

AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT AND AGRARIAN TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE FERGANA ECONOMIC REGION UNDER SOVIET MODERNIZATION (1950s–1980s)**Mamajanov Azizbek Alisher ugli**Associate Professor of the Department of History and Social Sciences,
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Abstract: This article analyzes the state of agricultural development in the Fergana economic region during the 1950s–1980s and examines the outcomes of Soviet agrarian policy on the basis of historical sources, periodical publications, and scholarly research. The study explores the post-World War II processes of agricultural expansion in the region, including the enlargement of irrigated agricultural lands, the reclamation of new territories, and the increasing specialization of agricultural production. Particular attention is devoted to the transformation of the Fergana economic region into a major cotton-producing area, the growth of raw cotton production, and the role of this specialization in meeting the demands of light industry enterprises located in the central regions of the Soviet Union. The findings indicate that although agrarian reforms contributed to the expansion of agricultural production and the development of new lands, they also reinforced the region's unilateral specialization in cotton cultivation. Consequently, traditional branches of agriculture experienced a relative decline, economic imbalances intensified, and a number of environmental challenges emerged. The article provides a historical assessment of the economic, social, and ecological impacts of Soviet agrarian policy on the agricultural development of the Fergana economic region.

Keywords: Fergana economic region, agriculture, Soviet agrarian policy, cotton cultivation, specialization, land reclamation, irrigation systems, agricultural production, agrarian transformation, economic development.

INTRODUCTION.

From the mid-twentieth century onward, with the transition of the Soviet state from wartime conditions to peaceful economic reconstruction, particular emphasis was placed on the further development of the agricultural sector throughout the USSR, including the territory of the Uzbek SSR. Within the framework of this policy, large-scale measures aimed at expanding agricultural production were initiated, among which the development of new lands occupied a central position. As in other regions of the republic, extensive land reclamation and agricultural development programs were launched in the Fergana Valley. The acquisition and cultivation of new lands were identified as strategic priorities by the central authorities and were repeatedly emphasized in the resolutions of the congresses and plenums of the CPSU. Furthermore, successive five-year plans envisaged the acceleration of systematic land development as an essential component of Soviet agrarian policy [9, p. 635].

Within the framework of the Fourth Five-Year Plan (1946–1950), one of the principal objectives of agricultural policy was the implementation of large-scale irrigation and land-reclamation projects in irrigated farming regions. In order to achieve these goals, efforts were intensified to complete the construction of the Sarisuy, Bagdad, and Soz-Isfara collector systems, while the construction of additional collectors and irrigation facilities in the economic regions of Fergana was significantly accelerated. These projects were intended to expand irrigated agricultural areas, improve water management infrastructure, and increase the productivity of cultivated lands.

Subsequent development programs continued to prioritize the agricultural sector, particularly cotton production. In the later five-year plans, special attention was directed toward increasing capital investments in cotton cultivation, ensuring the efficient utilization of available

production resources, raising labor productivity, improving the quality of cotton fiber, and promoting the broad application of scientific and technological achievements in agricultural production. These measures reflected the strategic importance attributed to cotton within the Soviet economic system and its role in supporting the industrial needs of the Union.

During this period, cotton constituted one of the most valuable agricultural raw materials in the national economy. Approximately 300 different industrial products were manufactured from cotton and its by-products. On average, every 100 kilograms of raw cotton yielded 30–35 kilograms of industrial-grade fiber. The processing of this fiber in textile enterprises produced approximately 3,000 meters of fabric. In addition, 100 kilograms of cotton provided 6–8 kilograms of lint, 11–12 kilograms of oil, 2.5 kilograms of soap, and various other industrial products [1, p. 3]. These indicators demonstrate the exceptional economic significance of cotton production and explain the priority accorded to the expansion and specialization of cotton cultivation in the agricultural policy implemented in the Fergana Economic Region.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.

