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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SUPPORT OF MODERN SCIENCE AND INNOVATION: a collection scientific works of the International scientific conference – Madrid, Spain, 2026, Issue 1.

Languages of publication: Uzbek, English, Russian, German, Italian, Spanish,

The collection consists of scientific research of scientists, graduate students and students who took part in the International Scientific online conference «**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SUPPORT OF MODERN SCIENCE AND INNOVATION**». Which took place in Spain, 2026.

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THE STATE OF COTTON GROWING AND THE IRRIGATION SYSTEM IN THE UZBEK SSR IN THE 1960s–1970s

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Abstract. This article analyzes the condition of cotton growing, livestock breeding, and the irrigation system—key branches of agriculture in the Uzbek SSR during the 1960s–1970s—based on historical sources. The study reveals the characteristics of Soviet agrarian policy founded on centralized planning, the formation of cotton monoculture, the expansion of irrigated lands, as well as the social and environmental consequences of these processes.

Keywords: Uzbek SSR, cotton growing, livestock breeding, irrigation, Soviet agrarian policy, resources, corruption.

The 1960s–1970s occupy a distinctive place in the history of the Uzbek SSR, marked by deep specialization of agriculture and the strengthening of centralized governance. Within the all-Union agrarian policy of the Soviet Union, the Uzbek Republic was designated as a raw-material base, primarily as a cotton-producing region. As a result, the republic's agrarian system developed in a one-sided manner, and cotton growing became the dominant sector.

During this period, state plans aimed at expanding irrigated lands, developing new territories, and increasing cotton yields were implemented. However, this policy led to insufficient attention being paid to the development of livestock breeding and food crops. Excessive use of water resources caused serious environmental problems, including soil salinization and the Aral Sea crisis.

In the course of the research, both domestic and foreign scholarly literature devoted to Soviet agrarian policy and the development of agriculture in the Uzbek SSR were analyzed. In particular, issues of agrarian reforms and planning during the Soviet period are extensively covered in the works of Y.V. Nechipas and V.Y. Romanchenko [1; 2].

The historical development of the irrigation system and irrigation policy is analyzed in the studies of R. Tukhtaeva [3]. Issues related to corruption in cotton growing and its social consequences are addressed by Western historians, notably in the works of J. Corlin [4].

In the years following the Second World War, the issue of developing the country's agriculture became particularly urgent. Undoubtedly, in the postwar years positive efforts were undertaken in the Uzbek SSR to develop cotton growing, livestock breeding, poultry farming, vegetable cultivation, and rice growing. Uzbekistan was a region with distinctive experience based on long-standing traditions of agricultural culture, and during the period of Soviet rule, cotton growing further developed as a model sector.

Although from the 1950s the Soviet state began to position itself among industrially developed countries, the majority of the population still lived in rural

areas. Rural regions required reforms, the demand for food products increased, and the necessity of conducting agrarian reforms across the country emerged.

In the 1960s–1970s, cotton growing in the Uzbek SSR became a strategically important sector on the scale of the Soviet Union. State plans were aimed at expanding cotton acreage and increasing yields. As a result, food crops were reduced in many farms, and a cotton monoculture took shape.

This process had a negative impact on other sectors of the republic's economy. Since cotton plans were rigidly imposed from above, the economic independence of farms was restricted, and artificial measures aimed solely at fulfilling plans became widespread [6].

The prioritization of cotton growing adversely affected the development of livestock breeding. The reduction of fodder resources and the conversion of pasturelands into cotton fields led to a decline in livestock production [2].

As a consequence, shortages of meat and dairy products intensified in the republic. The relegation of livestock breeding to a secondary sector clearly demonstrated the imbalance of Soviet agrarian policy.

In the 1960s–1970s, the expansion of the irrigation system became one of the key directions of state agrarian policy. New irrigated lands were developed in the Mirzachul and Jizzakh regions [3]. Intensive use of the waters of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers contributed to an increase in cotton production.

However, inefficiencies in irrigation systems led to soil salinization and depletion of water resources. This process became one of the major factors contributing to the Aral Sea crisis [5].

The mandatory nature of high cotton production targets created conditions for falsification in reporting and the spread of corruption. Illegal use of resources and vested interests of officials gave rise to systemic problems in agricultural administration [4].

In the 1960s–1970s, the transformation of cotton growing into the dominant sector of agriculture in the Uzbek SSR resulted in the one-sided development of the agrarian system. The limitation of livestock breeding and food production, the environmental consequences of irrigation policy, and corruption in governance revealed the negative aspects of Soviet agrarian policy.

Historical experience demonstrates that balanced distribution of resources and ensuring the economic independence of farms are of crucial importance for the sustainable development of agriculture.

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