

## **PAKISTAN'S WHEAT PARADOX: SELF-SUFFICIENCY AMIDST RISING IMPORTS AND POLICY CHALLENGES**

### **Dominance**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study aims to examine the food security conditions of Pakistan in the context of wheat, as it is a significant food crop consumed all over the country. The major objective of the study was to assess the current status of food security in Pakistan and analyze the trends in wheat production and consumption. Secondary data were obtained on production, consumption, imports, and exports of wheat from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for the years 2001-2024. The results found that the production of wheat has increased over the past 24 years despite facing fluctuations. However, on the other hand, consumption has continuously risen over the years, with the per capita consumption reaching approximately 124 kgs/person. Results showed a minimal increase in exports, while a huge rise was seen in imports to meet the growing domestic demand. The results further found that wheat availability has also gradually increased over time, but the gap between the quantity of wheat available and its consumption still persists. The study concluded that Pakistan is self-sufficient in wheat production and is a food secure country, but due to certain issues and mismanagement of resources, it has to import a huge quantity of wheat to feed its nation. Therefore, Pakistan must focus on addressing these issues by adopting high-yielding, climate-resilient varieties, modern agricultural practices, efficient use of quality inputs, and improved water management. Consistent policies of government, investments in research, and careful management of wheat imports are also crucial for minimizing reliance on imported wheat and ensuring food security in the country.*

**Keywords:** *Wheat, Wheat availability, Consumption, Food security.*

### **Introduction**

*Food security is when all people, at all times, have social, economic, and physical access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life," World Food Summit (1996).*

*The Food and Agriculture Organization (1996) defined four dimensions of food security, i.e., availability, accessibility, utilization, and stability. Food availability ensures the consistent availability of food for all individuals. In contrast, accessibility ensures access to nutritious food, utilization involves the proper food storage and processing practices, and stability ensures adequate food availability without any hindrance.*

*Pakistan has been ranked 109th out of 127 countries by the Global Hunger Index (GHI, 2024), showing a score of 27.9, which indicates that a "serious" level of hunger is prevailing in the country. Pakistan's total population is 207.7 million, and approximately 20.5% of the population is malnourished, and 44% of children under five are stunted (Rehman et al., 2023). Food availability is an important determinant of the nutritional status of the population. Availability of food is determined by the level of domestic food production, the level of domestic food stock levels, and the country's ability to import supplies, in addition to its availability. Mittal and Sethi (2009) stated that food availability is a crucial factor for achieving food security. Similarly, FAO (2006) also reported that food security greatly depends on food availability, the first dimension of food security. It indicates the physical quantity of food available in adequate quality, supplied and distributed through domestic production or imports.*

*As the world population is anticipated to increase, there will be a substantial increase in the demand for agricultural production (FAO et al., 2022). It is forecasted that by 2050, the world's requirement for food will increase as it is anticipated that the global population will surpass 10 billion (Morchid et al., 2024).*

*However, to meet this increasing demand and to fulfill the requirements of the increasing population, food production must be increased by about 70 percent (Giller et al., 2021).*

*As the global population increases, demand for agricultural production, including wheat, must increase. Similar to other developing countries, Pakistan is also struggling to balance its wheat production with its rising consumption requirements. Wheat is considered Pakistan's staple cereal crop, and critical for meeting the dietary needs of poor people. It is a part of daily consumption by a large portion of the population, playing a key role in assuring food security conditions of Pakistan (Pervaiz & Manzoor, 2025). The production of wheat significantly affects the overall economic growth, import bill, and nutritional status of a highly wheat-dependent poor population (Koonthar et al., 2018).*

*In Pakistan, wheat is grown on about 8.9 million hectares of land, constituting 40% of the total land irrigated (USDA, 2023). The current ongoing challenges, such as high food and input prices, potential climate shocks, and limited livelihood opportunities, continue to impact food security (IPC, 2024). In fiscal year 2025, wheat production has declined by approximately 8.9 percent from the record high production of about 31.81 million tonnes in the last fiscal year 2024, where the decline is linked to a reduction in area cultivated, dry spells, and high temperatures during the season of sowing (GoP, 2025).*

