

The History of Structural Changes in Agriculture in Uzbekistan (1991-2016)

Shakhzod Farkhod ugli Akhmedov

Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan,

PhD in Historical Sciences

Email: axmedovhistorian@mail.ru

ABSTRACT

This study examines the historical evolution of structural reforms in Uzbekistan's agricultural sector during the first twenty-five years of independence (1991–2016). The research analyzes the main stages of agrarian reform, the institutional and legal changes introduced during the transition to a market economy, and their impact on agricultural development. The study employs historical, comparative, chronological, and institutional methods based on the analysis of legislative acts, government documents, statistical data, and scholarly literature. The findings identify three major stages of agricultural reform: the transition from state and collective farms to diversified forms of ownership (1991–1997), the establishment of a legal and institutional framework for new farming entities (1998–2008), and the optimization of farm structures to improve production efficiency (2008–2016). These reforms contributed to the expansion of private farming, strengthened market-oriented agricultural production, and modernized the institutional framework of the sector. However, the reform process was constrained by uneven implementation and persistent administrative intervention. The study contributes to understanding the historical dynamics of agrarian transformation in Uzbekistan and provides a basis for further research on agricultural modernization in post-Soviet countries.

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 20th March 2026

Accepted: 14th April, 2026

KEY WORDS:

Uzbekistan; history of agriculture; agrarian reforms; structural transformation; post-Soviet transition; agricultural policy; land reform; privatization; institutional development; farmer enterprises; dehqan farms; shirkat farms; agricultural governance; rural economy; ownership transformation; market reforms; agricultural legislation; rural development; agricultural modernization; economic history; institutional change; land tenure.

Introduction. In the final years of Soviet rule, shortages of agricultural products in Uzbekistan became increasingly severe. The population was forced to purchase bread and other food products through a ration-card system. One of the main reasons for this situation was that agriculture operated within a centrally planned system based on state-owned farms. Despite numerous measures aimed at addressing the problems in the agricultural sector, the expected results were not achieved.

The low efficiency of agricultural production was largely attributable to the dominance of the administrative-command system, the limited autonomy of agricultural enterprises, and the absence of effective economic incentives. Moreover, the lack of private ownership led to the inefficient use of state and collective property, contributing to widespread mismanagement and misappropriation. Continuous ill-conceived experiments in

the agrarian sector, the state's monopoly over land ownership, and the principles of the socialist economic system further hindered the implementation of effective agricultural reforms.

Between 1991 and 2016, the transformation of Uzbekistan's agricultural sector passed through three main stages. The first stage, covering the period from 1985 to 1997, was characterized by efforts to stabilize agricultural production through the introduction of various forms of ownership and the development of new agrarian relations within collective and state farms, including lease arrangements, collective farming, brigade-based organization, and family contract farming [1; 22].

Main part. By the final years of the Soviet period, agriculture in the Uzbek SSR was administered through several republican-level ministries and state committees. In 1991, however, the institutional framework of agrarian governance was restructured. Under Resolution No. 5 of the Cabinet of Ministers under the President of the Uzbek SSR, "On Improving the Management Structure of the Agro-Industrial Complex of the Uzbek SSR," the State Committee for Cooperation of the Uzbek SSR was reorganized into the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Uzbekistan [2]. In 1996, the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Ministry of Land Reclamation and Water Resources were merged to establish the Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources of the Republic of Uzbekistan [3].

Prior to independence, agriculture in Uzbekistan, as in other former Soviet republics, was divided into two main sectors: (1) large collective and state farms (kolkhozes and sovkhozes), and (2) small household subsidiary plots owned by rural and urban residents. Collective and state farms were responsible for supplying agricultural products to the state, while household plots produced food primarily for family consumption and for sale, including in local markets. During the final decade of Soviet rule, these household subsidiary farms cultivated only about 3 percent of the country's arable land, yet they accounted for approximately 20–25 percent of Uzbekistan's total agricultural output [4;30]. During the early years of independence, 39.3 percent of Uzbekistan's working-age population was employed in the agricultural sector. In some districts, this figure reached as high as 80–90 percent, highlighting the dominant role of agriculture in the country's employment structure [5;235].

