

Growth and Development of Tea Industry in Assam

IJSER

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Tea industry in Assam

Assam is located in the North-East of India surrounded by seven states viz. Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura and West Bengal. It also shares its two boundaries with two countries viz. Bangladesh and Bhutan. The total geographical area of the state is 78,438 sq kms which is about 2.4 percent of the total geographical area of the country. According to the 2011 census the population of Assam stands at 3, 11, 69,272 of which 1, 59, 54,927 are males and 1, 52, 14,345 females. The economy of Assam continues to be primarily agrarian and the agricultural sector is providing employment to more than 50 percent of the rural population. This sector contributes 25 percent to the State Domestic Product (2010-11).

Even though Assam is rich in natural resources and has a few agro and mineral based industries, still the state is industrially backward by Indian standard in many aspects. Economic development of the state depends on the production of the state. The government had been making continuous efforts to develop the already existing agrarian economy and to improve the other sectors of the economy in the state.

Tea is considered as one of the main agricultural produce in the state and is reputed all over the world for its aromatic quality. The other agricultural produce in the state are rice, potatoes, pulses, jute, sugarcane etc. Different fruits like bananas, jackfruits, pineapples, mangoes, guavas are also produced in the state.

The major industries in the states are petroleum and natural gas, coal, tourism, limestone, granite and tea industry, some other industries are fertilizers, sugar, paper, rice mills food processing and sericulture. Some traditional industries are brass-metal

works, bamboo and cane works, spinning of endi, muga silk, pat silk, black smith, wood carving, village carpentry, gold smith, pottery, weaving etc.

Tea industry was doing well in the beginning of 20th century and was recognized as one of the major manufacturing industry in Assam with an enormous potential. It boasted relatively better workforce due to its majestic position in those days. The organization of the British in this respect was quite commendable; the infrastructure had reached snooty heights, the employment prospect were rising day by day even the freedom movement never actually affected the tea trade.

After Independence, there was a radical change that took place in tea industry as some of the tea estates in Assam came under control of Indians by purchasing maximum shares at the stock exchange or buying the tea estates directly. Most of the new buyers were not aware of tea plantation and lack of knowledge of the trade and a desire to make fast money from the business; they ignored the basic requirements of labour essential for plantation. They appointed unskilled labourers with low salaries and did not give adequate attention to improve the tea gardens. As a result, the quality of tea was adversely affected and consumers started complaining at the London tea auction. Countries like North America, Australia and Britain shared more than 80 percent of India's export. Due to unprincipled actions of India owned tea gardens, lesser known tea producing countries such as Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Japan began blowing up in the international market. The demand for Indian tea in the international level went down, but some Indian owned tea gardens in Assam priced significantly well in the international market as these tea gardens were given more attention by big agency houses in Kolkata and yielded better result.

The Indian Government abolished the managing agency system at the end of the 60's decade, which has destabilized the English stronghold on tea estates in India and forced them to walk out of the Indian tea plantations. The planning commission hereafter decided to restrain absurd practices of the tea estates to improve its form. Assam on its part has the largest domain for tea plantations and enjoys as the largest producer of tea in the world by employing utmost number of labourers. Tea industry in Assam contributes significantly in the development of state economy. The figures had moved on to more than Rupees 5000 crore annually as agriculture income, the number append up as the state also receives a share of income tax and export duties from the centre.

After the departure of Europeans, the supplies of tea chest are being looked after by various plywood industries of Assam and these industries provided employment to a vast number of people. It also opens market for Assam coal and the fertilizer industry as fertilizers and coal is needed by the tea industry. Therefore, it can be accomplished that tea industry shares 15% + a significant employment burden for the state of Assam directly and indirectly.

Tea is considered as the most important crop in Assam. It has been producing some of the finest teas in the world. Assam produces about 51% of the tea produced in India and about 1/6th of the tea produced in the world. The climate of Assam favours to produce sweetness and tangy tea in the region. The world's largest CTC tea auction centre is in Assam and the world's second largest in terms of total tea. Assam mainly exports its tea to Europe and Middle East countries and also to Pakistan, Egypt, Japan and Israel. Tea is grown in both the Brahmaputra and Barak plains in Assam. Tea gardens are mostly found in Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Sibsagar, Jorhat, Golaghat Darrang and Sonitpur

districts of Assam. About 17% of the workers of Assam are engaged in the tea industry. Though Assam plantation generally produces black tea, the region also produces smaller quantities of green and white teas. There are more than 850 tea estates and more than 2500 tea gardens in Assam that covers thousands of acres of land.

The tea industry in Assam is about 180 years old. This industry plays an important role in the state economy as well in the national economy. The first Indian tea produced in Assam was sent to United Kingdom for public sale in the year 1838. Subsequently tea cultivation was extended to other parts of the country between 50's and 60's of the last century. As of today, Assam tea has retained its international standard and commands significant share in the world market. The tea industry in Assam also gives average daily employment to more than six lakh persons in the state, which is around 50 percent of the total average daily number of labour employed by tea industry in the country.

The total area under tea cultivation in Assam is accounting for more than half of the country's total area under tea. In addition to existing big & large tea gardens owned by reputed both Indian and multinational Companies, the profession of tea plantation in the State has taken up by common man as business venture at present, especially by unemployed youths

Assam alone produces more than half of India's tea production. The estimated production of tea in Assam was 511.9 thousand tons in 2007. During the year 2006, the quantity of production of tea in Assam was 502.0 thousand tons.

Tea statistics of Assam and India

The development profile of tea industry in Assam in terms of production and growth rate of area during the last seventeen years (1990-2007) is given below:

Year	No of Tea gardens		Area under Tea (in '000 hectare)		Total Tea Production (in 000 kg.)		Average yield (kg / hectare)	
	Assam	India	Assam	India	Assam	India	Assam	India
1990	848	13860	231	416	388,181	720,338	1680	1731
1991	848	13873	233	420	400,554	754,192	1719	1795
1995	1196	37319	227	427	399,133	753,922	1758	1765
1999	30942	98867	258	490	437324	825,935	1695	1685
2000	39139	111996	267	504	451,236	846,483	1690	1679
2001	40795	116659	269	510	453,587	853,923	1686	1675
2002	43272	127801	271	516	433,327	838,474	1598	1625
2003	43293	129027	272	520	434,759	878,129	1598	1688
2004	43293	129027	272	521	435,649	892,965	1601	1713
2005	49102	140712	301	556	487,487	945,974	1619	1703
2006	NA	NA	312	567	502,041	981,805	1610	1731
2007	NA	NA	321	578	511,885	986,427	1593	1706

Source: *Economic Survey Assam 2009-Tea statistics* , Tea Board of India

It can be observed from the above table that the growth in number of tea gardens in Assam and India was nominal till 1995; number of tea gardens in Assam was 848 in 1990 which has enhanced to 30942 in 1999. The Tea Board of India included the small tea growers in its official statistics since 1998 and it has shown a massive 97.25 percent increase of tea gardens in Assam in 1999 and 85.98 percent increase in all India level which was lower than all Assam growth rate. The overall compound growth rates for the period 1990 to 2005 for Assam was 56.99 percent which was much higher compared to 29.37 percent of all India level.

The area under tea in Assam was 231 thousand ha in 1990 which has grown only to 321 thousand ha in 2007 and the area under tea has increased to 28.03 percent, during the same period tea production in Assam has increased from 388,181 (000 kg.) to 511,885 (000 kg.) with a growth rate of 24.16 percent. The growth rate of area under tea at all India level was 28.02 percent and the growth rate of production was 26.97 percent. Although similar growth rate of area under tea was maintained in Assam and at all India level, however the growth rate of production at all India level was slightly higher by 1.05 percent than the growth rate of Assam.

The compound growth rate of area under tea in Assam was 1.65 percent which was same with all India growth rate of 1.65 percent (1990-2007). During the same period the compound growth rate of production of tea in Assam was 1.39 percent and the all India growth

rate of production of tea was 1.58 percent which was marginally higher than the growth rate of Assam.

The average yield of tea per hectare in Assam has reduced from 1,680 kg in 1990 to 1,593 kg/ha in 2007 showing an overall decline of -0.54 percent, even at all India level tea productivity had negative growth from 1731 kg/ha to 1706 kg/ha during the same period with an overall decline of -1.46 percent. The tea productivity growth rate of Assam was higher than the national growth rate.

It has been observed that although the production of tea depends on the area under tea, it is also affected by factors like old tea bushes, heavy cost of production, unskilled workers, financial constrains etc. Due to fall in exports and slump in the international market, the producers opted to cut production in conventional tea and laid stress on production of quality tea to realize better per unit price.

