

Problems of Agricultural Development in Uzbekistan at the End of the 1980s: A Case Study of Surkhandarya Region

Dilmurodov Farrukh Rustamovich

Assistant at the Department of Social Sciences, Faculty of State Law, Tashkent State University of Economics, Uzbekistan

Received: 26 November 2025; **Accepted:** 30 December 2025; **Published:** 11 January 2026

Abstract: This research provides a scientific analysis of the social and economic consequences of the agrarian policy implemented in the agricultural sector of Uzbekistan during the 1980s under the conditions of a centralized planned economy. The study examines the absolute prioritization of cotton cultivation, the unjust pricing policies applied to agricultural products, and the systemic problems arising from the centralized distribution of land resources. Additionally, the content of the lease and family contract systems introduced in the 1980s, their short-term positive results in increasing production efficiency, and the limited potential within the existing governance mechanisms are analyzed. The negative outcomes of the centralized agrarian policy, such as the limited availability of household plots, the growing employment issues in rural areas, and the decline in the living standards of the population, are discussed and substantiated.

Keywords: Centralized Planned Economy, Agrarian Policy, Agriculture, Cotton Cultivation, Pricing Policy, Land Resources, Lease and Family Contract System, Household Farming, Rural Employment, Socio-Economic Problems.

Introduction: By the end of the 1980s, the deep socio-economic crisis that emerged across the former Soviet Union manifested itself in Uzbekistan, particularly in rural areas, in its most severe and complex forms. Under the conditions of a centralized planned economy, the one-sided agrarian policy pursued for many years, the denial of economic laws and market mechanisms in the production process, and the pricing policy that failed to adequately ensure the material interests of agricultural producers had a serious negative impact on the living standards of the rural population. As a result, social inequality intensified in the republic's rural areas, real incomes of the population declined, and the level of food security deteriorated. During this period, the absolute prioritization of cotton cultivation led to serious structural imbalances in the agricultural sector. The relegation of livestock farming, horticulture, vegetable growing, and other sectors directly responsible for providing food to the population to secondary importance hindered the diversification of agricultural production. Particularly, the lack of necessary material-technical, land, and financial conditions for the

development of private subsidiary farming led to a reduction in important additional income sources for the rural population. This situation contributed to the intensification of food shortages, the decline in employment opportunities, and the deepening of social conflicts in rural areas. In the context of a planned economy, the low procurement prices set by the state for agricultural products weakened the economic incentives of agricultural producers and sharply reduced labor motivation. At the same time, the sale of essential products such as meat, milk, and other foodstuffs at much higher prices through markets created a deep gap between the interests of producers and consumers. This directly affected the living standards of the population, particularly the most vulnerable groups, and led to an increase in social discontent. By the end of the 1980s, the limited availability of land resources in rural areas, the unjust distribution of private plots, and the rapid increase in the labor force with a mismatch between employment opportunities exacerbated the situation. During this period, the area of private plots allocated to workers in Uzbekistan's rural areas was significantly lower compared to other Soviet republics, which was one of

the clear manifestations of social inequality. The limited availability of private plots severely restricted the opportunities for developing personal subsidiary farms, which were important additional income sources for the rural population. Specifically, in 1987, the average area of private plots in the rural areas of the Soviet Union was 0.21 hectares, while in Ukraine, this figure was 0.27 hectares, in Belarus 0.31 hectares, in Latvia 0.34 hectares, and in Lithuania 0.41 hectares. In Uzbekistan, however, the average area of private plots for the rural population was only 0.10 hectares, which was 2-3 times smaller than in other republics. This difference indicates that the interests of the republic were insufficiently considered in the land policies implemented by the center [1].

The lack of land plots for many families and the limited allocation of land for housing construction led to an increase in population density in rural areas. As a result, in many villages, it became common for two or three, and in some cases even more, families to live together in one household [2]. These circumstances also contributed to the intensification of forced migration processes from rural areas to cities or other regions.

From this perspective, the introduction of the lease and family contract system in the 1980s in agriculture, under the conditions of the crisis in the centralized planned economy, emerged as an important experiment aimed at improving production efficiency, enhancing the material interests of producers, and relatively improving the social conditions of the rural population. While this system yielded positive results in the short term, it was unable to completely resolve the underlying systemic issues. However, these very experiences served as a crucial historical and theoretical foundation for the agrarian reforms carried out during the years of independence. The scientific analysis of the socio-economic problems that arose in Uzbekistan's rural areas is of critical importance not only for shedding light on historical facts but also for revealing the logical roots of the agricultural reform process during the period of independence. In particular, studying these processes in the context of Surkhandarya region allows for the identification of regional specifics, assessment of the local-scale consequences of the issues, and drawing scientific conclusions regarding the improvement of agrarian policy.

Research Methodology

This research was conducted based on historical, systematic analysis, and comparative-statistical methods. During the research process, official statistical data from the Soviet era, archival documents, reports on the activities of collective and state farms,

as well as factual materials related to the development of agriculture in Surkhandarya region were analyzed.