*Pakistan's Food security is closely related to the production and consumption of wheat. The availability of wheat for consumption is directly affected by its level of production. Rahman et al. (2021) analyzed Pakistan's food security conditions, and the findings revealed that Pakistan is a comparatively food insecure country due to inadequate food availability. Some studies have shown that the quantity of wheat available for consumption has decreased in recent years. However, according to Tariq et al. (2014), increasing per capita availability of wheat is important to meet the sustainable food security conditions in Pakistan.*

*In Pakistan, the estimated consumption of wheat flour is 124/kg/capita/annum. According to the National Food Security and Research Ministry's estimations, about 6.934 million metric tons of wheat are available to meet domestic demand. Pakistan Agriculture Storage and Supplies Corporation (PASSCO) had 1.78 million tons of wheat stock, which was assumed to be sufficient till 2024 (MNFSR, 2023). It is also forecasted that consumption will increase to 30.9 million tons with an annual growth of 2.3% in the year 2024-25 (USDA, 2024).*

*The increasing population of Pakistan is frequently causing an increase in the demand for wheat, which is further worsening the food security conditions. The rapidly growing population is leading Pakistan towards potential food shortages, threatening the country's ability to meet the sufficient quantity of food availability (Shah et al. 2021; Islam & Shehzad, 2022). If the population continues to grow at the current rate, it is highly estimated that by 2050, Pakistan will move from the 6th position in the world population to 4th position (Ahmad & Farooq, 2010). To meet food security, with the reduction of population, it is very necessary to increase the yield of the wheat crop (Islam, 2015). Tariq et al. (2014) reported that per capita availability of wheat would be 105 kg per annum in 2031 and 84 kg per annum in 2050 due to the rising trend of population and adverse climatic effects.*

*Climate change has been shown to negatively affect wheat production due to increased temperatures and erratic rainfall patterns (Rizwan et al., 2024). In irrigated regions, rising temperatures during critical months adversely impact yields, while rainfall variability further complicates production (Tariq et al., 2014). Abrar and Maryam (2023) in their study investigated climate change effects on the food security conditions in Pakistan and noted that a minimum rise in temperatures has resulted in a decrease of 8.87 kg in wheat yield, ultimately threatening food security in the country.*

*Global events like the Russia-Ukraine war and COVID-19 pandemic have severely disrupted wheat production and supply chains, leading to increased reliance on imports (Tahir & Khan, 2024) In the year*

*2023-2024, despite a minor decline in the area planted, wheat production hit 27.0 million tons, marking a 2 percent increase compared to the previous year (2022-23). However, with consumption growth anticipated to outpace production, wheat imports for 2023-24 rose to 2.6 million tons (IPC, 2024).*

*Due to supply disruption from Ukraine, Pakistan's wheat imports from Russia have seen a drastic rise of more than eightfold. Pakistan, a country with one of the highest populations in the world, has become the fifth-largest importer of Russian wheat. The reliance on imports raises concerns about food security, prompting calls for increased domestic production through innovative agricultural practices (Shaheen et al., 2022).*

*The government of Pakistan has always been actively involved in the wheat sector of the economy to ensure food security and achieve self-sufficiency in wheat production. The government provides different subsidies for wheat farmers, provides minimum support prices (MSP), and procurement prices to facilitate wheat production in Pakistan. The minimum support prices increase the wheat production, while on the other it increases the burden on the government and also make it less competitive in international markets due to rising production costs (Shahzad et al., 2019).*

*In conclusion, the latest literature suggests that wheat availability in Pakistan is affected by a multifaceted interplay of several challenges, including climate change, economic policies, and agricultural practices. To address these complex challenges, a holistic strategy is required to ensure stable wheat production and availability in the country. Therefore, based on the available literature, this study aims to assess the current status of food security in Pakistan regarding wheat availability and to analyze wheat production and consumption trends and their supply-demand gap.*

## **Materials and methods**

*Food security is a difficult and complex subject. Wheat is Pakistan's key component and is significant in maintaining its food security. A comprehensive review of the literature was conducted on the production, consumption, and availability of the wheat crop in Pakistan. Secondary data were utilized to achieve the aim of this study, which was to find Pakistan's current food security status. Time series data were collected from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) on production, consumption, imports, and exports of wheat from the years 2001-2024.*

### **Analytical measures**

*All the data collected were computed in the tables in MS Excel, and then the inferences were made using descriptive statistics such as tabulation and graphs.*

*The availability of wheat is measured as the total quantity of crop produced by the country where imports are added, and the exports are subtracted. Kyaw (2009) explained food availability as the total amount of food required by any country. Wheat availability was measured using the formula:*