District wise Area under Tea in Assam (1989-2007)

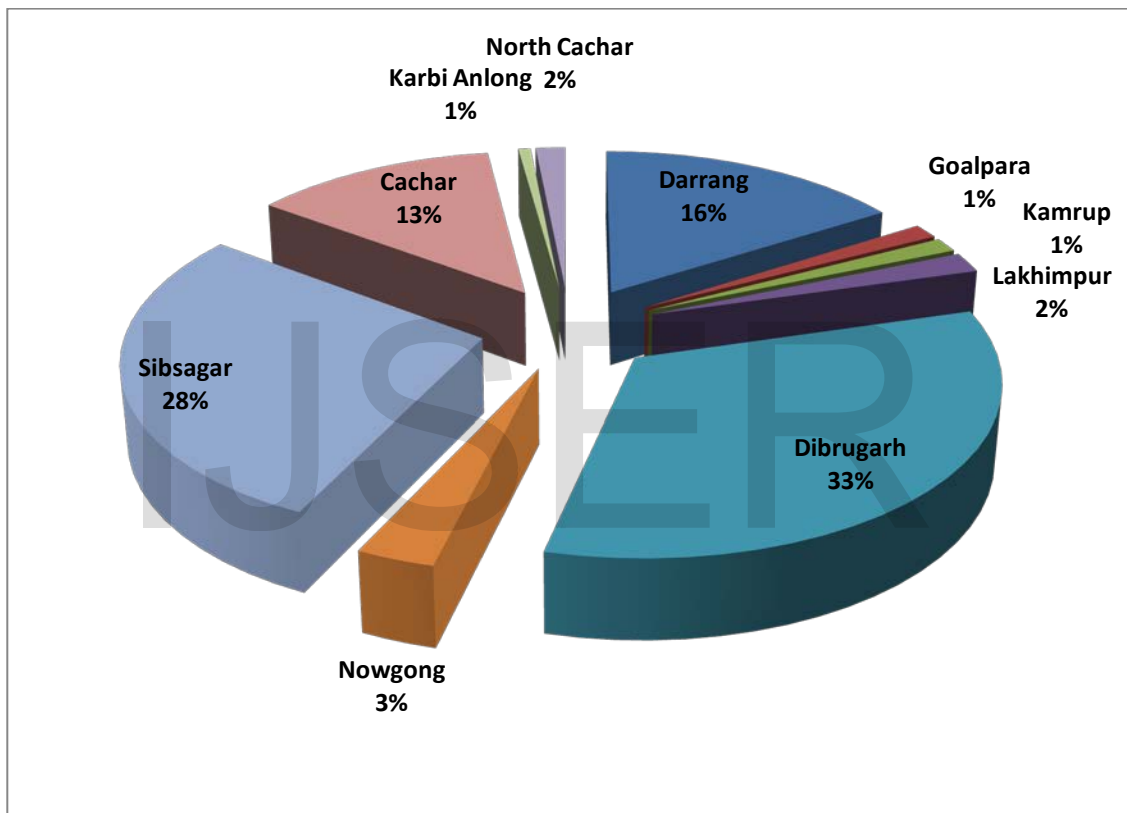
Distri ct	Darran g	Goalp ara	Kamru p	Lakhi mpur	Dibruga rh	Nowg oan	Sibsagar	Cachar	Karbi Anlon g	North Cachar	Total Assam
1989	39670	3136	3550	4152	67805	7767	68322	35026	-	-	229428
1990	39989	3141	3557	4212	68207	7780	63348	35075	1358	3696	230363
1991	40126	3188	3660	4287	68385	7829	64895	35314	1367	4233	233284
1992	40158	3191	3670	4287	68534	7847	64831	35314	1445	4381	233658
1993	39878	3300	3461	4258	69049	7630	64111	34385	1455	4326	231853
1994	40430	3158	3082	4326	68026	7657	62194	32326	1544	4377	227120
1995	40284	3176	3013	4494	68998	7723	62810	29969	1550	4263	226280
1996	41575	3112	3252	4362	70022	7524	62751	29534	1559	4514	228205
1997	41663	3143	3265	4497	70806	7715	63196	29503	1563	4486	229837
1998	40950	3338	3307	4809	83380	7746	71362	30565	1652	4516	251625
1999	40499	3295	3269	4744	88442	7975	72377	31721	1601	4532	258455
2000	41037	3460	3442	4815	93076	7994	74807	32008	1869	4004	266538
2001	41367	3471	3436	4763	93484	8004	76113	32703	1748	4065	269154
2002	41693	3523	3454	4793	93698	8041	76762	32775	1873	4071	270683
2003	41158	3635	3466	4839	95118	8114	77135	32137	1923	4064	271589
2004	41300	3643	3460	4873	95118	8135	77135	32149	1923	4032	271768
2005	41388	4215	3787	6301	114435	8605	83971	31894	1885	4021	300502
2006	41677	4451	3782	6724	120489	8709	88008	31805	2201	3976	311822
2007	41710	4451	3953	6756	122514	8758	94611	32312	2185	4069	321319
Total	776552	66027	65866	92292	1619586	151553	1368739	616515	30701	75626	4863457
	5.14%	29.54	10.19	38.54	44.65	11.31	27.78	-8.39	37.84	9.16	

Source: Tea Board, Guwahati (Figures in hectares)

The area under tea of different districts of Assam (1989-2007) is presented in the above table. From the point of tea growing areas, Assam is generally separated into two regions, viz. Assam valley and Cachar. Assam valley consists of the Brahmaputra valley with the districts of Dibrugarh , Sibsagarh, Lakhimpur, Darrang, Nowgone, Kamrup , Goalpara, Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills districts. Among the ten districts of Assam, Dibrugarh district with large area under tea has maintained the highest rate of increase of area under tea with 44.65 percent followed by Lakhimpur, Karbi Anlong (1990-2007), Goalpara, Sibsagarh, Nowgone, Kamrup, North Cachar (1990-2007) and Darrang districts with 38.54 percent, 37.84 percent, 29.54 percent, 27.78 percent, 11.31 percent, 10.19 percent, 9.16 percent, 5.14 percent respectively. However Cachar district has reflected negative growth rate of area under tea during the same period (1989-2007).

Dibrugarh has the largest area under tea with 33 percent followed by Sibsagar district with 28 percent next Darrang District with an area of 16 percent which followed by Cachar District with 13percent and Nowgone District with 3percent and remaining districts Lakhimpur, Goalpara, North Cachar, Kamrup and Karbi Anlong share with 2, percent, 1 percent, 2 percent, 1percent and 1 percent respectively.

District wise percentage of Area under Tea in Assam (1989-2007)



District-wise Production of Tea *(In Thousand Kgs.)*

Dist rict	Darra- ng	Goalp -ara	Kamru p	Lakhi- mpur	Dibrug -arh	Nowg a-on	Sibsag- arh	Cach- ar	Karbi Angl ong	Nort h- Cach ar	All Assam
1989	78345	4715	4572	8054	139205	11099	94753	39112	-	-	379855
1990	79632	5027	4702	8257	140447	11690	92331	40174	1048	4873	388181
1991	80907	5410	4774	8441	145995	11870	95785	40605	1373	5424	400584
1992	82437	5920	4725	8261	152383	12343	97320	41221	1577	5823	412010
1993	81724	6375	5109	8089	149914	12642	97503	42080	1518	5413	410367
1994	81033	6313	4703	8192	142409	12680	96869	41881	1413	5233	400726
1995	80538	5779	4766	8678	143931	13846	98186	40180	1598	5115	402617
1996	83240	5626	4044	8494	146435	12888	110278	45768	1427	5765	423965
1997	81112	5844	4498	8590	146074	12788	109933	48453	1487	6336	425115
1998	86942	6099	5146	9995	164463	14684	119749	51850	1375	6743	467046
1999	77216	6040	4462	8228	158911	12380	115152	45949	1538	7448	437324
2000	80227	5855	5006	9701	155932	14073	118324	53722	1878	6521	451239
2001	78224	6338	4588	9075	167047	11836	119626	49793	1945	5115	453587
2002	75743	6031	4434	9079	159006	11696	115243	45569	2186	4340	433327
2003	80291	6137	4333	8502	175339	11587	100693	41411	2028	4438	434759
2004	80474	5665	4304	8280	178352	10981	102192	38757	2012	4632	435649
2005	82281	5271	4021	8387	211376	11821	113392	44858	1663	4417	487487
2006	83404	6327	3720	8993	223876	10742	117231	41832	1682	4234	502041
2007	84976	6847	3982	9165	225321	12429	118622	44131	1677	4735	511885
Total	1538746	111619	85889	164461	3126416	234075	2033182	837346	29425	96605	8257764