In the research:

- Changes in the scale of agricultural production and by sector;
- Price policy and the material interests of producers;
- Practical outcomes of the lease and family contract system;
- The economic significance of personal subsidiary farms;
- Crisis processes in the livestock sector

were studied using a comprehensive approach.

Research results. In this study, we aimed to scientifically analyze the socio-economic problems that arose in the agriculture of Uzbekistan under the conditions of a centralized planned economy in the 1980s, using the example of the Surkhandarya region. We sought to explore the content and consequences of the agrarian policy, as well as to assess the introduction of the lease and family contracting system and its impact on the living standards of rural populations. The following tasks were set:

- Analyze the centralized planned economy that existed in the former USSR during the 1980s and its impact on Uzbekistan's agriculture;
- Identify the structural imbalances that emerged in the development of agricultural sectors due to the prioritization of cotton production;
- Evaluate the price policy for agricultural products and its impact on the material interests of producers;
- Investigate the role of personal subsidiary farms in agriculture and identify the factors that hindered their development;
- Analyze the content and practical results of the lease and family contracting system introduced in the 1980s;
- Examine the crisis processes that emerged in the livestock sector and their socio-economic consequences in people's lives;
- Identify and summarize the main factors that led to the decline in the living standards of the rural population in the Surkhandarya region;
- Draw historical conclusions and scientific recommendations for agrarian reforms carried out during the independence period.

Based on the above tasks, the socio-economic problems that arose in Uzbekistan's agriculture in the 1980s under the conditions of a centralized planned economy were scientifically analyzed using the

example of Surkhandarya. By this period, the content and consequences of the agrarian policy that was implemented in the former USSR, the structural imbalances resulting from the prioritization of cotton production, the price policy for agricultural products, and the relationship between producers' material interests had all come into conflict. In addition, the introduction of the lease and family contracting system, its practical results, and its impact on the living standards of the rural population became more pronounced.

In the early 1980s, the lease and family contracting system introduced in Surkhandarya's agricultural production was an important experiment aimed at mitigating some of the ineffective aspects of the centralized planned economy. Initially tested in the grain, fruit growing, and viticulture sectors, this system quickly demonstrated its economic effectiveness. The practice of rewarding contractors with a portion of the surplus product drastically changed the workers' attitudes toward labor, enhancing their responsibility for land and harvest. Notably, this led to a significant increase in the income of families engaged in livestock farming under the lease system.

However, despite these positive results, the price policy implemented by the state did not fully ensure the material interests of agricultural producers. The products produced in collective farms (kolkhozes) and state farms (sovkhозes) were delivered to the state at strictly regulated prices, which were often below the cost price. As a result, the economic motivation of producers declined. Moreover, essential food products such as meat and dairy, which were needed for daily consumption, were sold at much higher prices through markets, creating a sharp discrepancy between the interests of producers and consumers. This situation fostered the expansion of informal market relations and led to a rise in social discontent. Furthermore, it triggered crisis processes in the livestock sector.

The weakening of management and oversight in state farms, along with the insufficient functioning of material responsibility mechanisms, resulted in a sharp decrease in the number of livestock. Specifically, between 1981 and 1990, the number of cattle in Surkhandarya decreased by nearly 2.5 times, and the number of dairy cows, as well as sheep and goats, sharply decreased, signaling a deep structural crisis in the livestock sector. This process directly led to a reduction in the production of meat and dairy products, further exacerbating the food shortage in rural areas.

At the same time, statistical data shows the significant role of personal subsidiary farms in agricultural

production. Although only 3% of irrigated land was allocated to personal plots for rural residents, nearly one-fifth of the total agricultural gross output was produced on these plots. This situation clearly demonstrated the high productivity of personal subsidiary farms, their strategic importance in ensuring food security for the population, and their role as a livelihood source for rural families [6].

Overall, the research results indicate that while the introduction of the lease and family contracting system in the 1980s led to certain positive outcomes in increasing agricultural productivity, the systemic flaws of the centralized planned economy, unjust price policies, and the inadequate support for personal subsidiary farms prevented a stable improvement in the living standards of the rural population. This situation confirms the historical necessity of the fundamental agrarian reforms carried out in the period of independence [7].

Discussion. In the early 1980s, the introduction of the lease and family contract system in agriculture in Uzbekistan represented a significant experiment aimed at introducing certain elements of market relations under the conditions of the centrally planned economy [8]. Although this system yielded positive results in the short term, it was unable to completely address the underlying systemic issues. While the lease and family contract systems improved producers' attitudes towards labor and enhanced their material interest, these mechanisms showed limited effectiveness as long as the centralized planning, rigid state orders, and price policies persisted.

