

WHEAT LOSSES DURING HARVESTING OPERATION

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During the harvesting operation, a fairly good quantity of wheat grains and ears fall on the ground. Some of these ears are restored to the human population by the poor women folk of the rural community who pick the ears. Generally, picking of the ears is allowed after the sheaves are shifted to the threshing ground. As soon as the harvested crop is removed the field is also opened to buffalo, goat and sheep grazing. So, these animals also play a role in restoring indirectly some of the food energy lost in the grains to the human population.

In order to estimate the quantity of wheat grains lost during harvesting, about 33 hectares of harvested wheat fields in central Punjab were sampled with the help of 1 m² quadrats during the period extending from April 15 to May 15, 1987. In each acre of the fields, 3 quadrats were randomly selected and all the wheat grains present inside the quadrats were collected, dried and weighed.

About 94% of the quadrats had grains in them. An average quadrat contained 0.0059 kg of wheat in it. In other words, in each hectare 59.0 kg of wheat grains were lost due to shedding mainly during the harvesting operation. This is 3.14% of the per hectare yield of wheat in Pakistan during the year 1986-87, the per hectare yield being 1880 kg.

** (Source: Federal Bureau of Statistics, Government of Pakistan).

The estimated loss of 59.0 kg of wheat per hectare during harvesting should be a matter of great concern to agriculturists. No doubt some of this loss is mended by the domestic animals and the picker women, but this also helps in sustaining rats, sparrows, parakeets, and ant populations. Ploughing of the fields immediately after harvesting would deprive these animals of this important source of food during late spring.

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