By the early 1990s, the principal strategies for overcoming the crisis in Uzbekistan's agricultural sector had been identified. Reform efforts focused on implementing land reform, promoting new forms of ownership and farm management, transferring property out of state ownership, and restructuring existing agricultural enterprises into lease-based farms, cooperative (shirkat) enterprises, and joint-stock companies on democratic principles. Additional measures included improving fodder production for livestock, strengthening veterinary services, and enhancing livestock breeding programs.

Gradually, the dominant system of state ownership in agriculture gave way to non-state forms of ownership. At the same time, the government began to abandon the centralized methods of production management inherited from the Soviet system, reduce administrative command practices, and create conditions that allowed agricultural producers to operate with greater economic autonomy.

By the late 1980s, a system of lease-based agricultural relations began to emerge in the agrarian sector. It should be noted that the Soviet government's policy toward land leasing underwent several significant changes over time. Initially, under the Decree on Land of 1917, private ownership of land was completely abolished. In 1922, however, land leasing was introduced for periods of up to six years. In 1925, the maximum lease term was extended to twelve years, although this system was never effectively implemented in practice. By 1937, leasing was completely prohibited throughout the Soviet Union under a resolution of the Central Committee of the USSR [6;95]. It was not until 1988 that collective farms (kolkhozes), state farms (sovkhozes), and other agricultural enterprises were granted the right to lease land to primary production units, individual producers, and families. Following this policy change, republican party organizations actively promoted the introduction of lease-based arrangements, particularly in the livestock sector [7].

The majority of collective (kolkhoz) and state (sovkhoz) farms specialized in cotton production. Land devoted to cotton cultivation accounted for more than 70 percent of the country's total cultivated area. Under these circumstances, the primary responsibility for supplying the population with grain and other food products increasingly fell on household subsidiary farms [1;37]. Greater attention to household subsidiary farming can be traced back to 1989, while the Soviet system was still in place. During this period, additional land was allocated to household plots, and changes were introduced in the organization and management of collective

and state farms. In less than two ears, the total area of household subsidiary farms increased by approximately 60 percent, expanding from 250,000 hectares to 400,000 hectares.

By 1991, a total of 289,600 hectares of land had been allocated over the previous three ears to support the development of household subsidiary farms in rural areas of Uzbekistan, increasing the average size of household plots to 0.20 hectares per family. As a result, household farms supplied 20,500 tons of meat and 80,100 tons of milk to the state procurement system in that ear alone [8; 183]. During the initial stage of the reforms, collective and family contract farming arrangements were introduced in large agricultural enterprises, allowing land and other major means of production to be leased to groups of workers or individual families. These measures contributed significantly to improving the socio-economic conditions of the rural population amid the deepening economic crisis.

Structural reforms in the agricultural sector began in 1992. From that ear onward, the government initiated the transformation of predominantly loss-making and low-profit state farms, which had long depended on state financial support, into non-state forms of ownership. To facilitate this process, the government adopted a number of resolutions aimed at restructuring the agricultural sector [9].

In the agrarian sector, it was recognized that neither the emergence of independent agricultural producers nor the establishment of a fully functioning market economy could be achieved without transferring land, livestock, and other means of production out of direct state control. Consequently, livestock farms also became subject to privatization. The legal foundation for this process was provided by Resolution No. 137 of the Cabinet of Ministers, adopted on 15 March 1993.

Under the resolution, 609 low-productivity cattle farms were scheduled for privatization in 1993 and a further 388 in 1994. However, during 1993 alone, 735 cattle farms were transferred into the private ownership of labor collectives. As a result, approximately 265,000 head of cattle, including 97,000 dairy cows, came under the management of 16,200 individuals [10;15].