This study employs a multidisciplinary historical research methodology combining the principles of historical analysis, comparative-historical investigation, source criticism, and systemic approaches. The research is based on the examination of archival materials, official Soviet legislative and policy documents, statistical data, periodical publications, and scholarly literature concerning agricultural development and agrarian transformations in the Fergana Economic Region during the 1950s–1980s.

The historical-comparative method was utilized to identify changes in agricultural policies and development strategies implemented during different stages of Soviet modernization. This approach made it possible to compare agricultural reforms, irrigation projects, land-reclamation campaigns, and cotton-specialization policies implemented in the Fergana Economic Region with broader agrarian transformations occurring throughout the Uzbek SSR and the Soviet Union.

The historical-systemic approach was applied to examine agriculture as an interconnected socio-economic and environmental system. Through this method, the study analyzes the relationships between state agrarian policy, irrigation infrastructure development, land reclamation activities, cotton monoculture, labor organization, and environmental consequences. Particular attention was devoted to identifying causal links between agricultural modernization programs and their long-term socio-economic and ecological outcomes.

The principles of historicism and objectivity constitute the methodological foundation of the research. The principle of historicism enabled the examination of agrarian transformations within their specific historical context, considering the political, economic, and ideological conditions of the Soviet period. The principle of objectivity facilitated a balanced assessment of both the positive and negative consequences of Soviet agricultural modernization, including increases in agricultural production, expansion of irrigated lands, and the emergence of environmental problems associated with cotton monoculture and land degradation.

Source criticism methods were employed to evaluate the reliability, representativeness, and historical significance of archival documents, government resolutions, statistical reports, and contemporary publications. Special attention was given to identifying potential ideological biases present in Soviet-era sources and interpreting quantitative indicators within their broader political and economic context.

In addition, statistical and quantitative analysis methods were used to examine data related to irrigated land expansion, cotton production, labor productivity, land reclamation activities, and soil salinization levels. These methods facilitated the identification of long-term trends and structural changes in the agricultural sector of the Fergana Economic Region. The integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches ensured a comprehensive assessment of agrarian development processes and their economic, social, and environmental implications during the period under investigation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.

During the 1950s, large-scale irrigation and land development projects were intensified in the Fergana economic region as part of the Soviet Union's broader strategy of agricultural expansion. In this context, the trusts "Ferganavodstroy," "Andijanvodstroy," and "Namanganvodstroy" were established to coordinate irrigation construction, land reclamation, and the development of new agricultural territories. Between 1953 and 1973, "Ferganavodstroy" and the newly established inter-collective farm construction organizations participated in the reclamation of more than 50,000 hectares of previously uncultivated land and contributed to the establishment of three state farms and five collective farms on these newly developed territories [15, p. 95].

The favorable climatic conditions of the provinces constituting the Fergana Economic Region, combined with the availability of substantial labor resources, created favorable conditions for accelerating land development projects. Consequently, a series of resolutions and directives adopted by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan and the Council of Ministers of the Uzbek SSR provided the institutional and legal framework for large-scale irrigation and reclamation activities. Among the most significant were the resolution "On Measures for the Further Development of Irrigated Lands and Water Management in the Uzbek SSR" (20 October 1953), the resolution of the Council of Ministers of the USSR "On the Further Development of Cotton Production in the Uzbek SSR in 1954–1958" (9 February 1954), the order of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Uzbek SSR concerning the strengthening of irrigation and land development in Central Fergana, and subsequent resolutions adopted between 1958 and 1961 regarding the reclamation and irrigation of reserve, gray, and previously uncultivated lands. The implementation of these directives enabled the development of approximately 60,000 hectares of protected and reserve lands in Central Fergana by 1963 [8, p. 173].

