

Policy Communique

Developing Inclusive and Competitive Value Chain of Pulses in Pakistan

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Introduction

In Pakistan, the optimum level of pulses' consumption is very high since pulses are widely considered as the most affordable and nutrient-dense dietary sources. In a country like Pakistan where more than 107.95 million population out of 241.5 million lives below the poverty line and over 39.8 million in extreme poverty (World Bank, 2025), it is the only food to rely upon by the poor and the poorest for their sustenance. That's why the government spends about \$980 million each year on pulses import to meet domestic demand (Randhawa 2026), which is of course a huge burden on the national exchequer. Adding on to these woes, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation has risen cumulatively by 63 percent since March 2022, eroding household purchasing power at the highest level. Thus, 60 percent of the population is unable to afford a healthy diet, that costs around \$3.90 (SOFI, 2025).

Moreover, the majority of this vulnerable population lives in rural areas with limited income and resources. Presently, 16.5% of the population in Pakistan is undernourished, 33.6% of children are stunted, and 23% of adults are obese (Food and Agriculture Organization et al., 2025). Hence, 22 million people in the country are faced with different levels of food insecurity¹ (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, 2025). Therefore, ensuring adequate dietary diversity for these low-income food insecure households is a major challenge.

In this context, pulses are considered a staple diet in Pakistani food requirement, with an estimated of 1.3 million tons per year (USDA FAS, 2023). Pulses contain high amounts of protein, which is essential to deal with protein-related micronutrient deficiencies and malnutrition at a relatively low cost (Gurung and Bokhtiar, 2016). The vulnerable population in Pakistan has a high reliance on pulses, given their high content in proteins, iron, zinc, and dietary fiber (Langyan et al, 2022).

Major pulses produced and consumed include chickpeas (white gram), mung beans (green gram), mash beans (black gram) and lentils (masoor). Among these, chickpeas dominate domestic production, accounting for 80% of total pulse output (Saeed et al., 2023). Desi chickpea alone constitutes 50% of total pulse consumption (Majid, 2023), with annual chickpea consumption standing at 825,000 tons (USDA FAS **RAJA**, 2023).

The pulses are also beneficial for soil health and climate-resilient farming. They enhance soil fertility through fixing biological nitrogen and reducing synthetic fertilizer use. Additionally, pulses do not require high-maintenance, as they can tolerate extreme

¹ 11 million people experienced acute food insecurity, 1.7 million critical levels of food insecurity, 9.3 million experiencing crisis levels of acute food insecurity

temperatures and similarly, they are not water-intensive. Despite all this, a drastic decline in Pakistan.

Pulses Landscape

Over the last five decades, cultivation area and domestic production of major pulses, including chickpea, lentil, mung bean and mash bean have been declining in national cropping systems (Ullah et al, 2020). Presently, these are treated as minor crops, which occupy only 5% of the total cropped land (Ministry of National Food Security Research, 2023). The domestic production of 408,000 tons of pulses over 1.07 million hectares, against an estimated annual consumption of 1.3 million tons (USDA FAS, 2023), results in a shortfall of approximately 892,000 tons that must be met through imports (Ministry of National Food Security Research, 2025). Even though there has been a sharp reduction in per capita annual consumption, i.e. from 15kg to 7kg from 1961 to 2013² and further declining to approximately 5kgs in 2026.

Pakistan Bureau of Statistics data shows that pulse imports reached 1.464 million tons in the FY2025, costing \$1 billion in foreign exchange. Imports in FY2025 surpassed the previous record of 1.315 million tons set in the FY2023 (Khan, 2025). This rise in pulse imports depress domestic prices, reduce farmers' profits, and make protected crops like wheat and sugar cane comparatively more profitable and cause decline in domestic production. Since 2007, there has been a 37 percent decrease in pulse production (Agriculture Centre for International Agriculture Research, 2021).

