \$1.8 billion U.S. Agricultural exports comprising vegetables and horticultural products, coffee, fresh fruits, cotton, sesame seed, chickpeas, tobacco, spices had a total value of \$1.7 billion U.S. dollars that same year.

New agricultural policies enacted under the Salinas administration are directed toward positioning the sector to function and compete efficiently in context with global trade.

Recent constitutional reforms to the old ejido system represent the most important structural adjustment to land tenure regulations and property rights, allowing for direct participation in agriculture of domestic and foreign private sector interests. The modifications are designed to permit the efficient allocation of resources and increase technology and capital flows to the sector. Under the new reform, ejido (communal) farmers are allowed to buy or rent land, hire labour, associate with other producers, and enter into contracts or joint venture schemes with domestic or foreign private investors.

Despite the large investments directed to the fisheries sector during the 1980's, the catch continues to be low, considering the volume of available resource along its