These measures inevitably stimulated the expansion of irrigation and land-reclamation activities throughout the region. Over a nineteen-year period (1953–1972), the trusts "Ferganavodstroy," "Andijanvodstroy," and "Namanganvodstroy," together with regional irrigation administrations, carried out earthworks as well as concrete and reinforced-concrete construction totaling 1,634,039 m³. Of this volume, 650,526 m³ corresponded to Fergana Province, 833,821 m³ to Andijan Province, and 149,692 m³ to Namangan Province [7, p. 173]. Simultaneously, capital investments allocated from the state budget and the indivisible funds of collective farms for the reclamation of reserve and gray lands increased steadily. As a result, new districts, settlements, residential complexes, and agricultural production zones emerged in the newly developed territories.

Despite these achievements, the development of new lands was not consistently carried out on a scientifically grounded basis. The expansion of large-scale cotton plantations and the intensive application of chemical substances aimed at increasing cotton yields generated significant environmental consequences. Ecological degradation, deterioration of soil quality, and broader environmental disturbances became increasingly evident in the newly cultivated areas. During this period, approximately three-quarters of the republic's agricultural output originated from crop production, while the remaining share was generated by livestock farming [2, p. 14].

The continuous expansion of cotton cultivation in the cotton-growing districts and state farms of the Fergana economic region illustrates the strengthening of the cotton monoculture policy pursued by the Soviet center. Cotton occupied a dominant position within the agricultural sector of the Uzbek SSR, which ranked first among Soviet republics in cotton production and supplied 64.1 percent of the USSR's total cotton output. According to a number of historians, the large-scale development of virgin and reserve lands represented a manifestation of the extensive growth model characteristic of Soviet agriculture and was implemented without sufficient scientific consideration of its long-term consequences. The persistent enlargement of cotton-growing areas, coupled with the extensive construction of reservoirs and irrigation facilities,

intensified existing environmental challenges and contributed to the worsening of ecological conditions [13, p. 132].

The period under consideration was also characterized by the continuation of Soviet economic regionalization policies and the implementation of agricultural reforms. In accordance with decisions adopted by the CPSU and the Council of Ministers of the USSR regarding the transfer of state farms to the system of economic accountability (*khozaschyot*), a number of state farms in Uzbekistan were reorganized by July 1, 1967. Earlier, between 1957 and 1960, eighty-four large specialized state farms had been established throughout the republic on the basis of economically weak agricultural enterprises. Nevertheless, a number of structural problems persisted. In the Kokand zone of the Fergana Economic Region, poor land-reclamation conditions and inadequate quality of annual salt-washing operations negatively affected agricultural productivity. The “Nayman” state farm, for example, experienced particularly severe soil salinity problems compared with other agricultural enterprises in the region [5, p. 66].

Recognizing the need to improve productivity, the Soviet authorities devoted considerable attention to strengthening the material and technical base of newly established state farms. Significant state funds were allocated for this purpose on a regular basis. In 1963, the effectiveness of these farms was reviewed at a meeting of the Central Asian Agricultural Institute, where it was reported that the newly established state farms had collectively delivered 74,000 tons of cotton. At the same time, discussions emphasized the necessity of maintaining accurate accounting practices and ensuring balanced development across all branches of agriculture. Despite these efforts, serious financial difficulties remained. During the 1960s, seventy-one state farms across the republic concluded the fiscal year with losses amounting to 13 million rubles, while fifty farms failed to meet production targets by 8.6 million rubles. Similar problems were observed in the Fergana Economic Region. The Sokh state farm, for instance, recorded losses exceeding one million rubles despite a planned income target of 304,000 rubles [6, p. 64].

Comparable deficiencies were evident in other regions of the republic. In 1967, state farms failed to supply agricultural products to the state worth approximately 7 million rubles, largely because production resources were not utilized efficiently. One of the principal causes of these shortcomings was the excessive allocation of financial resources to administrative expenditures. Statistical data indicate that in 1967 alone, 544,000 rubles from the monthly salary fund of state farms were spent on administrative purposes. In response, measures were introduced to strengthen economic accountability, expand access to short- and long-term bank credit, and improve the financial management of state farms. The “Savai” state farm in Andijan Province was among the enterprises transferred to this system. By the end of 1967, it had successfully repaid its bank loans and produced additional output valued at 514,000 rubles beyond the established production plan [6, p. 65].