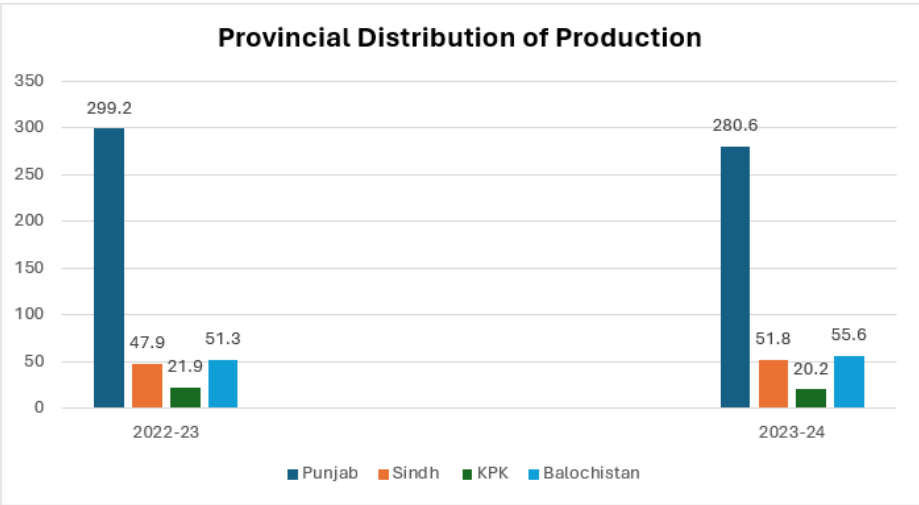
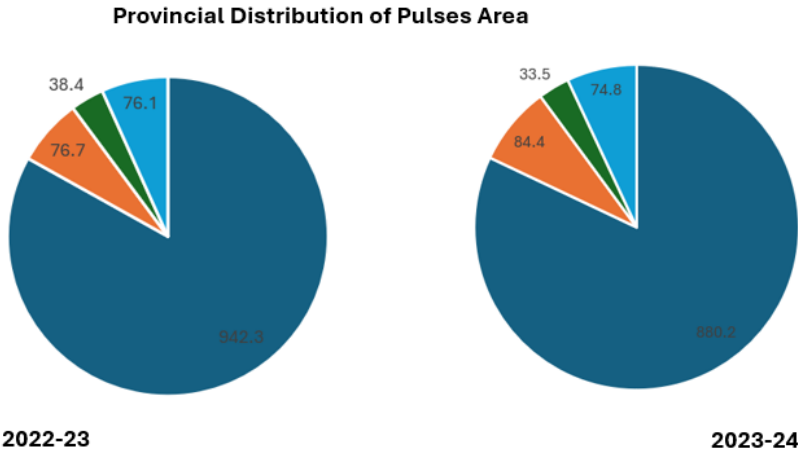
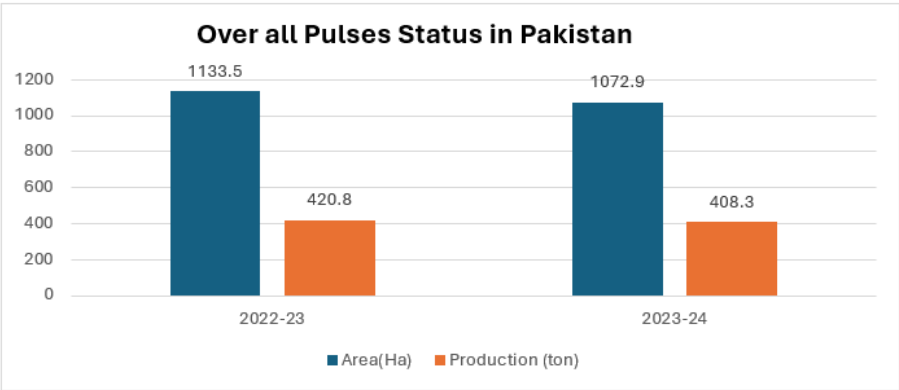
Spatial Distribution and Yield Dynamics of Pulses Cultivation

In Pakistan, chickpea is cultivated on 73 percent of total area and contributes 76 percent in total pulse production, followed by lentil and mash bean, each cultivated on 5%, and contributing 5% to total production (Ullah et al, 2020)

