

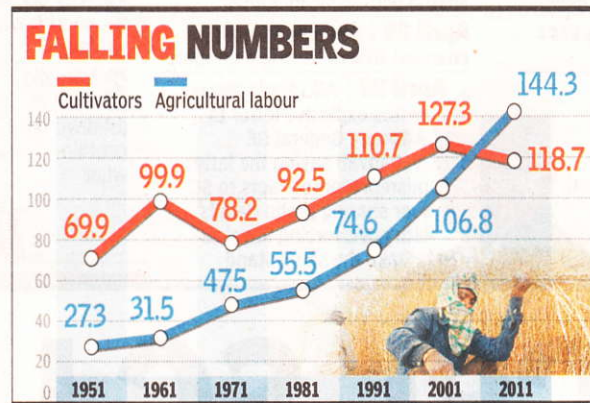
Farmer population falls by 9mn in 10 yrs

Census: Absolute No. Of Cultivators Had Declined For First Time In Four Decades

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New Delhi: There are now nearly 10 million fewer farmers than there were in 2001, the first time that the absolute number of cultivators has fallen. Census data released on Tuesday shows that while the proportion of cultivators to the total workforce has been steadily falling with each census, this is the first time that the number of cultivators has fallen in absolute terms.

The office of the Registrar General of India on Tuesday released the primary abstract of census data, which gives the final numbers for India's population, literacy rates and sex ratio, as also the number and types of workers. Workers are split into four industrial categories: Cultivators, agricultural labour,



Figures in million; Source: compiled from various census reports

household industry workers and others.

Cultivators remain the second-largest group at 119 million after 'others' but are now less than a quarter of the total workforce, a decline of over 7 percentage points over 2001.

Over the last 50 years, the

proportion of farmers to the total population has been in steady decline, but the fall has not been big enough for the absolute number to go down, given population increases. But in the last decade, the fall in farming has combined with the slowing rate of population growth to

create a fall in the absolute numbers of farmers.

As in previous decades, the proportion of agricultural labour has increased; there are now 144 million agricultural labourers, 30% of the total worker population against 26.5% in 2001. "The rise in agricultural labour could be explained by the falling size of land holdings over time," census commissioner C Chandramouli suggested.

Between cultivators and agricultural labour, there are now 263 million people working in agriculture, over half of all workers.

Even as there has been a 3.6 percentage point decline in the proportion of people working in agriculture over the last decade, their absolute number has increased from 234 million a decade ago.

The census also confirms trends thrown up by the National Sample Survey Organisation, which is the rise of casual and irregular work. The proportion of 'main workers' — a person who has worked at least six of the last 12 months — has fallen by 2.6 percentage points, while the proportion of marginal workers — those who worked between 0 and six of the last 12 months — has risen.

Within marginal workers, over 80% had worked for at least three months, Chandramouli said.

The census also confirms that female workforce participation has fallen slightly while it has risen for men. Delhi, Punjab and Chandigarh have India's lowest female workforce participation rates, Delhi being the nation's lowest.