Throughout the period under study, cotton constituted the principal commodity exported from the Fergana Economic Region. Cotton fiber was transported to textile enterprises located in the central regions of the Soviet Union, the western and northern territories, Siberia, Ukraine, the Volga region, Kazakhstan, and other areas. In addition, substantial quantities of vegetable oil, fruits, silk products, ozokerite, viscose, kirza, machine belts, diesel equipment, and pumps were shipped from the region to various parts of the Soviet economy [3].

However, the rigid adherence to centrally imposed production targets generated a number of systemic distortions within the cotton sector, including the widespread practice of inflating production figures. Simultaneously, insufficient material incentives reduced labor motivation and contributed to growing irresponsibility among agricultural workers. Cotton farms throughout Uzbekistan, including those located in the Fergana Valley, experienced numerous organizational and economic difficulties. One reason for the continued expansion of cotton cultivation was its capacity to absorb large labor resources. According to available statistics, the production of one centner of cotton required approximately 39 man-hours of labor, whereas the production of one

center of grain required only 6.8 man-hours, or nearly six times less labor [10, p. 10]. Nevertheless, weak material incentives, bureaucratic planning practices, and chronic shortcomings in agricultural management remained significant obstacles to sustainable agricultural development throughout the region.

Despite the relatively rapid implementation of agricultural operations in cotton-growing areas, insufficient attention was frequently paid to the quality of fieldwork. In many cases, fields were ploughed without being properly cleared of cotton stalk residues from the previous harvest, while stones and other obstacles often remained on cultivated land. Similar shortcomings were observed during sowing campaigns. For example, in the collective farms named after Akhunboboev and Hamza Hakimzoda, as well as in the "Yosh Leninchi" collective farm of Fergana District, inadequate attention was given to maintaining the proper alignment of seed rows during planting operations. Furthermore, in the districts of Tashloq, Altariq, Chinabad, and several other localities, cultivation activities intended to loosen and improve soil conditions were carried out at an unsatisfactory pace despite official requirements for their timely completion. Comparable delays were also recorded in the implementation of cotton-field maintenance operations in Andijan and Namangan provinces [12]. As a consequence of the excessive emphasis placed on fulfilling quantitative production targets, insufficient attention was devoted to the timely processing and maintenance of newly sown crops [11]. The rigid requirement to achieve predetermined production indicators, accompanied by extensive political campaigns and ambitious production slogans, encouraged a focus on quantitative results rather than the quality and sustainability of agricultural output.

The shortcomings of agricultural management became particularly evident during the cotton-harvesting campaigns. In 1951, the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Uzbekistan reviewed the results of an investigation concerning the implementation of the resolution of the Ninth Plenum of the Central Committee regarding the harvesting and procurement of the 1951 cotton crop. The investigation concluded that the district party committee of Kaganovich District in Fergana Province had failed to ensure the effective implementation of the prescribed measures. According to official reports, only 8.4 percent of the annual procurement plan had been delivered to the state during the final five days of September, despite a target of 14.4 percent.

The investigation further revealed a number of organizational deficiencies. Instead of conducting broad political and educational activities among collective farmers and promoting socialist competition, local authorities relied primarily on administrative methods. Several primary party organizations within collective farms remained detached from production activities and failed to contribute effectively to strengthening labor discipline or increasing labor productivity. Similar to many other regions of Uzbekistan, male workers were often engaged in secondary tasks rather than directly participating in cotton harvesting operations. At the same time, many cotton pickers failed to meet established production norms, while violations of labor discipline frequently remained unaddressed. Reports also noted the inadequate provision of hot meals for pickers, delays in advance payments, insufficient supervision of labor conditions, and the non-payment of wages amounting to 1 million 220 thousand soums for workdays accumulated in previous years. During the 1951 harvesting season alone, 313 cotton-picking machines remained idle in the province for various reasons. Contemporary assessments linked these shortcomings to the ineffective organization of mass-political work within collective farms. Consequently, additional measures aimed at improving political and organizational activities among cotton growers were introduced during the same year [15].