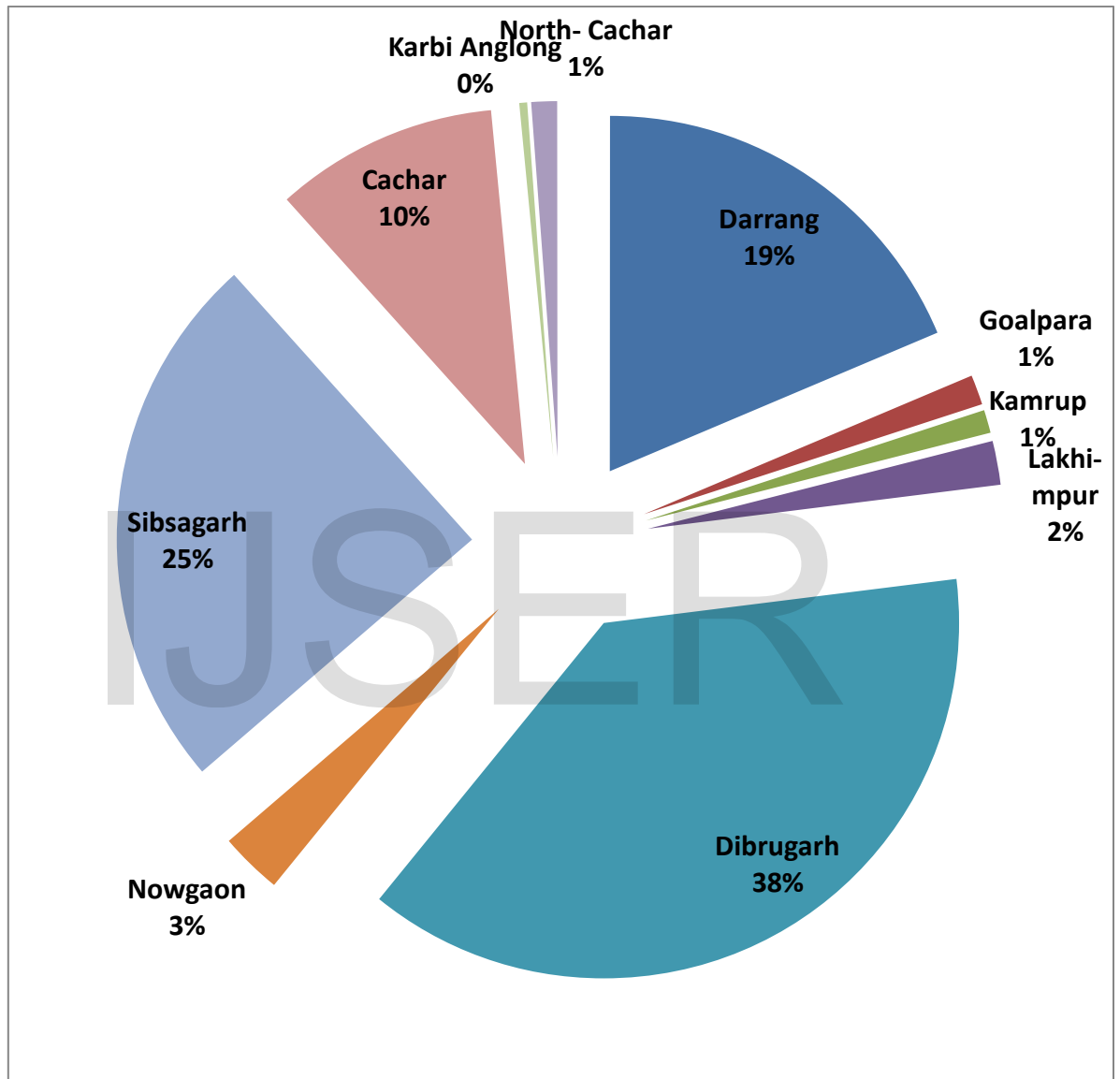
Source: Tea Board, Guwahati, NEDFi data bank

District-wise production of tea, figures of Tea Board, Guwahati, and NEDFi data bank, revealed that Dibrugarh district has recorded the highest production during the period 1989 to 2007, which has significantly amplified from 139205 thousand kg to 225321

thousand kg with an overall increase of 61.86 percent, followed by Karbi Anglong with 60.01 percent (1990-2007). During the same period Goalpara, Sibsagarh, Lakhimpur, Nowgone and Darrang, districts have reflected the overall growth rates of 45.21 percent, 25.19 percent, 13.80 percent, 11.99 percent and 8.46 percent of production respectively. Total production of Cachar district was 39112 thousand kgs in 1989, which has increased to 44131 thousand kgs in 2007 with fluctuating trend in between 2001 to 2006 with an overall growth rate of production of 12.84 percent. However, Kamrup and North Cachar(1990-2007) registered negative growth rates with -12.90 percent and -2.84 percent respectively. The total Assam tea production grew at 34.76 percent.

During the last 19 years (1989-2007), district-wise production of tea in Assam, Dibrugarh district contributed the maximum with 38percent, followed by Sibsagarh district with 25 percent. The contributions to tea production from other Districts in Assam are Darrang, Cachar, Nowgoan, Lakhimpur, kamrup, Goalpara and North Cachar with 19 percent, 10 percent, 3 percent, 2 percent, 1 percent and 1 percent respectively. However Karbi-Anglong district registered zero contribution to total tea production in Assam.

District wise percentage of production of tea in Assam (1989-2007)



District-wise Average Yield Rate of Tea:

(Figures in Kg/Hectares)

Source: Tea Board, Guwahati, NEDFi data bank

District	Darrang	Goalpara	Kamrup	Lakhimpur	Dibrugarh	Nowgaon	Sibsagarh	Cachar	Karbi Anglong	North-Cachar	Total Assam
1989	1975	1504	1288	1940	2053	1429	1387	1117	-	-	1655
1990	1991	1600	1322	1960	2059	1503	1458	1145	772	1318	1685
1991	2016	1697	1304	1962	2135	1561	1476	1150	1004	1281	1717
1992	2053	1855	1287	1927	2223	1573	1501	1167	1091	1329	1763
1993	2049	1932	1476	1900	2171	1657	1521	1224	1024	1251	1769
1994	2004	1976	1526	1894	2093	1656	1556	1296	915	1227	1764
1995	1999	1820	1582	1931	2086	1793	1563	1341	1031	1200	1779
1996	2002	1808	1244	1947	2091	1713	1757	1550	915	1277	1857
1997	1947	1859	1378	1910	2063	1658	1740	1642	951	1412	1849
1998	2123	1827	1556	2078	1972	1896	1678	1696	832	1493	1856
1999	1907	1833	1365	1734	1797	1552	1591	1449	916	1643	1692
2000	1877	1820	1250	1883	1756	1475	1604	1537	1041	1543	1692
2001	1891	1826	1335	1905	1787	1479	1572	1523	1113	1258	1685
2002	1817	1712	1284	1894	1697	1455	1501	1390	1167	1066	1600
2003	1951	1688	1250	1757	1843	1428	1305	1289	1055	1092	1600
2004	1949	1555	1244	1699	1875	1350	1325	1206	1046	1149	1603
2005	1988	1251	1062	1331	1847	1374	1350	1406	882	1098	1622
2006	2001	1421	984	1337	1858	1233	1332	1315	764	1065	1610
2007	2037	1538	1007	1357	1839	1419	1254	1366	768	1164	1593
	3.1392	2.2606	-21.8168	-30.0515	-10.423	-0.6997	-9.5890	22.2918	-0.5181	-11.68	-3.7462

Source: Tea Board, Guwahati, NEDFi data bank

The district wise growth rate of average yields of tea in Assam, in the last 19 years (1989-2007), more or less was negative in all the districts of Assam except Cachar, Darrang and Goalpara districts. Growth rate of average yield (kg / hectare) for Cachar, Darrang and Goalpara districts were 22.29 percent, 3.13 percent and 2.26 percent respectively. However, the remaining districts Kamrup, Lakhimpur,

Dibrugarh, Nowgoan, Sibsagarh, Karbi-Anglong and North-Cachar registered negative growth with -21.89 percent, -30.05 percent, -10.42 percent, -0.69 percent, -9.58.6 percent, -0.51 percent and -11.68 percent respectively.

The total average yield of tea in Assam during the period 1989 - 2007 has declined from 1655 kgs per hectares to 1593 kgs per hectares showing an overall decline of -3.74 percent.

Tea producing regions have been recording unstable yields, which generally depend on a series of things including productivity of labour, the productiveness of land, and the technology to be used, the quality of seedlings and climate of the area.

The causes for the low-yield position may be credited to a number of factors such as constant absenteeism and alcoholism, lack of workforce stability, poor equipment and improper management and old tea bushes.

Low frequencies of replanting and in filling have also crimped yields in the region. Replanting involves uprooting old bushes, rehabilitating soil, planting and protection until maturity.

**Growth of area (hectares), production (kgs), and yield in (Kg/Hectares)
 of tea in Assam during 1989-2007**

Sl No.	Particulars	Year		Percentage increase or decrease over 1989	Average Annual growth rate (%)
		1989	2007		
1	Area (hectares),	229428	321319	40.05	2.22
2	Production (kgs)	379855	511885	34.75	1.94
3	Yield (Kg/Hectares)	1655	1593	-3.74	-0.20

