

Exclusive Interview



Mr. Jameel Ahmad Oureshi

Secretary, Special Investment
Facilitation Council (SIFC)
Prime Minister's Office, Islamabad

“By integrating modern technology, fostering investment, and developing agricultural infrastructure, SIFC aims to drive sustainable growth in Pakistan's agriculture sector, ultimately enhancing productivity, increasing food security, and reducing reliance on imports.”

ICMA: How do you believe agriculture, livestock, and fisheries development can impact Pakistan's economy?

Secretary SIFC: Being an agrarian economy, the agriculture sector of Pakistan contributes around 22.91 percent of GDP to the national economy, with more than 40 percent of the labor force involved in the sector. The growth of other sectors is also dependent on this sector. It is a key source of foreign exchange earnings for the country. The fisheries sector contributed 1.39 percent to agricultural value addition and 0.32 percent to GDP in 2022-23. The livestock sector within agriculture has a share of 62.68% and contributes more than 14.36% to GDP. I believe that the agriculture and fisheries sectors have great export potential with value-added opportunities and can create a ripple effect on the economy, as they act as major sources of input and raw materials for other sectors, in addition to providing employment.

ICMA: What strategies does SIFC have in place to attract foreign investment specifically for agriculture projects?

Secretary SIFC: The SIFC has deployed a state-of-the-art Land Information and Management System (LIMS), which is an unprecedented initiative for the development of

Pakistan's agriculture sector, promoting modern technology and food security. Its main objectives are to reduce domestic agricultural imports, increase exports, and meet the food needs of the growing population. LIMS aims to revolutionize the agriculture sector by providing farmers with simultaneous access to information on available land, climate conditions, satellite crop monitoring, irrigation facilities, fertilizer, and spray focus areas, in addition to direct access to markets. LIMS is also focusing on converting 4.4 million acres of barren land into fertile agricultural land through the promotion of corporate farming.

ICMA: How does SIFC plan to streamline bureaucratic processes to facilitate agricultural investment?

Secretary SIFC: The SIFC has been designed to provide a platform for making economic decisions to expedite investment proposals. As per its mandate, the SIFC serves as a 'Single Window' with a whole-of-government approach, involving all Federal and Provincial Ministries/Departments for multi-domain cooperation with countries across the world. Its aim is to facilitate investment in agriculture and other sectors and create an enabling policy environment.



The SIFC is actively promoting corporate farming and leasing barren land to both local and foreign investors, which indirectly benefits small-scale farmers by creating employment opportunities and enhancing local agricultural infrastructure



It is uniquely structured to embody the whole-of-government approach and strategically amalgamates human capital from the BOI and other sectoral ministries, involving all levels of government. This collective integration ensures a harmonized approach to investment promotion and facilitation, fostering a streamlined and cohesive framework for investors while simplifying bureaucratic processes.

ICMA: Can you elaborate on SIFC's efforts to leverage technology and innovation in modernizing Pakistan's agriculture sector?

Secretary SIFC: As stated earlier, SIFC has established the following:

- **LIMS:** For promoting modern technology and food security in Pakistan.
- **NSDRA:** For the availability of quality seeds, resilient against climate changes and other challenges, the National Seed Development & Regulatory Authority (NSDRA), has been established along with its policy contours under SIFC.
- **UAS:** To leverage technology and innovation in modernizing Pakistan's agriculture sector, SIFC is collaborating with Ministry of Aviation and Pakistan Air Force for finalization of Draft Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) Rules, 2023, for exploring the avenues of introducing drone farming in Pakistan.
- **Telemetry:** Amendment in Indus River System Authority (IRSA) Act is being pursued to devise an implementation framework for telemetry monitoring system. SIFC is actively fast tracking the process of instalments of telemetry systems for effective irrigation at 25 sites across Pakistan.
- **OPU-IVEP:** Ovum Pick-up and In Vitro Embryo Production (OPU-IVEP) Technology has been acquired from Brazil and Lab has been established at Oka. About 139 Ovum have been picked, 36 embryos developed, and 22 embryos have been transferred in surrogate mothers.

- **Tech-import:** Besides, contract has been concluded with ST genetics USA for import of sexed semen which will result in herd upgradation at national level.
- **GRIDD:** Grass Root Incentivized Dairy Development (GRIDD) has been launched in 13 Districts of Punjab, and coordination with provinces of KP, Balochistan & Sindh is in process.
- **ARFC:** Construction is in progress on 10 sites in Punjab and Sindh for establishment of Agriculture Research & Facilitation Complex (ARFC).
- Weather stations being deployed at 10 locations across Pakistan.

ICMA: What measures is SIFC taking to ensure sustainable agricultural practices are integrated into investment projects?

Secretary SIFC: Under the umbrella of SIFC, various departments are being restructured to ensure sustainable agricultural practices are integrated into investment projects. These departments include the Pakistan Standards and Quality Control Authority (PSQCA), Federal Seed Certification and Registration Department (FSCRD), Animal Quarantine Department (AQD), and Department of Plant Protection (DPP).

LIMS is focusing on conversion of 4.4 million acres of barren land into fertile agricultural land. This initiative will lease land to local, as well as foreign investors, including China, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, and Bahrain.

