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Ahsan Iqbal Calls for Agricultural Innovation and Long-Term Self-Sufficiency

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Federal Minister for Planning, Development, and Special Initiatives Ahsan Iqbal has urged transformative reforms to revitalize Pakistan's agriculture sector, emphasizing innovation and long-term planning to achieve self-sufficiency. This article explores Iqbal's vision, the sector's challenges, and the urgent need for strategic action to secure Pakistan's food sovereignty and economic stability.

During a visit to a cotton research farm on Defence Road, Lahore, on July 20, 2025, Iqbal highlighted the neglect of agriculture since the 18th Constitutional Amendment devolved it to provincial control. “Provinces have failed to deliver tangible progress,” he stated, noting stagnant per-acre yields and outdated seeds for crops like cotton, canola, and rice, as reported by Daily Times. Accompanied by agricultural expert Engineer Javed Saleem Qureshi, who developed a new cotton seed variety after 25 years of research, Iqbal stressed the need for robust planning. “We must plan for the next decade with clear goals to compete globally,” he said, warning that reliance on imports threatens national security.

Pakistan’s agriculture, contributing 18.9% to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employing 42.3% of the workforce, faces systemic issues. Weak zoning laws have allowed urban sprawl to consume fertile land, with Pakistan’s agricultural import bill hitting \$10 billion annually, per Pakistan Observer. Iqbal criticized the lack of investment in research, noting that only 0.11–0.63% of agricultural GDP has been allocated to research and development over the past two decades. This has left Pakistan lagging behind India and China, where wheat yields reach 3.5 and 5.4 tons per hectare compared to Pakistan’s 2.9.

Iqbal’s call for innovation aligns with initiatives like the Agricultural Innovation Program (AIP), which promotes modern technologies for crops and livestock. He advocated for climate-smart practices, such as regenerative farming, which Ayesha Fatima in Sindh credits for a 15% productivity boost and 30% less water use. With water scarcity and climate change pressing, Iqbal’s vision demands urgent action to modernize farming, protect arable land, and ensure Pakistan’s self-reliance.