Regional agro-industrial associations often implemented the privatization of livestock farms as a mere formality rather than as a substantive reform. As a result, the management practices, methods of production, attitudes toward production assets, labor remuneration, and incentive systems at many privatized farms remained largely unchanged, and the expected transformation failed to materialize.

In some cases, farm managers did not fully understand the objectives and significance of Cabinet of Ministers Resolution No. 137, leading to only nominal privatization. Most importantly, many livestock farms were not transferred into the ownership of genuine private proprietors, thereby undermining the intended goals of the reform.

During the initial stage of agricultural privatization, approximately 70 percent of the newly elected managers of privatized farms were former chairpersons of state farms. Moreover, one-half of these managers were over the age of 50, and their management practices largely remained unchanged from the Soviet period. [11;118]. Another new form of agricultural ownership, the farmer enterprise, began to emerge in Uzbekistan in 1989. Initially referred to as *dehqan* (farmer) farms, this system allowed collective and state farms to lease land to individual farmers under contractual agreements. Farmers were also granted the right to keep 10–15 or more head of cattle. Under these arrangements, farmers delivered meat, milk, and other agricultural products to the collective or state farm at state procurement prices in fulfillment of contractual obligations. In return, they received mixed feed, construction materials, and other production inputs. During its early ears, this form of farming became particularly widespread in the Bukhara, Samarkand, and Tashkent regions [12; 66].

The allocation of land was identified as the principal issue in the establishment of farmer enterprises. It was noted that, after obtaining land, many farmers sought to withdraw completely from collective and state farms, giving rise to conflicts between the two parties. It was also emphasized that the challenges facing the agricultural sector could not be addressed solely through the state sector and that government support was essential. At the same time, given the state's limited financial and institutional capacity, farmers were expected to rely primarily on cooperation with collective and state farms and to avoid conflicts with them [13]. Nevertheless, by 1994, a total of 13,135 independent farmer enterprises had been established in Uzbekistan [14]. Under a 1996 resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers, all land belonging to collective farms in the Ellikkala District of the Republic of Karakalpakstan was, on an experimental basis, redistributed among *dehqan* (farmer) enterprises [15;83].

Until 1998, the terminology used to describe farmer enterprises in Uzbekistan varied considerably, with such entities being referred to as farmer enterprises, dehqan farms, dehqan (farmer) farms, individual dehqan farms, and family individual farms. During the first three to four years following the emergence of dehqan (farmer) farms—up to November 1991—there were no specific normative legal acts regulating their activities, and reliable data on their number remain limited.

Overall, the dehqan (farmer) movement developed gradually. However, prior to 1998 these farms could not be regarded as fully independent economic entities, since they were not permitted to market their products directly to the state or other organizations. Instead, they supplied their output to collective or state farms under contractual arrangements. Another distinguishing feature of this period was that more than half of these farms specialized in livestock production.

Nevertheless, although agricultural enterprises were reorganized under new names and organizational forms, the systems of labor organization and management largely remained unchanged. In practice, attitudes toward property and the internal structure of these enterprises continued to reflect the previous state-farm model. As a result, the processes of de-statization and privatization in the agricultural sector progressed only gradually and without fundamental changes during this period. The allocation of land to rural households during the early years of independence played a significant role in addressing Uzbekistan's socio-economic challenges. Household plots enabled families not only to meet their own needs for crop and livestock products but also to sell surplus production in local markets, thereby generating additional income. At the same time, this policy promoted productive employment in rural areas, helped mitigate the risk of rising unemployment, and encouraged a more responsible and market-oriented attitude toward labor.

The privatization of agricultural enterprises continued through further institutional reforms. These measures included the transformation of collective farms into closed joint-stock companies through the introduction of property shares, the transfer of small and inefficient orchards and vineyards together with their productive assets, the leasing of land for periods of no less than ten years, and the completion of the privatization of social facilities, auxiliary production units, and industrial enterprises previously held on the balance sheets of agricultural organizations.