Engagement of SIFC is ongoing with Ministry of National Food Security & Research, along with the provinces, on amendment in National Livestock Breeding Policy aiming at import of Exotic Breeds from Brazil for promoting investment projects in this area.

ICMA: Any successful agricultural projects facilitated by SIFC?

Secretary SIFC: SIFC is only a 10-month-old initiative but has already reaped steady progress at various fronts including policy and projects within the agricultural domain. Following is some of the key projects being facilitated by SIFC:

- **Cultivation of 1,000 acres in South Waziristan:** SIFC has facilitated the sanctioning of cultivation of 1,000 acres in South Waziristan for agriculture farming in South Waziristan, with the prospects of further expanding land to 41,000 acres in a bid to enhance agricultural productivity of the region and promote food self-sufficiency.
- **Land acquisition:** SIFC has facilitated the signing of a Joint Venture agreement by the Government of Punjab for acquisition of 1.3 million acres. Moreover, JV agreement has also been approved by Sindh Cabinet for acquisition of 1.3 million acres on 1st December 2023. Engagement is in process with Governments of KP, GB & AJK for land acquisition.

- **Land contracted:** 115,000 acres of land in Punjab has been contracted to investors, and about 35,500 acres has been cultivated. Active engagements with Saudi Company at Rakh Mahni for 5000 acres are in progress, besides side-line engagement with Bahrain & UAE is in process.
- **Model Farm in Punjab:** 20,000 Acres Model Farm being prepared at Khippli Mauj Garh Bahawalpur
- **Pilot Project in KP:** Cultivation is in progress on 1000 acres as a Pilot project in Zermilan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
- **Land Identification:** In Balochistan 60,000 acres of land has been identified in 7 Districts for cooperative farming, while farming has already been done in various parts of Balochistan with the assistance of LEAs. In the province of Sindh, land identification for farming has been completed in Nara & Thar areas. Moreover, pilot project on about 14,000 acres is also being undertaken.
- **Olives Grafting Gorakh Hill Sindh:** 65,000 grafts completed so far. Phase 2 has already commenced. Fresh plantation is planned on 100 acres.
- **Oil Palm Plantation:** Feasibility of 10,500 acres oil palm plantation in process at Thatta and surrounding areas.

ICMA: How does SIFC plan to support small-scale farmers in accessing financing and resources for agricultural development?

Secretary SIFC: The SIFC is actively promoting corporate farming and leasing barren land to both local and foreign investors, which indirectly benefits small-scale farmers by creating employment opportunities and enhancing local agricultural infrastructure. Farmers can access useful soil fertility information about their agricultural land through the LIMS online system free of charge. Additionally, the SIFC is facilitating the development of model farms and pilot projects across various provinces. These projects serve as training grounds and demonstration sites where small-scale farmers can learn and adopt best practices. By providing access to modern technology, facilitating investment, and creating training opportunities, the SIFC aims to empower small-scale farmers, enabling them to enhance productivity, secure better financing, and contribute to Pakistan's agricultural development.

ICMA: How does SIFC contribute to improving agriculture for food security?

Secretary SIFC: The deployment of LIMS, the conversion of 4.4 million acres of barren land into fertile land, the initiative for drone farming technology infrastructure, the establishment of the National Seed Development and Regulatory Authority, the restructuring of key agricultural institutions, the installation of weather stations and telemetry systems for irrigation, the import

“

The government has to take the tough decision of restricting non-essential imports to tackle macroeconomic imbalances and stabilize the national economy

”

of technology, and the initiation of notable pilot projects all exemplify SIFC's commitment to increasing agricultural land use and productivity. These initiatives are expected to enhance regional food self-sufficiency and ensure food security.

ICMA: What's your perspective on the current status of agricultural imports in Pakistan?

Secretary SIFC: The government has to take the tough decision of restricting non-essential imports to tackle macroeconomic imbalances and stabilize the national economy. However, to correct the economic fundamentals, along with many other initiatives, the government has focused on improving food security by offering the Kissan Package and an optimal support price, improving investor confidence, considering barter trade with Iran and Afghanistan, and increasing reliance on indigenous sources for electricity generation.

ICMA: Can you outline the SIFC's approach to promoting agriculture sector growth?

Secretary SIFC: SIFC is adopting a multifaceted approach to promote growth in Pakistan's agriculture sector, focusing on technological integration, infrastructure development, and strategic investments. Key components of SIFC's strategy include the deployment of advanced agricultural technologies and the establishment of the appropriate physical and policy infrastructure in collaboration with the Ministry of National Food Security, the Ministry of Science & Technology, the Ministry of Energy, the Ministry of Water Resources, and relevant provincial agriculture departments. SIFC's comprehensive approach also includes the development of model farms, pilot projects, and the identification of land for cooperative farming across various provinces. By integrating modern technology, fostering investment, and developing agricultural infrastructure, SIFC aims to drive sustainable growth in Pakistan's agriculture sector, ultimately enhancing productivity, increasing food security, and reducing reliance on imports.

The Editorial Board thanks Mr. Jameel Ahmad Qureshi, Secretary, Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) Prime Minister's Office, Islamabad for sparing from his precious time to give exclusive interview for Chartered Management Accountant Journal.