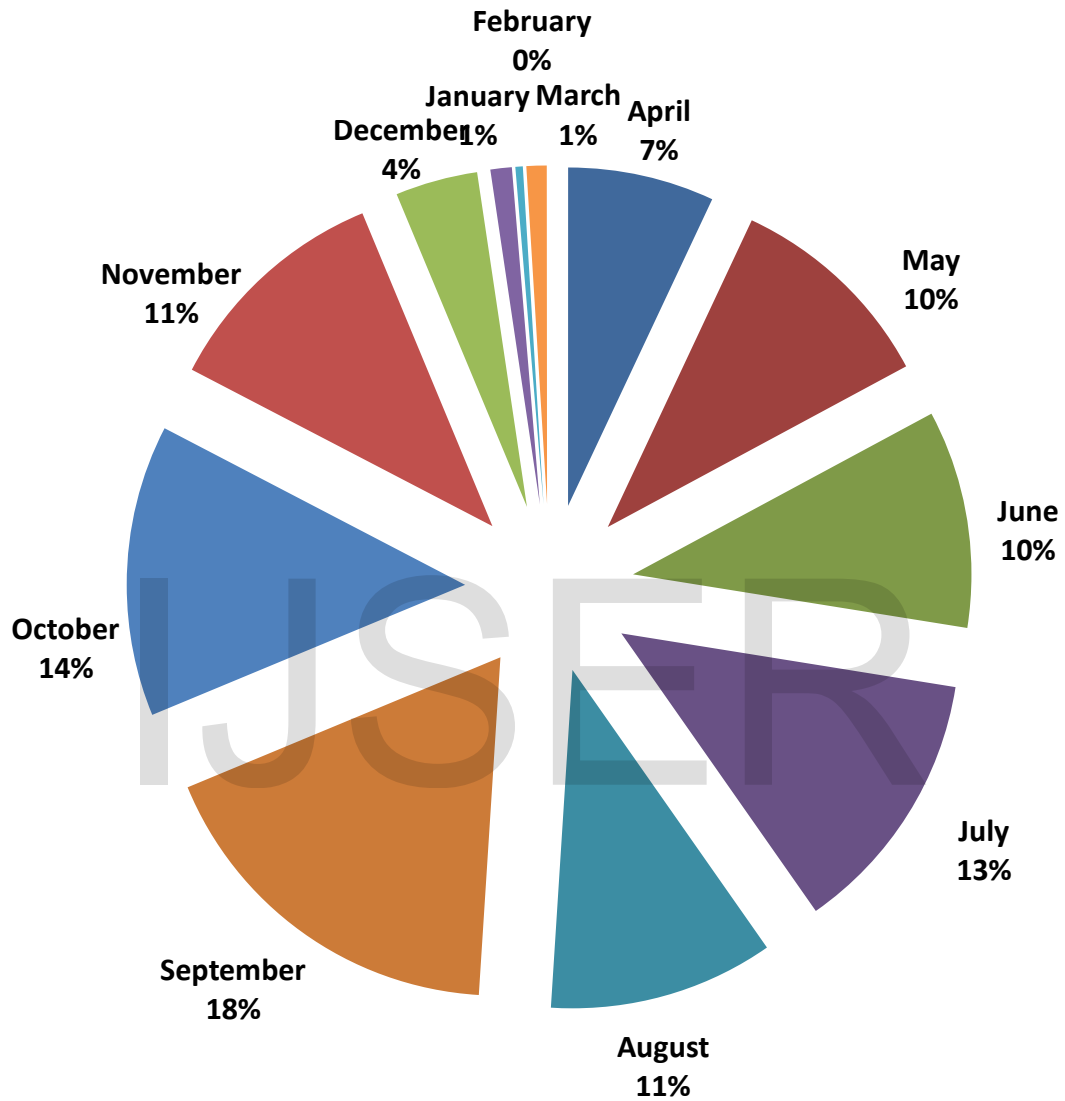
The Assam tea industry experienced ups and downs in its growth during the period of 18 years. Area under tea cultivation increased by 40.05 percent with an average annual growth rate of 2.22 percent and the percentage increase of production was 34.75 percent with an average annual growth rate of 1.94 percent. However, yield per ha decreased by -3.74 percent with negative growth rate of -0.20 percent during the same period. The above table highlights that annual growth rate of area under tea cultivation was higher than the growth rate of production and productivity of tea. The area under tea increased steadily over the years but this did not lead to a proportional growth in productivity of tea.

Month-wise Production of Tea in Assam, (2007-2008 and 2008-2009):
(Ton)

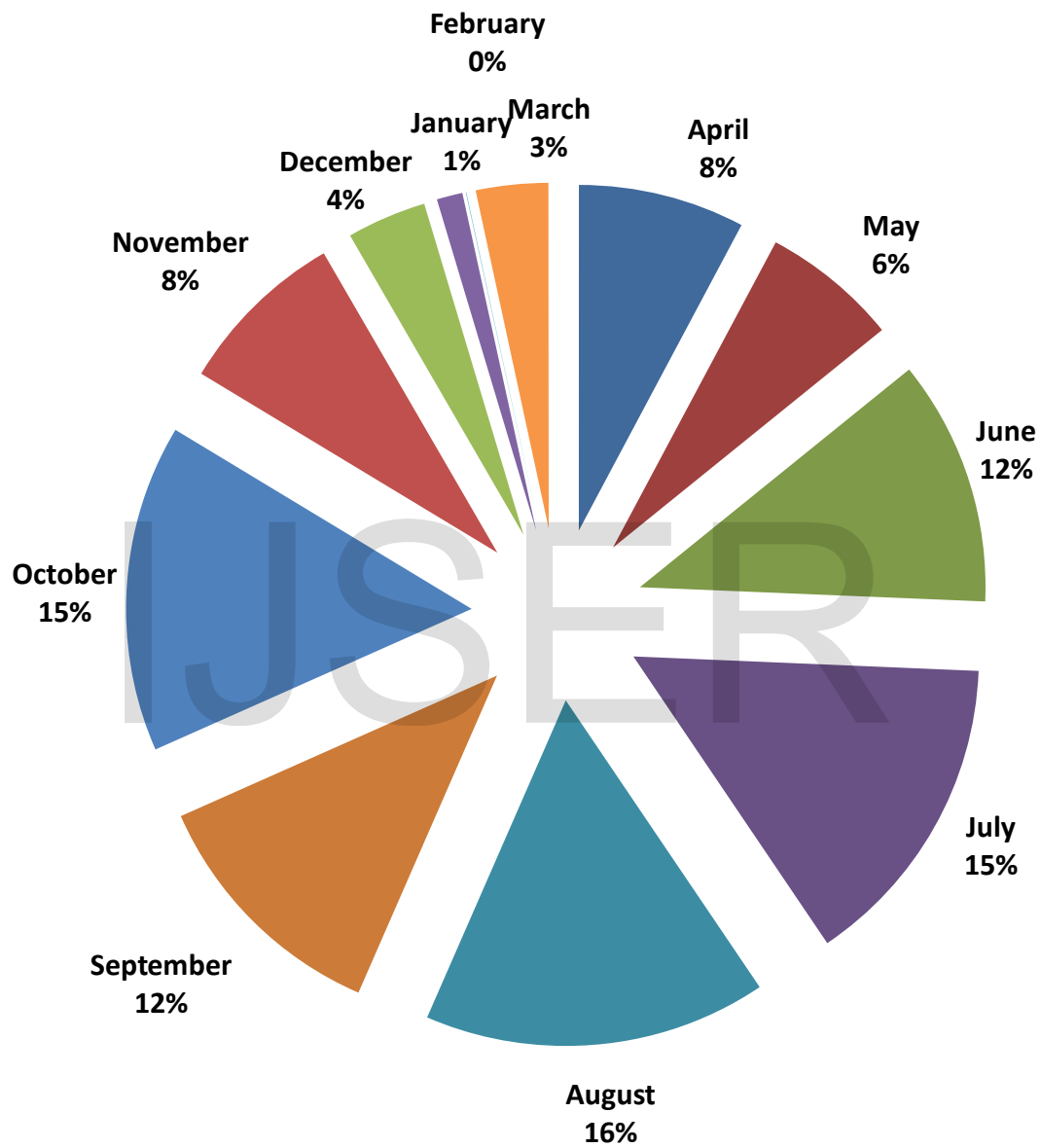
Month	2007-2008	2008-2009
April	33929	37711
May	49278	30852
June	50530	55666
July	61908	71969
August	52167	77555
September	85999	56991
October	67544	74139
November	53843	38643
December	19073	17976
January	4961	5919
February	1714	112
March	4738	16448
Total	485684	483981

Source : Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Govt. of Assam.

Month-wise percent of tea produce in Assam 2007- 2008



Month-wise percent of tea produce in Assam, 2008-2009



It is observed from the above graph that in the month of September (2007-2008) the production of tea in Assam registered the highest production with 85999 tons. From April 2007-2008 to July 2007-2008 tea production had increased gradually from 33929 tons to 61908 tons showing an overall increase of 82.46 percent and in the month of August production declined to 52167 tons. After September, the production of tea shown a declining trend, from October to February the production declined from 67544 tons to 1714 tons with an overall decline of 97.46 percent (2007-2008) and yet again in March, 2007-2008, tea production has enhanced to 4738 tons.

In the month of August 2008-2009 tea production has registered its maximum at 77555 tons. From April to August production enhanced from 37711 tons to 77555 tons showing an increase of 105.65 percent with a marginal fall in the month of May. In September 2008-2009 tea production has slipped to 56911 tons and yet again enhanced to 74139 tons in the month of October. In the period, November to February overall production has significantly declined from 38643 tons to 112 tons showing an overall fall of 99.71 percent. Which was a major concern for the tea industry in the region although it has picked up yet again in the month of March with an enormous production of 16448 tons.

It was observed that month-wise tea production in Assam during the financial year 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 show more or less similar tempo of tea production. In the region, production gradually picks up from March, continues until September-October, and slows down from November to February. This trend of tea production in Assam can be attributed to climate situation. Tea production is much higher during the period August to September. After November tea

production comes to an almost standstill due to severe winter which is not

Months	North India			All India		
Months	Qty (Th kgs)	Value (Th/p)	Unit Price P/kg	Qty (Th kgs)	Value (Th/p)	Unit Price P/kg
Apl-o8	5466	723282	132.32	11966	1279626	106.94
May-08	5051	759079	150.28	13060	1422674	108.93
Jun-08	5734	866681	151.15	14800	1673967	113.11
Jul-08	9899	1541856	155.76	18538	2288677	123.46
Aug-08	13024	1864679	143.17	21416	2614506	122.08
Sept-98	13523	1961567	145.05	19532	2587468	132.47
Oct-08	12986	1825237	140.55	20990	2705202	128.88
Nov-08	11264	1716508	152.39	15613	2260355	144.77
Dec-08	8987	1361100	151.45	16262	2145591	131.94
Jan-09	5775	849213	147.05	12080	1466328	121.38
Feb-09	6395	942569	147.39	12156	1501310	123.50
Mar-09	8200	1197825	146.08	14225	1872229	131.62
Apr 08 to Mar 09	106304	15609596	146.84	190638	23817933	124.94

conducive for tea production as the quality of tea goes down with the approach of winter. Therefore, March to November is the ideal period for tea production in the region and maximum production can be anticipated only during this period.

