

# Essay on Wheat in Bangladesh

Since the early 1970s, sustained government investment in irrigation facilities, rural infrastructure, agricultural research, and extension services has helped Bangladeshi farmers achieve dramatic increases in food production. Today Bangladesh is nearing self-sufficiency in rice, the major staple. Production of wheat, the second most important cereal, has also increased, although the country still imports significant quantities of wheat to meet rapidly growing domestic demand. While the government of Bangladesh continues to provide strong support to rice producers, its commitment to wheat farmers seems less firm. Some policymakers have gone so far as to question whether support to wheat should be scaled back, citing studies showing that wheat production is unprofitable and represents an inefficient use of resources. But is wheat production in Bangladesh really unprofitable for farmers and inefficient for the country?

Researchers from the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) recently examined the arguments for and against wheat production in Bangladesh. In *Wheat Production in Bangladesh: Technological, Economic, and Policy Issues*, Research Report 106, Michael L. Morris, Nuimuddin Chowdhury, and Craig Meisner used a combination of financial and economic analysis to compare the production of two irrigated crops (wheat and boro rice) and three nonirrigated crops in five wheat-growing zones.

Wheat also accounts for the great bulk of imported food grains, exceeding 1 million tons annually and going higher than 1.8 million tons in FY 1984, FY 1985, and FY 1987. The great bulk of the imported wheat is financed under aid programs of the United States, the European Economic Community, and the World Food Programme.