*Availability=Production+Imports-Exports*

*The gap between the available wheat quantity and its consumption was calculated as:*

*Gap=Available wheat-wheat consumption*

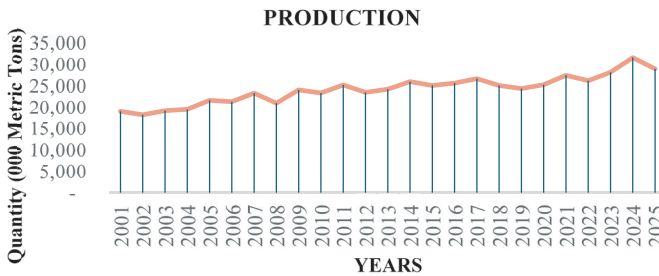
*Data is presented using visually distinct tables and graphs to help readers understand critical aspects of the study. It provides a clear insight into production, consumption, imports, exports, and their relationship with wheat availability*

## **Results**

*This chapter presents the results based on the available data, descriptive statistics, and visualization*

### Wheat production status

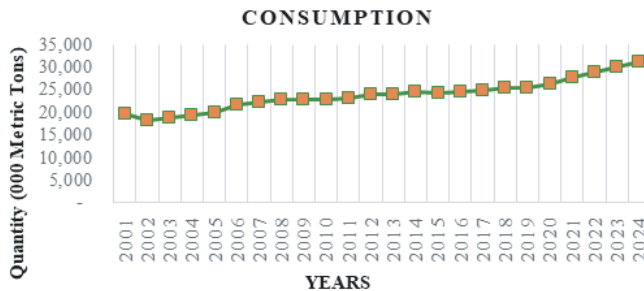
*Wheat is considered the major food crop and is harvested in all four provinces of Pakistan. The production of the wheat crop has been fluctuating, with some years showing an increase and others showing a decline. Despite fluctuations, the overall trend indicates growth in wheat production capacity over the 25 years. The increase in production in recent years can be attributed to the increased area, availability of good quality seeds, fertilizers, favorable weather conditions, and also timely government decisions.*



**Fig. 1** Trend of wheat production in Pakistan

### Wheat consumption status

*Despite being an agrarian country, we have to import wheat to meet the consumption requirements of the people. The consumption of the wheat crop in Pakistan has been increasing for the past 24 years. The consumption trend may be increasing due to several factors such as the continuously increasing rate of population, urbanization, and changes in diet, and it is forecasted that consumption will further increase in the coming years.*



**Fig. 2** Wheat consumption in Pakistan

### Wheat export status

Wheat is one of the major crops grown in Pakistan, and its exports could be a valuable source of foreign exchange earnings and can play a vital role in the economic growth of the country. In 2023, Pakistan was ranked as the 106th exporter of wheat crop in the world out of 135 countries. The ranking shows the minimal contribution of Pakistan in the world's wheat export markets. The country's wheat export data have seen serious ups and downs and have been unstable over the past 24 years.

A significant decrease can be seen in the quantity of wheat exported by Pakistan in the last few years. This decline is attributed to the limited domestic production, making it difficult to meet consumption requirements. The situation has caused government officials to ban the export of wheat in order to meet domestic needs as a first priority



Fig. 3 Pakistan's wheat exports

### Wheat import status

Pakistan is among the major wheat producing countries in the world, still it has been importing wheat to meet its domestic demand. It could be seen that Pakistan has been importing wheat for almost the last 2 decades. This increasing trend of wheat imports in the last few years highlights the need for Pakistan to focus on increasing its production to meet its domestic needs.

However, in the last fiscal year, the Pakistani government had put restrictions on imports of wheat due to the availability of higher wheat stocks from last year's bumper production. The decision was made to protect the

*farmers and to ensure the country's self-sufficiency in food production.*



**Fig. 4 Pakistan's wheat imports**

### Wheat availability

*Being one of the most important cereal crops consumed by the majority of the population, the availability of wheat plays a significant role in ensuring food security in Pakistan. Figure 5 shows that wheat availability has gradually increased over the past 24 years. In some years, the quantity of wheat available for consumption has increased due to huge quantities of wheat being imported. Whereas in certain years the increase is due to an increase in support prices, which resulted in bumper wheat productivity, ultimately increasing its availability.*



**Fig. 5 Wheat availability trend in Pakistan (Author's calculations)**

### Wheat availability gap

The following Figure 6 shows that overall, there has been a significant increase in both the quantity available and its consumption. This gap is mainly caused due to decrease in production, area under wheat production, weather conditions, availability and quality of seeds, fertilizers, timely irrigation, and many more reasons. Meanwhile, on the other hand, increased consumption levels also worsened the situation.