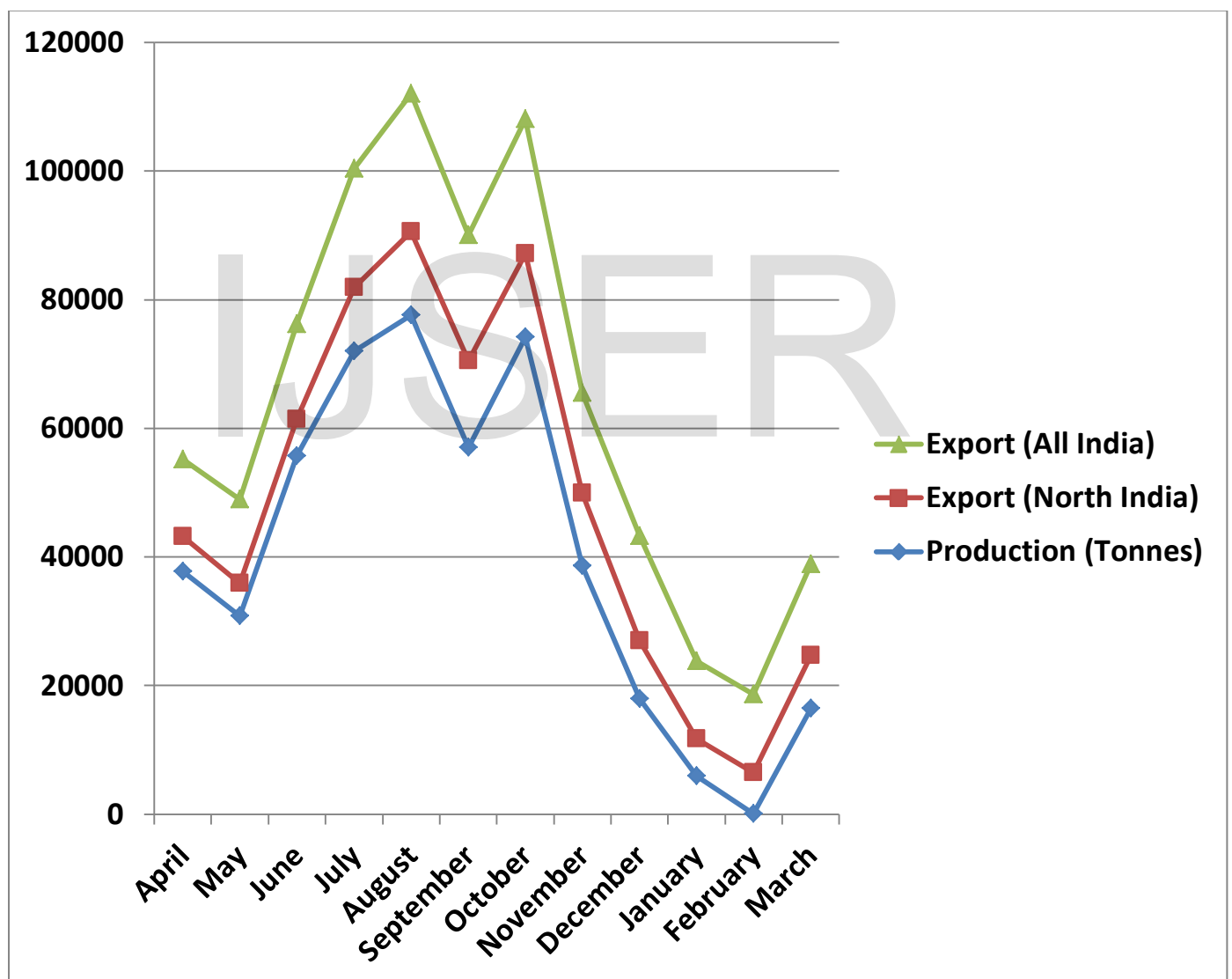
Monthly Exports of Tea from India during 2008-2009 [Financial Year] (Final)

Comparison of Month wise Tea production in ASSAM and monthly export of Tea from North and All India (2008-09)

(In Tons)

Month	Production (Assam)	Export (North India)	Export (All India)
April	37711	5466	11966
May	30852	5051	13060
June	55666	5734	14800
July	71969	9899	18538
August	77555	13024	21416
September	56991	13523	19532
October	74139	12986	20990
November	38643	11264	15613
December	17976	8987	16262
January	5919	5775	12080
February	112	6395	12156
March	16448	8200	14225
Total	483981	106304	190638

Comparison of Month wise Tea production in ASSAM and monthly export of Tea from North India and all India (2008-09)



From the above graph, it is observed that rate of growth of tea production in Assam plays a crucial role in the tea export of the country. As the tea production in Assam gradually enhances export too shows positive trend and low production results in low export from the country. Hence, it can be said that tea production in Assam plays a crucial role in the overall tea export from North India as well as from the country.

The production of Assam Tea has crossed the 500-million kg scratch

For the last few years, Assam has witnessed declining trend of tea production, high cost of production and inferior quality of tea. However, there is good news that after three years, production of Assam tea has once again crossed the 500-million kg mark. In 2011, Assam has recorded a total production of 508.74 million kg. The last three years the productivity of tea in the state was:

Year	Million kg
2008	487.49
2009	499.99
2010	480.28

Over the past 11 years, this is the third time Assam tea has crossed the 500 million kg mark and during the same period, the total tea production in India was 988.32 million kg. This was the highest over the past 11 years.

Mr Bidyannand Barkakoty, Chairman of North Eastern Tea Association (NETA) revealed that the credit for the increase in tea production in Assam goes to small growers who contribute about 30 percent of the total tea production in the region. The decrease of two million kg in the Brahmaputra Valley and a drop of three million kg in the Barak valley have not affected the significant increase of tea production in the state in December, 2011, as compared to the corresponding month of 2010.

Mr Borkakoty said, “The decrease in tea production in December was due to less rainfall than required in October. If we had sufficient rainfall in October than we would have got a good pluck in November-December and the final production figure for 2011 would have touched about 513 million kg in Assam and India's total production too would have touched 1,000 million kg.”

The NETA Chairman also mentioned that the decrease in production in the month of November-December has considerably affected three weekly sales at the Guwahati Tea Auction Centre (GTAC) in March.

Mr. Barkakoty said the Tea Board statistics showed that Darjeeling recorded 9.7 million kg in 2011 as compared to 8.86 million kg in 2010, Dooars 143.23 million kg (144.56 million kg) and Terai 73.33 million kg (76.35 million kg) while total production in West Bengal 226.36 million kg in 2011 as against 229.78 million kg in 2010.

In 2011, Tamil Nadu recorded a total production of 167.22 million kg, Kerala 68.34 million kg and Karnataka 5.30 million kg.

Tea was declared as the 'State Drink' of Assam by Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi on November 22 at the World Tea Science Congress held in upper Assam's Jorhat town on the occasion of 100 years celebration of Tocklai Experimental Station of the Tea Research Association.

The tea industry's contribution to the economy of Assam is very significant as far as employment is concerned; it provides direct employment to more than half-a-million workers in Assam, of which fifty percent are women workers. This industry on an average employs about 531 thousands workers per day in Assam as against 789 thousand in All India. Tea industry in Assam accounts for 66.6 percent of the total labour employed in North India and 54.8 percent of All India.

Honchos root for tea harvester

Since tea leaves plucking is quite time consuming and slow process, Assam tea gardens could soon be introducing mechanical harvesters which will improve plucking skill and increase both quality and quantity of tea.

At the 111th annual general meeting of the Surma valley branch of Indian Tea Association (ITA) at Cachar Club in Silchar, Chairman K.A. Mahabir mooted the idea of introducing mechanical harvesters in Cachar tea region which has more than 100 gardens.

He said tea gardens in Cachar were facing competition from the job scheme under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, as labourers find them more lucrative than the daily wages at the gardens.

The mechanical harvesters, priced at Rs 1.5 lakh, would also be “very cost effective” and are already popular in China, Vietnam and Keyna.

He also demanded a subsidy from the Tea Board to buy these machines.

Mahabir, however, allayed fears of worker retrenchment, women tea labourers in particular, asserting that the easy-to-handle machines would only help the labourers to improve their plucking quality.

“Behind each machine, a human hand will be needed to operate it,” he said.

Secretary General of the Surma valley branch of the association, M. Das Gupta, also expressed concern over the low annual output of CTC tea in Cachar gardens in 2010-11.

Aenakhal tea estate in Hailakandi district, a 700-hectare property of the Bhuwalka Trading and Tea Company Limited which produces around 15 lakh kg of superior CTC tea, has already introduced the gadgets. The tea association also suggested modification in the special purpose tea fund as part of its proposals to the Centre for the 12th Five Year plan.

Das Gupta said the scheme under the Union ministry of commerce and industry that extends financial support to the ailing tea estates should now be revamped in keeping with the Chan- god circumstances of the industry.

He said the Indian Tea Association wants the tea fund to be provided on a company basis and not on individual garden basis in a bid to allow the cash-strapped tea industry to gain more flexibility in availing of loans.

At present, under the fund norms, only tea gardens with 50-year-old plants are eligible for the benefit.

Das Gupta, however, suggested that the low-yielding bushes which are less than 50 years of age should also be considered for this scheme.

