

SPECIAL EDITION

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SEMINAR IN CONNECTION WITH WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP DAY, FOCUSES ON ACCESS TO FINANCIAL FOR WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

**BY M QADEER****LCCI President Abuzar Shad, EC members Amina Randhawa, Firdous Nargis and others posing for the group photo**

LAHORE - A seminar in connection with Women Entrepreneurship Day and campaign to enhance access to finance for women entrepreneurs was organized by the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry in collaboration with United Bank Limited. The highly impactful seminar was the result of untiring efforts of LCCI Executive Committee Members Amina Randhawa and Firdous Nisar for the cause of women entrepreneurs. LCCI President Mian Abuzar Shad was the Chief Guest while District Head of UBL Syed Amir Abbas, Khawaja Waqas, Amina Mohsin, Tayyab Masood also spoke on the occasion. The event brought together women entrepreneurs, financial experts and business leaders.

In his address, LCCI President Mian Abuzar Shad appreciated the efforts of Amina Randhawa and Ms. Firdous Nisar in organizing the seminar and emphasized the critical role women entrepreneurs play in Pakistan's economic growth. He said that empowering women entrepreneurs is essential for achieving inclusive and sustainable development. This seminar is a testament to LCCI's commitment to fostering gender equality and providing women with the tools they need to succeed. The LCCI President also highlighted LCCI's initiatives to advocate for policy reforms that facilitate women's entry into the business world and enhance their access to financial resources.

He urged financial institutions to develop women-centric products and called on the government to reduce regulatory hurdles that disproportionately affect women-led businesses. Amina Randhawa, a successful entrepreneur and LCCI Executive Committee Member, stressed the importance of addressing systemic barriers that hinder women entrepreneurs from accessing finance. She called for innovative solutions to foster their growth and integration into mainstream business sectors. Firdous Nisar, another LCCI Executive Committee Member, highlighted the economic potential of women entrepreneurs and urged stakeholders to collaborate in creating a supportive ecosystem.

EXPECTED DECLINE IN WHEAT PRODUCTION, THREAT TO FOOD SECURITY

**BY LCCI PRESIDENT MIAN ABUZAR SHAD**

This increase was attributed to favorable weather, government support, and an expansion in the area under wheat cultivation, which rose from 9.0 million acres in 2022-23 to 9.6 million acres in 2023-24. However, due to the rapidly growing population and unstable climate conditions, this production is proving insufficient to meet national needs. Despite this increase in production, our average per-acre wheat yield is 3.3 tons, which is below the global standard. If we compare with other countries in the region, China is the world's largest wheat producer, with an annual output of over 137 million tons. The per-acre wheat yield in China is up to 4.8 tons, attributed to modern agricultural methods, research and development, and government support. Similarly, in 2023, India's wheat production was approximately 110 million tons, nearly four times that of Pakistan. The per-acre yield in India is about 3.5 tons, which is higher due to modern agricultural techniques and government assistance. To increase our per-hectare yield, we must adopt modern farming methods, support farmers, and invest significantly in research and development. Due to the current dry season, it is said that wheat production during 2024-25 may see a decline, posing a risk to our food supply with effects felt nationwide. In recent years, Pakistan has worked hard to reduce reliance on imported wheat. Thanks to increased domestic production, wheat imports decreased from \$958 million in 2022-23 to \$235 million in 2023-24.

THIS SECTOR CONTRIBUTES 24 PER CENT TO THE NATIONAL GDP AND PROVIDES 37 PER CENT OF EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN THE COUNTRY. HOWEVER, IF TIMELY AND EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES ARE NOT DEVELOPED TO ADDRESS THE SEVERE ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES FACING THE COUNTRY

However, if production declines this year, we might need to import large quantities of wheat again, increasing the import bill and putting pressure on the national budget. Given these anticipated challenges, the government must provide full support to wheat farmers to ensure they have access to resources that can help them deal with climate threats. For example, subsidies for quality seeds, especially hybrid seeds, and fertilizers can help farmers enhance their productivity even in harsh weather conditions. Water management is also a crucial factor in wheat production, especially during dry seasons, where continuous water availability becomes a challenge. The agricultural sector's water supply in the country depends on rainfall and glacier melt. Due to climate change, irregular rainfall and rapid glacier melting create water management challenges, as we lack sufficient water reservoirs. Through the platform of the Lahore Chamber, we have consistently emphasized the need for building reservoirs, including the Kalabagh Dam. This would prevent millions of cubic meters of clean water from being wasted into the sea each year and could be stored for agricultural and power generation needs, which is also a major factor in increasing business costs. The government should consider investing in irrigation systems. Introducing wheat varieties that can be grown in drought conditions and promoting modern farming techniques will be key steps in mitigating climate impacts. Farmers need financial support to cover production costs, and the government should provide easy loans specifically for wheat farmers.

Protecting an essential crop like wheat is crucial for Pakistan's food security, economic stability, and the well-being of the population. A decline in wheat production will not only affect the lives of farmers but also burden consumers with higher prices due to potential shortages, impacting sectors like the poultry industry. Therefore, this sector demands immediate government attention to avert any potential risks. By supporting our farmers and preparing for climate challenges, we can mitigate such threats, but we urgently need a comprehensive climate adaptation strategy that prioritizes the needs of farmers.

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