Mung and mash beans are grown in Kharif season (April-July), whilst chickpea and lentil are cultivated in Rabi season (October- December). These crops are largely grown in rain-fed zones, including Thal desert (spanning through Jhang, Bakhar, Khushab, Mianwali, and Layyah) and Barani region (including Attack, Chakwal, Jhelum, Rawalpindi and Narowal) (Ullah et al, 2020). Figures 1 shows overall pulse production in Pakistan. Whereas figures 2 and 3 show a province-wise comparative analysis of pulse cultivation and production during FY 2022-23 and 2023-24 for both Rabi and Kharif Crops.

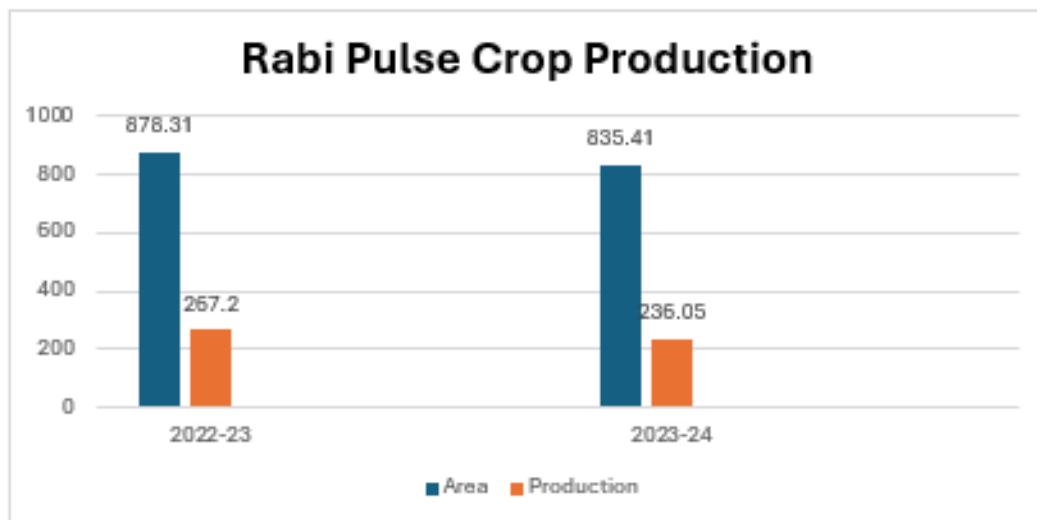
² <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/72001900-cde5-4a94-a8b2-c4dbb557fc6e/content>

Figure 1: Overall Pulse Production in Pakistan (2022-2024)

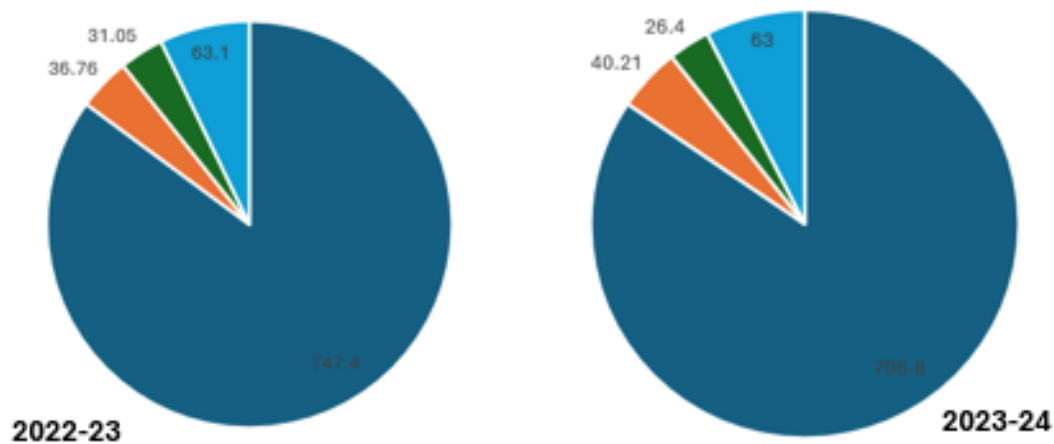


Source: Authors’ designed based on [MNFSR, 2023-24](#).