The secretary general wants the 25 per cent subsidy to be enhanced to 50 per cent to undertake tasks of uprooting the uneconomic tea bushes for replanting.

Bio Tea in Assam

The demand for organic tea has been increasing in the international market. The rising demand for organic tea in countries like United States, Japan and Europe and other countries is due to growing consciousness of the people against harmful effect of conventionally produced tea.

Presently, the demand for organic tea in the international market is around 3million kg per year and the growth rate is 10 percent per annum. However, the demand for organic tea is likely to be increased incredibly as preference of the people shifting from conventional tea to organic tea.

Singpho people have been playing a key role in the tea industry of Assam and perhaps they are the first one to have introduced the concept of organic tea in the tea segment of the state. And the concept of organic tea has gained momentum in other parts. The technique used by the Singpho people has inspired more and more youths towards organic tea in Assam and adjoining North Eastern States. The growing demand for organic tea across the world has also influenced to some extent in this regard. Singpho

people generally inhabitant in Margherita of Tinsukia District of upper Assam and some parts of Arunachal Pradesh. They produce organic tea without using chemical fertilizer and use only cow dung and vermin compose as manure for producing organic tea.

There are about 200 small and medium size tea gardens scattered in Margherita and Arunachal Pradesh where 300 Singpho people are directly or indirectly involved in producing organic tea to run their families. Total productivity of organic tea is low compared to ordinary tea. Due to high demand for organic tea in the world market, producers obtain good price for their produce. The process of manufacturing organic tea is also different from ordinary tea. Without using modern technique, the Singpho people produce organic tea by using traditional method. Originally, green leaves are crushed into a bamboo pipe (choonga) and then smoke dry. This is their traditional way of producing organic tea, which gives a special fragrance for which Singpho people is largely accepted by the people in different parts in the region.

“Our production method keeps all tea nutrients intact, besides it provides a new flavour and therefore our tea is very popular” Gopeshwar Ningda, a senior Singpho leader opined. According to him due to growing demand for organic tea, across the world, several youths who once closely associated with the orange cultivation have come forward to associate themselves with organic tea cultivation. Realising the importance of organic tea and the technique used by the Singpho people to make it, a Canadian NGO Fertile Ground has come forward to support the Singpho youths. The members of the NGO have been providing technical support and guidance to the garden owners to march towards right direction.

Recently Singpho community has developed ‘Tea Coin’ (round shape tea tablet). The ‘Tea Coin’ can be consumed by merely dissolving in the hot water. The product is sold in

the foremost stores of Canada in the brand name of 'Phalap' (Tea is known as Phalap in Singpho language). Small Tea Cooperative, a Canadian company that has strong grip across the world, markets the product. The 'Tea Coin' contains 2 to 5 gm of tea, which is now very popular among the Canadian people because it is also produce by traditional method.

"We have sold 1000 pieces of Tea coins within a short span of time in the Canada market and another consignment comprising 10,000 pieces have been sent in view of growing response from the consumers in Canada," Rajesh Singpho, the man behind the mission said. He has also informed that he is in the process of exporting 'Tea Coins' to North America. "We have received feedback from North America companies on our traditional tea and they are keen to import Singpho tea," he informed. Quoting reasons for the Canadian company's enthusiasm to purchase tea from Margherita despite aggressive marketing from China and Sri Lanka, he observed that it is purely because of traditional method of manufacturing and chemical free.

It is quite a challenging task to capture worldwide market for farmers from a small place like Margherita. Due to tough competition and aggressive marketing strategy from countries like China and Sri Lanka, yet Singpho people who are involved in the tea business are optimistic that their tea will be able to make inroads into the world market in days to come for its traditional value. Hundreds of unemployed youths of Upper Assam have been motivated by these Singpho people to take up tea business to earn their livelihood. However they should be provided good support and a proper market from the authorities concerned so that they can achieve their goals.

In 90s features of tea industry have changed with the emergence of Bio-Tea, in Assam. Bio-Tea indicates tea that is completely free of chemicals through fertilizers', but

at the same time it is not feasible to increase productivity without using fertilizers. Mr. Eberhard, a German socialist activist, travel freak and an ardent tea taster has pointed out that “Tea choices in Europe had gone in for a sea change and if Assam who were once the largest suppliers to Norway and other Scandinavian countries, did not cater to the swinging trends they won’t be able to stand on the same platform as they have done so often in the past.”

Challenges of tea industry in Assam

The government of India has implemented labour laws, which have come up with enough problems for the tea industry. Sontosh Soren former Asst Manager, Mornai Tea Estate, lower Assam, has very influential voice against labour laws, he says “Apart from provisions minimum wages act and provident fund act others such as payment of wages act, trade union act, industrial disputes act and few others had only gone ahead to pile more problems for the industry, all these labor laws had risen the tea cost in the international market. Most importantly, the Assam Tea had lost its competitive edge in the market due to price rise”. Over the last few years the tea industry is facing danger as the land for tea plantations has not grown much while the work force had multiplied enormously which indicates vast surplus of labour in tea gardens.

Although Small tea growers in Assam have received financial support from various banks and financial institutions like cooperative banks in Assam, industrial finance cooperation and few commercial banks yet inadequate finance has affected the growth of tea plantations of this section.

To recover from appalling chapter of tea industry in the region, the industry needs transformation through low prices, incorporation of small estates and cooperative

management. Adequate measures should be taken to deal with the crisis of the industry that will have effect in the economy of the state.

Assam Tea Industry expects higher Prices.

Assam tea industry is expecting price recognition to be in line, compared to the year 2010 stock being nil, tea industry particularly in Assam expected better return in 2011 with the weather being normal in many areas.

“As there has been no carryover this year, there is absolutely no reason why price realisation should not be as good as last year or even better in 2011,” said Bidyananda Barkakoty, chairman of North Eastern Tea Association (NETA).

Harvesting of crop, Barkakoty said, has already begun in many areas of Brahmaputra Valley as the weather has been “more or less normal”. In past, the tea production in the initial months in the state had suffered due to unfavourable weather conditions, with the worst being in 2009 when the state witnessed a drought-like condition.

Barkakoty further told Business Standard that the industry is hopeful that even if the weather plays truant, prices would remain firm in 2011. “Though we don’t know how the weather will be later, but we don’t think prices would be below last year’s average,” he said.

In 2010, the average prices of Assam tea have been Rs. 130.39 and 112.93 respectively in Kolkata and Guwahati auction centres.

The average price of Assam CTC (leaf) tea in Kolkata auction was Rs. 131.69 and that of CTC (dust) was Rs. 128.07. Similarly, average prices of CTC (leaf)

and CTC (dust) had been Rs. 117.99 and 117.26 respectively in Guwahati auction.

Although Assam witnessed a bumper production and healthy price realisation in 2009, thus bringing the industry out of 10 years of recession, production took a hit last year due to excessive rainfall. Total tea produced in Assam in 2010 was little more than 480 million kgs as compared to 499 million kgs in 2009.

Assam accounts for around 55 per cent of total tea produced in India. The total tea production in 2010 in India was 966 million kgs.

Concept of Small Tea Cultivation in Assam

The concept of small tea cultivation in home stead gardens and to sell the green leaf to the existing big factories for enhancing farm income was initiated during the seventies by the then Janata Government in Assam and encouraged by the government. The increase of small tea gardens began in early 90's and peaked in late 90's. The number of tea gardens increased specially from 1993 onwards and the numbers continue to grow.

The small tea growers in Assam are now an economic force for the state. According to the "Survey Report and Data Bank on Small Tea Growers" published by state Industry Department recently, Assam has 68,465 small tea gardens. These Small Tea Growers account for about 25% of the state's total tea production. According to the Tea Board of India, "there are more than 4300 small tea growers in Assam producing about nine percent of the state's total annual production." (state focus paper, Assam-2009-10 by NABARD).As per Tea Board of India information there are 52000 small tea growers in Assam at the end of March 2009 out of which 3767 were registered with the Tea Board of India. The small tea growers cover around 65000 hectares of land and they

produce more than 100 million tone of tealeaf annually. According to All Assam Small Tea Growers Association (AASTGA) the number of the small tea growers has risen to around 65,466 on March 2008 and covers 103298 hectares of land. These small tea growers produced 14185 lakh Kgs. green tea during the year 2007-08. Most of the small tea gardens in the state are confined to Upper Assam. Dibrugarh accounts for 30 percent of the total tea gardens followed by Tinsukia 22 percent, Jorhat 13 percent, Golaghat 12 percent, Sivasagarh 11 percent and other districts contain 11 percent. It is a matter of regret that most of the growers do not have land patta even now. The small tea gardens are now the backbone of economic rejuvenation.

The tea business as a profession has now shifted from the rich to the common man, as most of the unemployed youths have taken up it as a business enterprise which have given money power to local Assamese youths for the first time and would surely ease the growing unemployment problem in the state.

In Assam, small tea growers are offered comparatively better prices. It is noted that many of the BLFs are fetching higher prices through auctions as compared to selling to estate factories. As one of the officials of the Tea Board, Assam says, "There are several new BLFs in the region. These factories are technically better prepared for produce as compared to many of the estate factories. If these factories get good green leaves, they can produce better quality of 'made tea', which helps them to obtain high price from the market. It is imperative to note that one of the BLFs, TEAMFCO, achieve high price realisation and they have also focus to improve the development of the small growers.