As revealed by the research, the absolute prioritization of cotton farming hindered the balanced development of agricultural sectors. The relegation of livestock farming and other sectors directly related to food production to secondary status exacerbated food shortages in rural areas, negatively affecting the standard of living of rural populations. This, in turn, resulted in the shrinking of production volumes and the restricted ability to meet the daily needs of the population. Additionally, the limited availability of plots for household farming, combined with the rapid growth of labor resources, intensified the mismatch between employment opportunities and available resources, becoming one of the key factors in the social tensions in rural areas. Notably, Uzbekistan was allocated 2–3 times fewer household plots than other Soviet republics, which clearly demonstrated the injustice of the centralized land policy. The scarcity of household plots restricted the development of personal subsidiary farming, reducing additional income and food sources crucial for the population. As a result, the socio-economic stability of rural families

deteriorated.

The primary reasons for the crisis in the livestock sector were identified as the weakening of management and control systems, as well as the insufficient functioning of material responsibility mechanisms. The sharp reduction in the number of livestock led to a decrease in meat and dairy production, further exacerbating food shortages. This situation had particularly severe socio-economic consequences for rural populations with low income levels. At the same time, the high productivity of household farming further confirmed its strategic importance in the agricultural system. Although a very small portion of irrigated land was allocated to household farming, the volume of products produced on these plots exceeded that of large centralized farms. This illustrates that even in a planned economy, small-scale farms with characteristics closer to market mechanisms were relatively more efficient.

In general, the agricultural reforms implemented in the 1980s failed to address the systemic socio-economic issues in rural areas, as they lacked a comprehensive character. Moreover, the political and social measures aimed at improving the health and living conditions of rural populations were insufficient[9]. While the lease and family contract system produced short-term positive outcomes, the continued centralized governance, unjust price and land policies, and the inadequate support for personal farms prevented a sustainable improvement in the living standards of rural populations. From this perspective, the experiences of this period scientifically validate the historical necessity of the agrarian reforms carried out during the years of independence and their socio-economic foundation.

Conclusion

Our conclusion is that the agrarian policy implemented in Uzbekistan during the years 1980-1981, under the conditions of a centrally planned economy, failed to enhance production efficiency and improve the socio-economic conditions of the rural population in a sustainable manner. The absolute prioritization of cotton farming disrupted the balanced development of agricultural sectors, pushing livestock farming and food production to secondary importance. This situation led to food shortages, employment issues, and a worsening of social tensions in rural areas. The unfair price policy regarding agricultural products diminished the material incentives for producers and sharply reduced their motivation to work. The obligation to deliver products to the state at artificially low prices created a deep divide between the interests of producers and consumers, contributing to the expansion of informal

market relations. As a result, there was a decline in real incomes and a deterioration in the living standards of the rural population.

The lease and family contract system, which was introduced during this period, represented an important experiment aimed at softening some of the negative aspects of the centrally planned economy. In the short term, it achieved positive results by improving production efficiency and enhancing material incentives for producers. However, the potential of this system was limited under the conditions of centralized management, strict planning assignments, and the existing price policy, and it could not address the systemic problems in agriculture. Moreover, the limited availability and unfair distribution of household plots severely impacted the socio-economic conditions of the rural population. Despite occupying a very small portion of irrigated land, household farms produced a significant share of the total agricultural output. This situation clearly demonstrated the higher productivity of small-scale farms and their strategic importance in ensuring food security for the population.

Overall, the socio-economic problems that emerged in Uzbekistan's agriculture in the 1980s were a direct consequence of the systemic crisis of the centrally planned economy, unjust land and price policies, and the insufficient consideration of producers' material interests. This historical experience scientifically confirms the necessity and socio-economic rationale for the agrarian reforms carried out during the years of independence and serves as a valuable historical lesson for ensuring the future development of agriculture.

References

1. Muminov, A. (1989). Opportunities of Private Household Farming. Tashkent. p. 8.
2. Tokhtaev, E. (1990). Socio-Economic Problems of Improving the Living Standards of the Rural Population of the Uzbek SSR. Tashkent: Fan Publishing House. p. 46.
3. "Lenin Bayrogi" Newspaper. (February 12, 1988).
4. Nosirov, R. (1983). Comprehensive Mechanization of Agriculture. Tashkent. p. 16.
5. Source [3].
6. Berdiev, H. (1991). The First Man of the Region. Tashkent: Nur Publishing House. p. 8.
7. "Qishloq Haqiqati" Newspaper. (November 5, 1992).
8. Tursunov, S., Qobilov, E., Pardaev, T., & Murtozaev, B. (2001). Surkhandarya in the

Mirror of History. Tashkent: Sharq Publishing House. p. 263.

9. Tajimirzaev, E. (2020). Everyday Life of the Rural Population of the Fergana Valley in the 1960s–1980s. PhD Dissertation in History. Andijan. p. 80.

10. Kayumov, U. A. (1994). Improving the Efficiency of Using the Potential of Private Household Farming (A Case Study of Surkhandarya Region). Dissertation submitted for the degree of Candidate of Economic Sciences. Tashkent: Uzbek Agricultural Academy.

11. Kholmuminov, Kh. (2011). Historical and Demographic Processes in the Southern Regions of Uzbekistan. Tashkent.