

**DEVELOPMENT STAGES AND ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE OF
FINE-FIBER COTTON CULTIVATION IN UZBEKISTAN'S
AGRICULTURE (A CASE STUDY OF KASHKADARYA AND
SURKHANDARYA REGIONS, 1945–1990)**

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Abstract: This article examines the development of fine-fiber cotton cultivation in the agriculture of Uzbekistan during the period of 1945–1990, highlighting its economic and strategic significance as well as the specific characteristics of its development in the Kashkadarya and Surkhandarya regions. Based on historical sources, the study analyzes the Soviet Union's cotton policy, the expansion of irrigation systems, advances in cotton breeding, and the increase in fine-fiber cotton production under the centrally planned economy. Furthermore, the article provides a scholarly assessment of the impact of this process on the regional economy and the social life of the local population.

Keywords: fine-fiber cotton, cotton cultivation, Kashkadarya, Surkhandarya, irrigation, cotton breeding, agriculture, Soviet period, economic policy.

Introduction. During the second half of the twentieth century, cotton cultivation became one of the leading sectors of Uzbekistan's economy. Fine-fiber cotton, in particular, was regarded as a strategic raw material because it was used in the production of high-quality textiles, military fabrics, and various industrial products. In the post-World War II period, the economic policy of the Soviet Union increasingly focused on specializing Uzbekistan in the cultivation of fine-fiber cotton. The implementation of this policy relied heavily on the favorable natural and climatic conditions of the Kashkadarya and Surkhandarya regions, which became key areas for the expansion of fine-fiber cotton production.

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In the post-World War II period, the economy of the Soviet Union entered a stage of rapid reconstruction and industrial development. Within this process, the Union republics, particularly the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic (Uzbek SSR), assumed a leading role in the agricultural sector, especially in cotton production. The favorable climatic and geographical conditions of the Uzbek SSR, the availability of abundant labor resources, and the suitability of its natural environment for cotton cultivation created the necessary conditions for the Soviet leadership to pursue a large-scale policy aimed at expanding cotton production, with particular emphasis on the cultivation of high-quality fine-fiber cotton. Within the framework of state policy, cotton production became one of the principal components of the Soviet Union's overall economic strategy. Based on the principles of the centrally planned economy, comprehensive measures were implemented to significantly increase cotton production through the expansion of cultivated areas, the development of irrigation infrastructure, the improvement of cotton varieties, and the advancement of breeding and selection programs. At the same time, the activities of agricultural research institutions were intensified, while greater attention was devoted to the training of qualified specialists for the agricultural sector. Fine-fiber cotton served as an essential raw material for the light industry, particularly the textile sector, and was in high demand throughout the domestic market of the Soviet Union. Moreover, it also occupied a certain place in the Union's foreign economic relations. Consequently, efforts were made to expand the cultivation of fine-fiber cotton throughout the republic, particularly in its southern regions, and a number of special governmental resolutions were adopted to increase the production of this strategically valuable agricultural commodity. The successful implementation of the Fourth Five-Year Plan resulted in significant progress in various sectors of the national economy, including improvements in public welfare, healthcare services, and cultural and educational development. These achievements created the necessity for adopting the Fifth Five-Year Plan (1951–1955). In this regard, the Nineteenth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) defined the principal directions for the country's subsequent stage of development and issued corresponding

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directives to the Central Committee of the CPSU and the Council of Ministers of the USSR. Among these directives, the further development of the cotton industry was identified as one of the highest priorities. In particular, it was planned that capital investments allocated to the cotton sector during 1951–1955 would nearly double compared with the 1946–1950 period. This policy created favorable conditions for expanding the production of fine-fiber cotton, modernizing agricultural technologies, increasing irrigated land areas, and accelerating scientific research related to cotton cultivation. As a result, the Uzbek SSR not only became the leading cotton-producing republic of the Soviet Union but also acquired the capacity to supply the Union with high-quality cotton products on an unprecedented scale. The implementation of this policy was largely facilitated through the plenary sessions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan, which served as an important political and ideological platform for determining the priorities of agricultural development. During these plenums, particular attention was devoted to expanding cotton cultivation, especially the production of fine-fiber cotton, increasing cultivated areas, and raising gross cotton output. As a result of these decisions, several directives were adopted to improve cotton productivity in different regions of the Soviet Union. Cotton yields were projected to reach 26–27 centners per hectare in the irrigated areas of Central Asia and Southern Kazakhstan, 25–27 centners in the Transcaucasian republics, 11–13 centners in the irrigated southern regions of the European part of the USSR, and 5–7 centners per hectare in rain-fed areas. These directives reflected the Soviet government's determination to maximize cotton production through scientific farming methods, improved irrigation systems, and the expansion of cultivated land. The outcomes of this policy were later emphasized by Leonid I. Brezhnev, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. In his report to the Twenty-Fifth Congress of the CPSU, Brezhnev highly praised the achievements of cotton growers, stating: *"It is impossible not to express sincere appreciation for our cotton growers. Every year of the Five-Year Plan has been marked by remarkable achievements in*