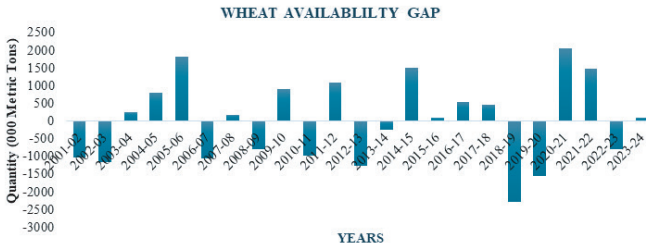


Fig. 6 Gap between the quantity of wheat available and its consumption in Pakistan  
Authors calculations

### Discussion

This section discusses the results of this study and compares them with the previous studies. Wheat is a major crop grown in the country, and its availability plays a significant role in meeting the dietary needs of the population and maintaining food security.

The study revealed an overall increase in the production of wheat crop in despite severe fluctuations in several years. The findings are in accordance with the results of a study conducted by Islam et al. (2023), which also reported an increase in both area and production. The increase is attributed to favorable weather conditions and supportive government policies. On the other hand, wheat consumption has consistently shown an increasing trend over the past 2 decades, primarily due to a rapidly growing population. In contrast to our findings, the study of Akram and Henneberry (2016) reported that there was a reduction in wheat consumption in Pakistan due to a huge shift towards other fast food items.

Our results have shown a decline in the quantity of wheat exports and a steady rise in imports. Similar to findings of (Mustafa & Hussain, 2023), stating that the decline in wheat exports has led to an increasing trade deficit, with

*exports decreasing from 16% to 10% of GDP over the past twenty years. Whereas, Abbas et al. (2007) have found that domestic wheat production in Pakistan has been facing serious fluctuations, where most of the time it is lower than the quantity demanded for consumption, so to meet the needs, imports are made. The recent surge in Pakistan's imports from Russia also emphasizes Pakistan's dependency on foreign sources. The study has further found an increase in the quantity of wheat available due to both increased production and imports. However, the gap still persists between the quantity available and consumption. According to the Ministry of National Food Security and Research (MNFSR, 2025), about 33.47 MMT of wheat is available for consumption in the current fiscal year compared to the domestic requirement of 33.58 MMT.*

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

*Wheat holds a central role in Pakistan's economic background, serving as the staple food crop and being widely consumed all over the country. It is concluded from the above study that the overall production of the wheat crop in Pakistan has shown an increasing trend, but still remains vulnerable to fluctuations. On the other hand, its consumption is rising continuously due to population growth and changing dietary patterns, which sometimes causes a shortage of wheat in the country. According to a report by the USDA (2024), wheat makes up 72 percent of Pakistan's daily calorie intake, with a yearly consumption rate of over 124 kgs. The study also identified a gap between the quantity of wheat available and its demand, which was estimated to be about 5.36 percent. The results further revealed that to fill this gap, a huge amount of wheat is imported to meet domestic demand. Despite being an agrarian country having the potential to meet its requirements, Pakistan heavily relies on imports to meet its domestic consumption needs. This reliance on imports is burdening Pakistan's economy with heavy import bills, which is already not in a very good situation. The study concluded that Pakistan can self-sufficiently produce wheat to meet its domestic*

*demand, but due to mismanagement of resources and increasing problems in the agricultural sector are affecting the nation's food security situation.*

*To tackle the disparity between wheat production and consumption in Pakistan, it is vital to increase productivity by utilizing high-yield, climate-resilient varieties and modern agricultural practices. Making efficient use of quality seeds, fertilizers, and enhanced water management methods can greatly help to improve yield. Moreover, consistent government policies, investments in research, and careful management of wheat imports can help minimize reliance on imported wheat.*

#### **Authors contributions**

*All the authors have the same level of contribution from idea development to data collection, analysis, and writeup of the manuscript*

#### **Conflict of Interest**

*There is no conflict of interest.*

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