More broadly, the predominance of the administrative-command system in Soviet agricultural governance from the 1950s onward generated a range of structural problems. Excessive bureaucratic control over production processes, the predominance of directive management methods, and the intensive exploitation of rural resources negatively affected the efficiency and sustainability of agricultural development.

During the period under study, numerous development programs and scientific projects were formulated to promote the further expansion of cotton cultivation. Nevertheless, the Fergana economic region continued to experience difficulties in the effective application of local fertilizers and other agronomic measures. By November 1970, assessments of agricultural development programs identified the need to improve irrigation channels on 948,200 hectares of land, reconstruct and develop drainage networks on 787,200 hectares, and undertake major capital-improvement works on 989,300 hectares. At the same time, approximately 1.4 million hectares of land throughout the republic required significant land-reclamation measures. The failure to resolve these problems led to substantial production losses. On average, annual cotton yields declined by 6–7 centners per hectare, while more than 37 percent of the irrigated lands of the republic became affected by salinization. As a result, agricultural production losses associated with soil salinity reached approximately 400–500 thousand tons annually [4, p. 28].

The consequences of these processes were particularly visible in the Fergana Economic Region. During the period under consideration, saline soils accounted for 12 percent of agricultural land in Namangan Province, 21.7 percent in Andijan Province, and as much as 51.7 percent in Fergana Province [4, pp. 28–29]. These indicators demonstrate that the extensive model of agricultural development pursued under Soviet agrarian policy generated significant environmental and land-reclamation challenges. The continuous expansion of cotton cultivation, combined with inadequate attention to soil conservation and sustainable water management practices, contributed to the deterioration of land quality and reduced the long-term effectiveness of agricultural production systems in the region.

CONCLUSION.

In conclusion, following the end of the Second World War, the Soviet government attached considerable importance to the further development of the national economy of the Uzbek SSR, with particular emphasis on the Fergana Economic Region. Within the framework of this policy, the development and agricultural reclamation of new lands were accelerated throughout the republic, including the territories of the Fergana Valley. These measures were intended to expand agricultural production, increase the supply of strategic agricultural commodities, and strengthen the role of the region within the centralized economic system of the Soviet Union.

However, the implementation of large-scale land development programs was frequently carried out without sufficient scientific justification and long-term environmental assessment. In pursuit of increasing agricultural output and maximizing economic returns, extensive cotton cultivation was introduced across newly reclaimed territories. The predominance of cotton monoculture, combined with inadequately planned land-reclamation and irrigation practices, contributed to the intensification of soil salinization and the deterioration of land quality in many areas of the region.

As a consequence, the anticipated economic outcomes were not always achieved. The declining productivity of agricultural lands, together with the increasing scale of environmental degradation, limited the effectiveness of agricultural development initiatives and negatively affected crop yields. Furthermore, the rapid and insufficiently coordinated expansion of cultivated lands generated a range of structural challenges within the agricultural sector, including land-reclamation difficulties, ecological imbalances, and declining efficiency in the utilization of natural resources.

Therefore, the experience of agricultural development in the Fergana economic region during the post-war Soviet period demonstrates that the expansion of agricultural production based primarily on extensive methods and administrative directives produced not only short-term economic gains but also significant long-term environmental and agrarian challenges. These developments highlight the importance of scientifically grounded agricultural planning and sustainable land-management practices in ensuring the long-term effectiveness of agrarian modernization policies.

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