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cotton production.” This statement clearly illustrates the strategic importance attached to cotton cultivation within the Soviet economy. The Ministry of Agriculture and Cotton Procurement of the USSR identified several priority tasks, including planning the development of the principal branches of agriculture, supervising the implementation of state agricultural plans, strengthening agricultural extension services, expanding the activities of scientific research institutions, introducing scientific achievements and advanced farming practices into production, promoting agricultural mechanization through machine-tractor stations, and improving the material and technical supply of the agricultural sector

During 1981–1985, the introduction of advanced production technologies and modern agricultural machinery significantly improved the efficiency of cotton cultivation in the Uzbek SSR. The implementation of new technological systems at the “Uzbek SSR Five-Year Plan” State Farm, particularly at the Ulyanov Division, demonstrated that the planned indicators specified in technological guidelines had been successfully achieved. Similar results were recorded in the Kashkadarya and Surkhandarya regions, where field operations were carried out in accordance with scientifically developed technological recommendations. According to the technological guidelines, labor requirements for cotton cultivation averaged 632 man-hours per hectare across the republic, while regional indicators ranged from 559 to 703 man-hours per hectare depending on local climatic and production conditions. At the same time, the level of mechanization increased substantially. Whereas mechanized operations accounted for approximately 74 percent of agricultural activities within the system of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Uzbek SSR in 1985, this figure was projected to reach 83.4 percent by 1990. These achievements reflected the Soviet government’s continuous efforts to modernize agricultural production through technological innovation and mechanization. Leonid I. Brezhnev also acknowledged the achievements of cotton producers in Surkhandarya in his congratulatory message of December 1977, emphasizing that the workers of the region had fulfilled their socialist obligations with exceptional dedication and had

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made a valuable contribution to the implementation of state agricultural plans. Economic efficiency assessments were based on the actual production indicators achieved between 1981 and 1984 within the system of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Uzbek SSR. These calculations assumed that the republic's cotton cultivation area amounted to approximately two million hectares. Furthermore, the technological program for cotton production during 1986–1990 was developed in accordance with the principal directions of scientific and technological progress.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it envisaged the comprehensive utilization of both existing and newly introduced agricultural machinery, together with advanced mechanized cultivation technologies aimed at increasing productivity while reducing labor costs. The technological guidelines also stipulated that cotton sowing in all agricultural zones should be completed by 20 April each year. The implementation of these measures contributed to the modernization of cotton production, the expansion of irrigated lands, the improvement of land reclamation practices, and the wider application of scientific achievements in agricultural production. As a consequence of these state policies, the technical and scientific foundations of cotton cultivation in the Uzbek SSR were substantially strengthened. New irrigated lands were brought into agricultural use, large-scale land reclamation projects were implemented, and scientific research became increasingly integrated into agricultural practice. Consequently, the Uzbek SSR emerged as the leading cotton-producing republic within the Soviet Union and became the principal supplier of high-quality raw cotton for the Soviet textile industry. At the same time, the fulfillment of state production targets placed considerable pressure on agricultural workers. The centrally planned system prioritized quantitative indicators over environmental sustainability and social welfare, resulting in excessive exploitation of land and water resources. Although the expansion of fine-fiber cotton production contributed significantly to the Soviet economy, it also generated long-term ecological and social problems that became increasingly evident during the final decades of the Soviet period.

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