Small tea growers face a number of problems like collecting and transporting green tea leaf, as there was long wait before they could deliver the leaf to the agent and then leaf would reach the BLFs late. Due to poor infrastructure such as roads and

vehicles, it becomes difficult to transport green leaf to BLFs. At present the green leaves are transported through agents from the tea gardens to the BLFs as there is no other source to supply them and the distances between tea gardens and the BLFs are very long. For instance, most of the BLFs either in Lahoal or in Tinsukia are situated near the main road. From different small growers the agents collect leaf and it sometimes takes till evening to reach the BLFs.

Small growers in Assam especially in the Tinsukia region belong to associations of small growers. The association members interact with the Government of Assam regarding necessary steps to improve the situation of small growers in Assam. One of the members however points out, "Many of the small growers do not come to us when they get good prices, they approach us only when there is a crisis, or they have a problem with prices and this affects our functioning as well."

Due to lack of experienced and trained workers, small tea growers face difficulties as most of the workers engaged in the small tea gardens are unskilled and inexperienced local surplus workers. Since prospects for substitute jobs are limited in the region, a major section of former tea garden workers are also engaged in small tea gardens.

Nature and profile of workers in Small Tea Gardens

In Assam, a majority of the workers in small tea gardens are either ex-tea garden workers or their kin/relatives. During the peak plucking season most of these workers are engaged in estate gardens and the small tea growers face severe problem of skilled labour shortage at the same period. Small growers in Assam also were confronted by limited knowledge about cultivation, as most of them are not trained cultivators. They have moved to tea cultivation when tea started

fetching high prices. Some of them brought roots from Darjeeling and began cultivation here. At present, green leaves fetch high prices in Assam, though the hike in price is purely seasonal and the small growers acknowledge that the quality and the price of green leaves are directly related to each other. As in the case of West Bengal, title deeds of cultivable land is one of the major problems faced by small growers in Assam as only 25 percent of the small growers have registered with the tea board. The land problems of most of the small tea growers are not settled, hence they are unable to register with the tea board and it becomes difficult for them to avail the benefits provided by the tea board. The tea board being a statutory body does not have the authority to resolve the land problems. A resource person from Tea Board says, "We have several welfare and other schemes for small growers but they can be availed only by registered small growers. We cannot however take the responsibility of settling their problems." The tea board is all set to help the civil society and other interested groups who have shown their concern for the development of small growers. The introduction of Self Help Groups in Assam is quoted as an example of initiatives by the Tea Board. Tea cultivation has entered forest land including reserved forest and government land in small tea segments. As most of them have "Lack of knowledge of tea cultivation has negatively affected the productivity and quality of the tea leaves in the region"- Tea Board

Many of the small growers and their associations have agreed that small tea cultivation has enhanced the condition of the labour market by providing employment to a big number of people and workers have the same opinion that they find jobs in small tea gardens. Yet employment in small tea gardens is not sustainable in terms of wage rates and working days. Workers are offered only minimum wages and other benefits such as gratuity, provident fund etc is not provided to them. Moreover, the workers get job only during peak season and

whenever there is a fall in tealeaf prices, it becomes difficult for them to get jobs. It proved that this type of employment is neither sustainable nor dependable for the workers. Hence, employment opportunities exist only for a short period, which forces the workers, majority of them known as tea-tribe community, to leave their places of work and look for jobs in other segments. Some of the tea workers left the tea plantations to stay in the nearby agricultural lands before the end of the contract. This group of workers later on came to be known as the ex tea labourer community and provides casual labour to small tea growers depending on seasonal demand. Men and women both were given equal wages. Workers in small tea gardens are not members of any union as they are barred from any kind of organization. As some workers observe, “some producers fear that if we get associated with unions it will go against their interest. We all stay in nearby estate gardens mainly because we are kin and kith of tea garden and some of us are ex-tea garden workers”

All the workers live in the tea estates along with some of their family members who are permanent workers in the estates; these workers are not given any benefits other than the daily wages. At present there is no provision of welfare schemes and proper safety measures for the workers while working in the tea gardens. Some of the workers believe that if they form a union of their own chances for negotiation would increase. However, these workers get jobs during peak plucking season but during off-season, they remain jobless and so no job guarantees for these workers. The role of the Government is also negligible, despite the fact that there are standards for minimum wages; many parts do not follow the minimum wage rate standards. There are no provisions or channels to make sure social benefits and security measures for small tea garden workers in the region. This is in contrast to estate gardens, where there is some sort of social security measures in the form of welfare schemes.

Tea Board bid to promote small growers in State

The small tea growers were provided a number of subsidies and included in various schemes by the Tea Board to support their endeavours. Small tea growing has become a collective movement in Assam.

The Board has been providing subsidy to the small growers at the rate of Rs 38, 000 per hectare for the development of plantations in the traditional areas. The small growers are also provided subsidy at the rate of Rs 69,000 per hectare if they resort to plantation in the non-traditional areas like Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya. The small growers are granted subsidy in the form of reimbursements in instalments but to avail the subsidy the small tea growers must have landownership right on which the tea is grown with legal papers. In addition, the land should be appropriate for growing tea, for that the growers should also get certificate from the institutions like the Tea Research Association's Tocklai Experimental Station, Jorhat or Assam Agricultural University Jorhat etc.

Though it was claimed by small tea growers that their number is around 42, 000, but only around 3,000 small tea growers were registered with the Tea Board. Most of the small tea growers do not have the legal documents against the land on which they are growing tea to register with the Tea Board.

Tea Board has been encouraging the small growers' self-help groups to purchase vehicles, weighting scales, plastic bags, leaf carrying bags and construction of leaf-sheds. Since 1989-90, the Tea Board for plantation provided subsidy to 2619 small tea growers. For the purchase of trucks 50 percent subsidy is paid but the

self-help groups should have a provision for procuring and storing 1,000 kg of green leaf per day during the peak season of plucking. There should be a provision of leaf shed for storing 2000kg of leaf harvested by the societies or the self-help groups for which the board provides Rs 30,000. The Board also provides 25 percent subsidy for purchasing one pruning machine per 10 hectares of the holding, The Board has also a provision of cent percent subsidy for manufacture of stands to lodge leaf carrying plastic crates, the sources said.

The big planters are also provided subsidy at the rate of Rs 52,000 per hectare for re-planting, the subsidy is payable in three instalments in a period of three years after completion of the re-plantation.

The Board provides subsidy at the rate of Rs 16,000 per hectare for rejuvenation and filling of old plantations of over 25 years of age in three installments after completion of pruning and infilling. There is also an additional provision of subsidy for rejuvenation, infilling, pruning at the rate of Rs 22,000 per hectare which is payable in three instalments in three years after the completion of the procedure. Machinery subsidy to the tea planters at the rate of 25 percent of the total cost of machinery and civil construction within a maximum limit of Rs 25 lakhs is also provided which was introduced in 2003-04 fiscal.

In Assam, the same subsidy was provided to four factories in 2003-4, to 77 factories in 05-06, and to 127 factories up to January 2007(during the 2006-07 fiscal). The Board has spent around Rs 2,500 lakh on this subsidy for quality upgradation of machinery said the sources.

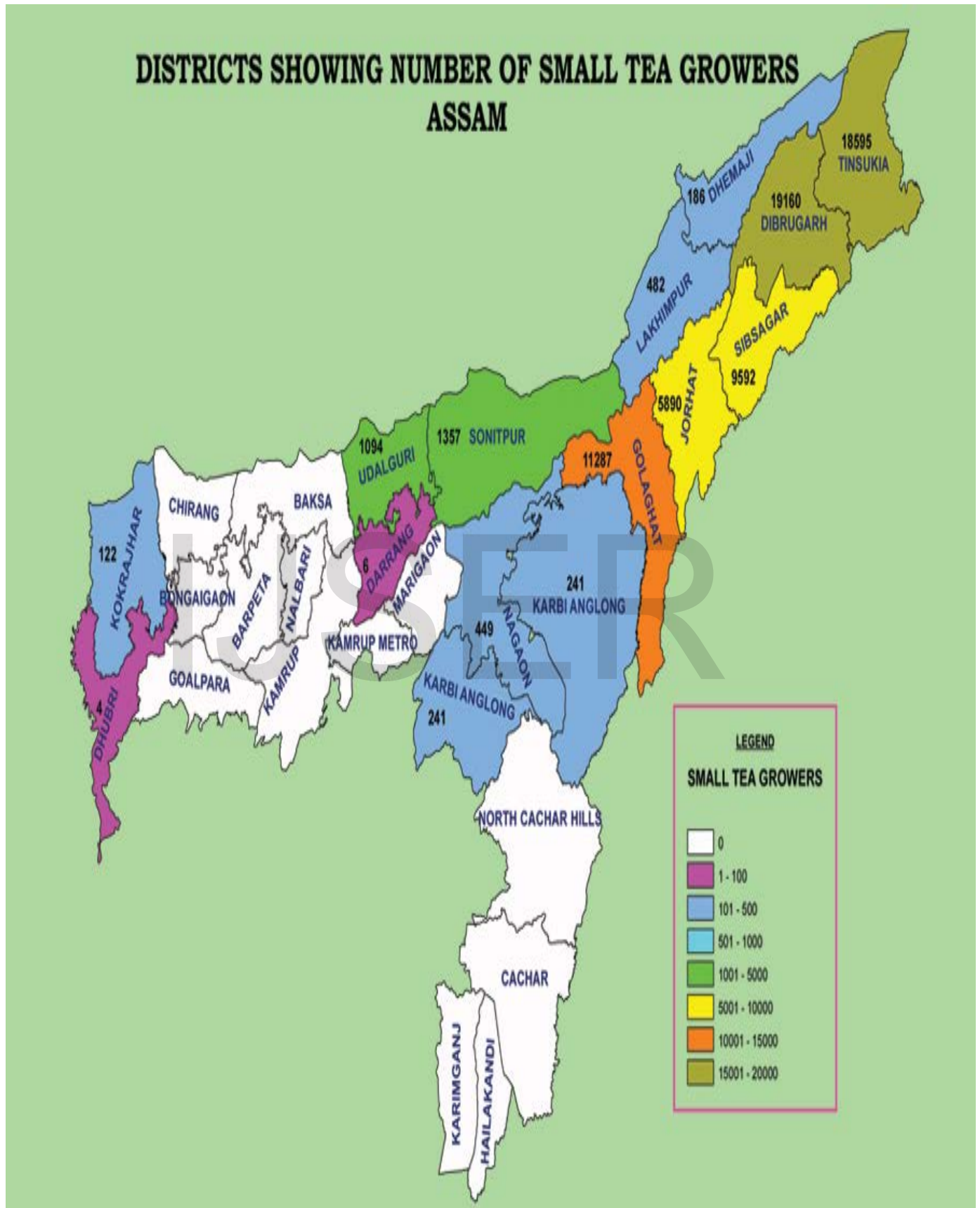
Small tea growers of Assam have been classified into 6 socio-economic background viz, i) Sedimentary cultivators, ii) Educated rural youth, iii) Educated