The objective of agricultural reform was not merely to redistribute land, but rather to identify the most efficient forms of agricultural production under market conditions. The reforms sought to determine the optimal size of farming enterprises capable of ensuring the efficient use of land, water, and labor resources while facilitating the adoption of scientific and technological advances [16;17].

By 1998, Uzbekistan had entered the second stage of agrarian development, characterized by a period of active institutional transformation that continued until 2008. This phase was marked by the adoption of a comprehensive legal framework governing the agricultural sector. On 30 April 1998, the Republic of Uzbekistan adopted the Land Code, as well as the Laws "On Farmer Enterprises," "On Dehqan Farms," and "On Agricultural Cooperatives (Shirkat Farms)." These legislative acts established the legal and organizational foundations of the country's agricultural system.

To implement these laws, the Cabinet of Ministers approved a series of normative acts, including model regulations for agricultural cooperatives, farmer enterprises, and dehqan farms, as well as regulations governing the charter, share, and indivisible funds of shirkat farms, together with other implementing provisions [17;7].

In summary, by 1998, Uzbekistan's agrarian legislation had established three principal forms of agricultural organization and three main categories of agricultural producers: agricultural cooperatives (shirkat farms), farmer enterprises, and dehqan farms.

Beginning in 1998, collective farms were gradually reorganized into agricultural cooperatives (shirkat farms) based on land and property shares. A total of 898 agricultural enterprises were transformed into shirkat farms in 1999, followed by 856 in 2000 and 112 in 2001. By 1 January 2002, the total number of shirkat farms in Uzbekistan had reached 1,900.

This reorganization expanded the use of family contract farming within the agrarian system. Each cooperative member received a property share, and contractual relations were established between shirkat farms and individual producer-members. Under these arrangements, each family contract unit was typically allocated approximately five hectares of cultivated land, orchards, or vineyards and was provided with formal contracts

and accounting records for financial settlements. As of 1 July 2000, approximately 598,500 family contract units were operating within agricultural cooperatives across the republic. By early 2002, around 1.4 million people were working as members of shirkat farms.

At the same time, particular emphasis was placed on the development of farmer and dehqan farms. By mid-2002, Uzbekistan had approximately 55,400 farmer enterprises and more than 1.5 million dehqan farms engaged in agricultural production. A new stage of agrarian reform was initiated by the Presidential Decree of 24 March 2003, which introduced new directions for restructuring the agricultural sector. As part of these reforms, a number of shirkat farms were dissolved and reorganized into independent farmer enterprises [18]. In this context, the establishment of farmer enterprises may be regarded as one of the most effective components of Uzbekistan's agrarian reform program. The experience of subsequent years demonstrated the advantages of this organizational model. Farmer enterprises developed a stronger sense of ownership and adopted a more efficient and responsible approach to land use. As a result, they achieved higher yields of cotton and grain with relatively lower production costs, while also improving productivity in the livestock sector [19; 213]. During this period, cotton production remained the leading branch of Uzbekistan's agricultural sector. At the same time, Uzbekistan's cotton, raw silk, karakul pelts, and leather raw materials continued to enjoy strong demand in international markets.

The third stage of agrarian reform began with the Presidential Order of 6 October 2008, "On the Establishment of a Special Commission for Developing Proposals on the Optimization of Land Holdings of Farmer Enterprises." Under this reform, the size of land holdings allocated to farmer enterprises was optimized on the basis of crop productivity, compliance with agrotechnical standards, economic performance, and other relevant criteria. Farmer enterprises with excessively small landholdings and inadequate material and technical resources were dissolved, and approximately two-thirds of all farmer landholdings were reorganized through the optimization process. As a result, many small-scale farms were consolidated into financially sustainable farmer enterprises with stronger material and technical capacities.

During the initial phase of the land optimization program, the size of farmer enterprises was adjusted on the basis of crop productivity, compliance with agrotechnical standards, economic performance, and other relevant indicators. As a result, many small-scale farms were consolidated into larger farmer enterprises that were more economically viable and possessed stronger technical and production capacities. While the optimization process carried out up to 2011 primarily focused on enlarging farm sizes, the subsequent phase launched in 2015 emphasized the evaluation of farmers' economic performance, with farm operations being reorganized accordingly.