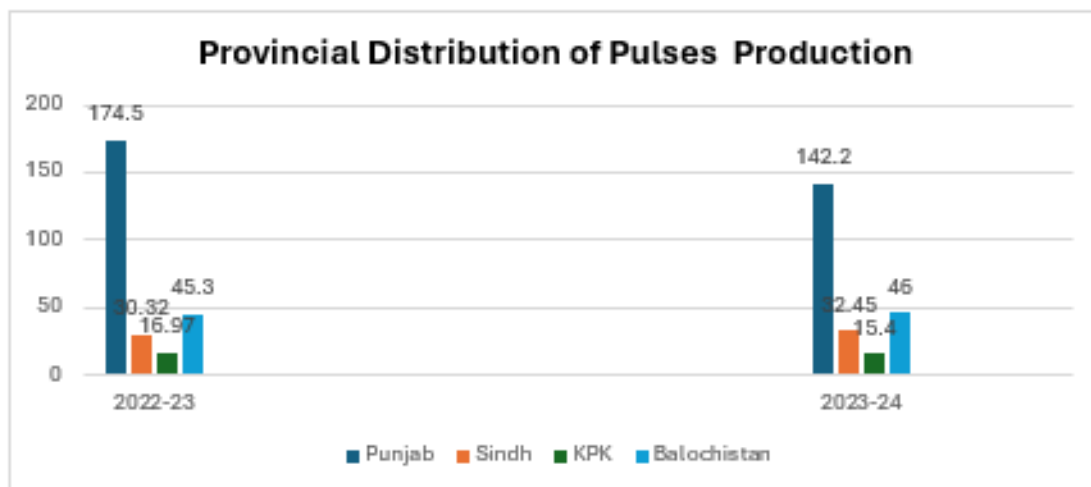
Figure 2: Rabi Pulse Crop Production



Provincial Distribution of Pulses Area

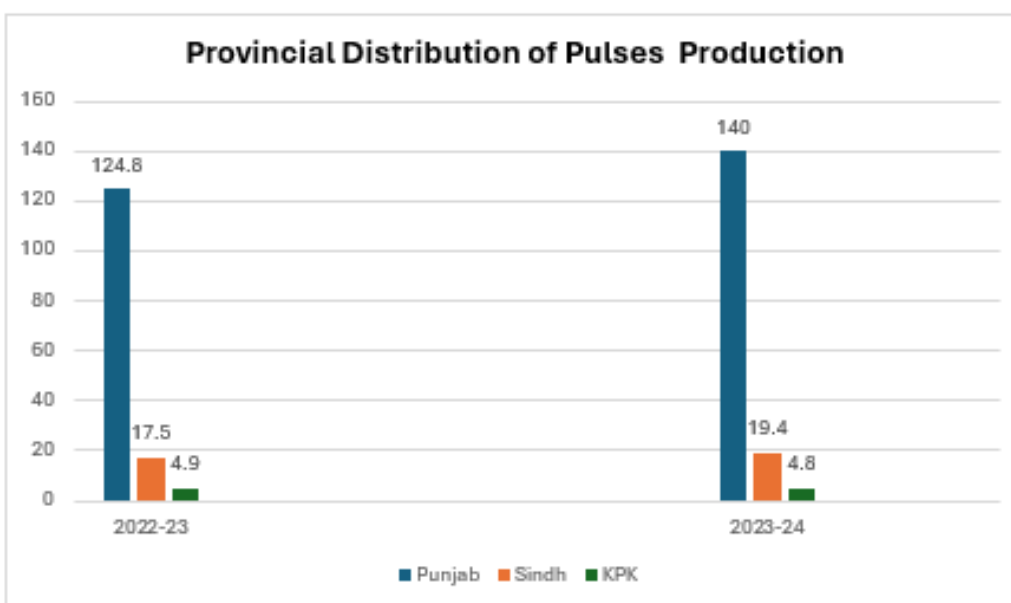
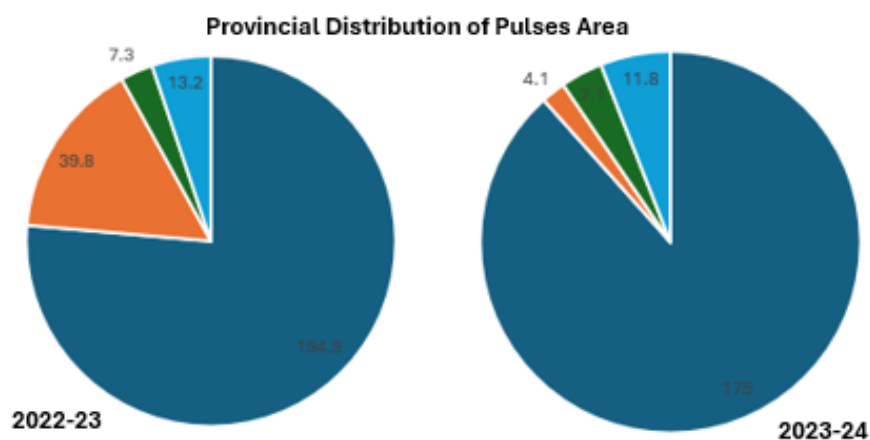
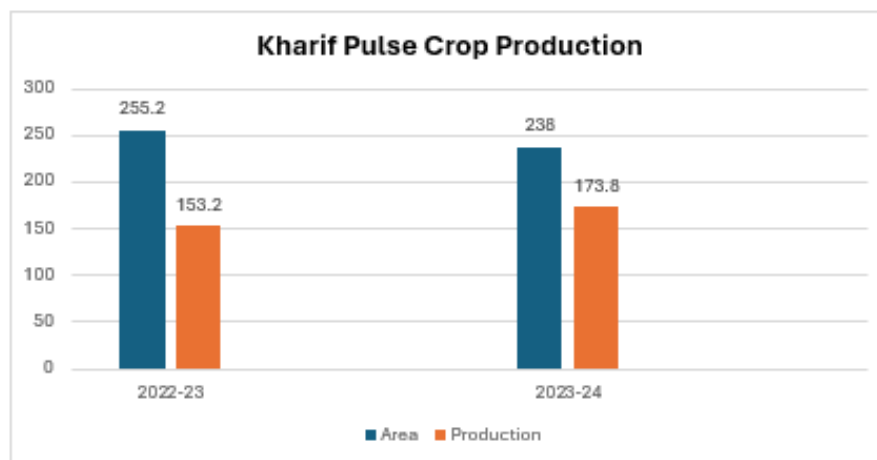


Provincial Distribution of Pulses Production



Source: Authors' designed based on [MNFSR, 2023-24](#).

Figure 3: Kharif Pulse Crop Production



Source: Authors' designed based on [MNFSR, 2023-24](#).

Policy and Institutional Landscape

An overall decline in domestic production and contraction in cultivated areas is mainly attributed to misaligned policies resulting in market distortions. Policies regarding support prices, input subsidies, and trade controls applied primarily to other crops have impacted the pulses sector adversely. The most prominent of these are the policies directed towards cash crops. The wheat procurement and price support policies administered by federal and provincial authorities in the past previously amounting to 5–7 million tons annually, have made wheat more profitable than the other crops like pulses. However, both federal and provincial governments withdrew from wheat procurement in 2025 (Khetran, 2025).

Input subsidies, particularly on fertilizer and electricity, further disadvantage pulse growers. Although these subsidies are crop-neutral on paper, their benefits are reaped mostly by the fertilizer intensive cereals and cash crops. Pulses, on the other hand, require lower fertilizer application, receive a smaller implicit benefit, placing the pulse growing farmers at a relative disadvantage.