urban youth, iv) In service personal, v) Tea garden workers/supervisors and vi) Sleeping growers.

Small Tea Growers of Assam registered with Tea Board of India upto 31st March 2008:

District	No. of Small Tea Grower	Registered Area (in Hect.)
Dhubri	2	11.07
Kokrajhar	26	108.98
Bongaigaon	36	94.28
Goalpara	2	7.44
Barpeta	1	1.51
Nalbari	8	29.42
Kamrup (M)	7	26.95
Kamrup		
Darrang	162	476.07
Sonitpur	784	1496.90
Lakhimpur	191	362.06
Dhemaji	61	119.96
Morigaon	7	127.70
Nagaon	131	321.44
Golaghat	1039	2251.54
Jorhat	161	327.84
Sibsagar	228	546.53
Dibrugarh	202	505.73
Tinsukia	241	549.47
Karbi Anglong	391	2350.65
North Cachar Hills	1	4.68
Karimganj	7	36.28
Hailakandi	4	23.84
Cachar	47	183.47
Udalguri	22	39.13
Baska	6	31.05
Chirang	NA	NA
Assam	3767	100033.99

Source: Statistical Handbook Assam 2009



Setting up of a Separate Cell to look into the developmental needs of the Small Growers.

There is an increasing demand for opening new offices of the tea Board to meet the demands of the small tea growers of North Eastern Regions. As the existing Board is functioning with less manpower, pile up with heavy additional work load like implementation of SPTF and Orthodox subsidy scheme, small grower cell etc. It has become unattainable for the Board to meet the demands of the North Eastern Regions as well as small growers because the number of small growers has gone up enormously in recent years. Taking into consideration all these, a suggestion has been submitted to Government for expansion of technical manpower of the Board for efficient administration of small growers cell and for opening of new filed offices in all the important areas of small grower concentration. The suggestion of the Board is under active contemplation of the government.

Problems of small Tea Growers

(i)Unorganised growth- Green leaf production from the small tea growers is not able to harmonize with the requirement of tea market. Moreover, the entire production process of green leaf is not properly channelized to tea processing amenities. It was observed in many cases, for tea cultivation, incongruous land is used affecting the quality as well as productivity of tea.

(ii)Land Patta and title- Most of the small tea growers do not have land patta and they are deprived of being registered with Tea Board. As a result, they could not avail the benefit of plantation subsidy scheme and bank loan. Although, there is a provision for issuing provisional registration to the small tea growers with annual patta, normal land, etc based on certificate holding for tea plantation.

(iii) **Technical backup-** There is a wide technological gap between trained and untrained small tea growers. Small tea growers may be imparted training in certain areas like drainage, manuring, weed/pest control, pruning etc.

(IV) **Ecological Imbalance-** The growth of small tea plantation has reported a large-scale ecological problem by way of clearing village wood lots. The commercial forestry (bamboo plantation, etc.) has vanished and crops like orange, pineapple, sugarcane, and citronella have been replaced by tea.

(V) **Climate Change-** is bound to have major impact on the tea industry in Assam. Rising temperature, flood, drought and minimum temperature are the factors reducing yields and alternating the unique essence of the most popular drink. The changing taste of Assam tea is a serious concern for the tea growers and the changes will sharply slow down the demand for this variety of tea abroad.

Assam promised to strengthen small tea growers

Even though small tea growers are (STGs) not getting due attention from the Tea Board as well as from the government, recently the state government realising their significance contribution to tea industry promised to look into the welfare measures of this unorganised sector by forming a corpus. It demanded a separate directorate of the Tea Board in Guwahati for STGs and said “will compel” Tea Board to look into the issues pertaining to STGs and “extend full cooperation” to them.

Supporting the contribution of STGs to tea industry, Chief Minister Mr Tarun Gogoi said “We will not tolerate that Tea Board will look only the big tea growers.

We want inclusive growth. Tea Board will have to extend full cooperation or we will compel them to do so.”

The ‘green leaf cess’ collected from STGs will be used to fund the special corpus, which can be utilized for the welfare of STGs and other tea labourers, said Assam’s industry minister Pradyut Bordoloi while releasing a ‘data bank’ on STGs, which is a first such initiative for gauging STGs in the state. The ‘data bank’ found around 68,465 STGs in Assam and their contribution to total tea production in the state is nearly 25 percent and around 5 lakh families are connected with small tea cultivation.

Mr Pradyut Bordoloi, Industry Minister of the state has taken initiative for the welfare of STGs and related labourers by deciding to form a special fund to deal with problems of this unorganized sector. It was decided that about 35 percent of the total fund will be utilized for the welfare of the unorganized labourers connected to STGs as they are deprived from all benefits enjoyed by organized sector. With the help of this fund STGs will be able to get trainings and other tea related research at Tocklai Tea Research Association like organized sector.

“Assam has been witnessing a silent revolution for the past 15 years as more and more people were taking up tea cultivation. Today, rural unemployment has almost ended in most of the Upper Assam districts as tea cultivation gave the people a new avenue to earn livelihood,” said Bordoloi.

According to the ‘data bank’, the total land under tea cultivation of small growers is 117 thousand acres. It found that there is shift from paddy to tea cultivation in high lands in Upper Assam.

It found that 59,717 small tea gardens have the holding size of less than 3 acres, which is 87 per cent of the small tea growers in the state are small farmers. Small tea growers produced around 400 million kgs of green leaf in 2008 and it is expected to touch 500 million kgs in the coming years.

The State Government of Assam conducted a survey in 14 districts which indicated that there were more than 68,000 small tea growers. The State Government offers to continue the survey in the remaining 13 districts and also re-survey the 14 districts surveyed earlier so as to specify those small tea growers who have been left out during the initial survey. The Government of Assam has, on 7th February, 2011, notified the "ASSAM CESS UTILIZATION POLICY, 2010". The main aim of this policy is to make stronger the small tea growers and workers related to the small tea growers' gardens by providing financial support. The intent of this policy is also to organize the small tea growers into self-help groups for setting up of tea factories in the co-operatives sector so as to bring about quality, as well as to get better price of green leaf on the basis of price sharing formula of the Tea Board.

The government of India through the Tea Board of India has taken several steps for the development of the small tea growers in the country. They are offered financial support for the re-plantation, rejuvenation of old tea bushes, modernization of tea processing units, market promotion and for the welfare of the tea garden workers. A separate Directorate is being established at Dibrugarh in

Assam to deal with the developmental requirements of small growers.

The Tea Board of India is taking major step for the small tea growers in Assam to make the small growers sector an organized one, Vice-Chairman of the Board Shri Dinesh Sarma mentioned in one of the conference held at Kumarakom in Kerala, who is also the vice-president of All Assam Small Tea Growers' Association. The vice-chairman's post is important as he is the second-in-command and chairs meetings in the absence of the chairman and takes decisions. The small tea growers' sector has long way to go as this sector is covered with several problems. The Tea Board is trying to help this sector and for the first time has projected an outlay Rs 300 crore for the development scheme in the Twelfth Plan, which would help them to turn into more organized and climb up the ladder of success.

"There was a time when members from the small tea growers sector were apprehensive about entering the offices of the tea board. The situation has changed now and we have emerged a major player by the sheer dint of hard work," Sarma said. Unveiling his plan, Sarma said the small tea growers would have factories of their own and their own brand too. "Having a brand would help us have our own identity," he said.

From official sources it has been confirmed that the Centre had sanctioned 95 posts for the small tea growers' directorate comprising 82 technical and 13 non-technical posts. The placement envisages one development officer for every 3,000 growers and one factory advisory officer for every 25 bought leaf factories.

Despite of all these efforts only 4, 966 small growers could be registered till March 31, 2012, out of estimated one lakh small growers in Assam because of non-availability of documents. The small tea growers have been facing lots of criticisms for not maintaining quality of tea, so they are given extra attention by starting awareness campaigns for them to maintain the quality of their produce.

Executive director, Tea Board Northeast, Rakesh Saini, said that the Board was now reaching out to small tea growers and would help them in every way possible.

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