The optimization process was also accompanied by various legal violations committed by both local authorities and farmers. Thus, although the initial reforms concentrated on the consolidation of landholdings, the later stage focused on improving the economic efficiency and organizational performance of farmer enterprises.

Conclusion. During the years of independence (1991–2016), Uzbekistan implemented comprehensive reforms aimed at transforming the agricultural sector into a market-oriented system. These reforms established the legal, institutional, and regulatory foundations for agricultural development, promoted diverse forms of ownership, encouraged the growth of private agricultural entrepreneurship, and introduced changes in land and water tenure, financing, credit, and pricing mechanisms. Particular attention was also devoted to improving the efficient use of natural resources and strengthening the social infrastructure of rural areas. Although these reforms produced significant institutional and economic changes, their implementation was accompanied by a number of structural weaknesses and practical challenges, which limited the effectiveness of certain policy measures and slowed the pace of transformation

LIST OF REFERENCES

1. Хўжамуратов У.Р. Ўзбекистонда аграр соҳадаги трансформация жараёнлари (1985–2016 йй.): тарих фанлари бўйича фалсафа доктори (PhD) диссертацияси автореферати. Тошкент. 2020.
2. O‘zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidenti huzuridagi Vazirlar Mahkamasining «O‘zbekiston SSJ Agrosanoat kompleksi boshqaruvi tuzilmasini takomillashtirish to‘g‘risida» 1991-yil 11-yanvardagi 5-son qarori (lex.uz/docs/5123676).
3. O‘zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidentining «O‘zbekiston Respublikasi Qishloq va suv xo‘jaligi vazirligini tashkil etish to‘g‘risida» 1996-yil 1-noyabrdagi PF-1617-son farmoni (lex.uz/docs/177861).
4. Ўзбекистонда чорвачилик: бугунги ҳолат, муаммолар ва тараққиёт истиқболлари. Тошкент: «Насаф». 2010.
5. Каримов И.А. Ўзбекистон: миллий истиқлол, иқтисод, сиёсат, мафкура. Тошкент. 1996.
6. Кадырова М.М. История развития животноводства в Узбекистане (80-годы): диссертация на соискание учёной степени кандидата исторических наук. Ташкент. 1993.
7. «Қишлоқ ҳақиқати» newspaper. 22 May 1990. No. 115.
8. National Archive of Uzbekistan (NAUz). Fund R-90, Inventory 13, File 14.
9. «Қишлоқ ҳақиқати» newspaper. September 1993. No. 107.
10. Departmental Archive of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Inventory 1, File 106, Sheet 15.
11. Departmental Archive of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Inventory 1, File 152.
12. Мамажонов С.Х. Ўзбекистонда аграр ислохотларни амалга оширишда фермер хўжаликларининг ўрни (1991–2004 йиллар): тарих фанлари номзоди илмий даражасини олиш учун тақдим этилган диссертация. Андижон. 2011.
13. «Қишлоқ ҳақиқати» newspaper. 1 November 1991. No. 212.
14. «Қишлоқ ҳақиқати» newspaper. 7 April 1995. No. 22.
15. Фермерлар учун маълумотнома. Тошкент: «Очун». 2020.
16. National Archive of Uzbekistan (NAUz). Fund M-37, Inventory 1, File 3709.
17. Departmental Archive of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Inventory 1, File 150.
18. O‘zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidentining «Qishloq xo‘jaligida islohotlarni chuqurlashtirishning eng muhim yo‘nalishlari to‘g‘risida» 2003-yil 24-martdagi PF-3226-son farmoni (lex.uz/docs/170168).
19. Каримов И.А. Хавфсизлик ва тинчлик учун курашмоқ керак. Тошкент: «Ўзбекистон». 2002.