Another major policy-induced drawback for pulses was the imposition of 35% export tax on pulses through Statutory Regulatory Order (S.R.O.) 492(I)/2006. Which was introduced to ensure smooth accessibility to domestic consumers at lower prices. Later in 2016, the tax was replaced by an export ban under S.R.O. 344(I)/2016. Thus, a decade of export taxation followed by ban reduced the profit of producers (farmers) and discouraged them from investing in the pulse sector.

Moreover, Institutionally, agriculture is a provincial subject post-Eighteenth Constitutional Amendment, agriculture is now a provincial subject. Whereas, trade policy and price control mechanisms remain federal responsibilities. This division creates confusion as the two subjects are not aligned with each other. As pulses are grown in provinces but marketed within a nationally regulated trade framework.

Key Constraints and Structural Challenges

Beyond these policy gaps, decline in pulse production is driven by a number of structural factors, including ***limited allocation of agriculture land to pulses cultivation, inadequate availability of certified seed and poor seed distribution mechanism***. In 2023-24, only 9089 metric tons of certified seed were distributed against the demand of 85,413 metric tons, depicting public sector availability of only 11%. This shortfall forced farmers to move towards expensive private seed companies or use the saved seeds that were saved by the farmers from the previous year crop. Presently, more than 80% of pulse cultivation depends on saved seed. As a result, the pulses sector is experiencing low and stagnant productivity. Thus, the low production of pulses is strongly linked to technological

factors including lack of innovative crop improvement programs and seed distribution systems.

Gaps Between Stated Policy Intent and Observed Outcomes

Another gap lies between food security objectives and the policies devised to achieve them. Trade restrictions on pulses were introduced to protect consumers from price increases, yet the impact on prices has not been significant enough with prices still rising with the each passing year. At the same time, cash crop-focused subsidies have increased fiscal costs and resource use without impacting food security significantly.

Increasingly, productivity ambitions are not translated into market incentives. Public research and development initiatives have emphasized yield improvement and value chain strengthening, but without complementary reform of trade and pricing policies, productivity gains risk eroding farm incomes.

Hence, all the above market and policy distortions force the governments to import pulses to meet the domestic demand. As data from Pakistan Bureau of Statistics depicts that

“Pakistan imported 110,098 metric tons of pulses worth \$73.837 million in July marking a 13.25% increase from 96,223 metric tons worth \$55.552 million during the same period last year” (The Nation, 2025)

BOX1: Pulses Overview

Pakistan produced 408,000 tons of pulses over 1.07 million hectares in 2023–24 (Ministry of National Food Security and Research, 2025). However, production was not ample enough to meet the domestic demand. Pakistan Bureau of Statistics data shows that pulse imports reached 1.464 million tones in FY2025, costing \$1 billion in foreign exchange (Khan, 2025).

Mung cultivation declines over time. In 2024-25, 131,000 tons of mung were grown over an area of 457200 hectares. In comparison with previous year, a decrease of 7.92% in an area, with 14.6% decrease in production in 2023-24 and 19.9% (35.9% production decline) in 2020-21 was observed. The Punjab produces 91% (139,000 tons) on 427500 acres, followed by Sindh (5%) with 7100 tons, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (2%) with 3800 tons and Balochistan (<2%) with 3500 tons. In 2024-25, 59,874 tons have been imported for PKR 13, 676 million from Myanmar, Brazil, Argentina, Tanzania and Kenya.

Chickpea (gram) production is continuously declining due to low crop yield. In 2024-25, domestic production was recorded at 175,000 tons with 16% decline (Agriculture Market Information System, 2025). In 2023-24 production declined mainly due to sharp reductions in Punjab, where output fell from 250.0 thousand tons in 2021–22 to 172.0 thousand tons in 2022–23. Sindh also saw a decline (22.88 to 20.37 thousand tons). In

contrast, production increased in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (8.57 to 12.92 thousand tons) and Balochistan (34.41 to 38.33 thousand tons), but these gains did not offset Punjab's losses (Ministry of National Food Security and Research, 2023). The Punjab contributes 66% (138,000 tons from 1737200 acres), followed by Baluchistan (18%), Sindh (10%) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (6%). Pakistan heavily relies on imports. In 2024-25, Pakistan imported 134087 tons (at PKR 25823 million) from Russia, Tanzania and Australia (Agriculture Market Information System, 2025).

Masoor cultivation has been showing a downward trend since 2020-21, with a slight increase in 2022-23. In 2024-25, domestic production of Masoor recorded 5 million tons (depicting 6.8% increase to 2023-24 and 21.9% increase to 2020-21 (Ibid). Production showed mixed provincial trends between 2021-22 and 2022-23. In the Punjab, output increased from 3,868 tons to 4,668 tons, while Sindh also recorded growth (360 tons to 524 tons). In contrast, production declined in KP (431 to 328 tons) and Balochistan (1,182 to 1,101 tons). Total masoor production in Pakistan in 2022-23 stood at 6,621 tons. This decreased to 4,000 tons in 2023-24 (Ministry of National Food Security and Research, 2023 and 2025).

Mash cultivation is done on 4900 acres, which is quite low. Approximately 92% of the country's demand is met through imports. In 2024-25, domestic output was recorded at 6000 tons. Whereas the national consumption was 144,900 tons, with 138,900 tons met by import. At least 74% domestic production is managed by Balochistan (4100 tons), followed by KP (14%) (800 tons) and Punjab (12%) (600 tons). In 2024-25, 66,393 million tons were imported from Myanmar, 17,785 tons Afghanistan and 1025 tons from Thailand (Agriculture Market Information System, 2025).

Policy Recommendations

- 1- Reconsider the Export Ban on Pulses to Correct Payment of Balance:** Export ban is the major explicit government policy, which undermines the profit of farmers and private investment. Therefore, revisiting this ban and exploring alternate trade policies would restore farmers and private investors' trust, in turn increasing domestic production and cultivation. This will positively contribute to Pakistan's foreign exchange balance and help improve the balance of payment, given the rising import bill.
- 2- Correct relative Crop Incentives by Rationalizing Subsidy Design:** There is a need to introduce agri- wide approach that fosters a level-playing field for pulses. Coupled with the gradual rationalization of cash crop procurement and input subsidies, combined with targeted investment in pulses research, certified seed multiplication, and crop-specific mechanization.

- 3- Developing a Dedicated Policy Framework:** Despite its significance in achieving food and nutrition security and climate resilient cropping, the pulses sector lacks a dedicated policy framework. It is high time to devise a separate National Pulses Policy aligned with existing policies of trade, climate change, agriculture, food security and nutrition.
- 4- Institutional Responsibilities and Coordination:** Provincial agriculture departments should integrate pulses-specific extension modules within existing outreach programmes, with emphasis on selection of variety, planting practices, pest management, and harvesting methods. Targeted mechanization support, particularly for harvesting and post-harvest handling, should be prioritized to reduce labor costs and post-harvest losses in major pulses-growing areas. Moreover, a dedicated pulses coordination mechanism should be established within existing food security or agriculture platforms to align trade policy, seed regulation, extension, and market monitoring.
- 5- Investment in Pulses Improvement Technology:** Pulses production can be improved through crop improvement (including development of short duration, high yielding, disease resistant, and climate resilient varieties), intercropping and growing of pulses as catch crops, adoption of conservation agriculture to conserve resources, provision of crop-specific farm machinery, development and dissemination of site-specific production technologies.
- 6- Scaling up Domestic Production:** About 80 percent of country's total pulse consumption is met through imports. To manage the balance of payment and upgrade the declining per capita consumption of pulses certified seed availability needs to be expanded, coupled with public-private partnerships, seed breeding and participatory extension approaches suited to rainfed systems. This would offer a high-return intervention with limited fiscal exposure.
- 7- Strengthening Pulses Value Chain:** Strengthen the interlinkages between relevant actors (growers, market intermediaries, wholesalers, retailers, processors, government institutions, non-government organizations, and donors), to improve information dissemination on quality requirements and price discovery for different markets. This will empower all participants in the value chain to make informed decisions.

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