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| 1. How accurate is it to say that the Great Leap Forward in **agriculture** (1958–61) was a failure? | |
| **INTRODUCTION** | Set the scene: Mao believed that the modernisation of the economy was essential to the PRC’s survival as a nation. Reforming Agriculture along with the rapid modernisation of Chinese industry was seen by Mao as essential to this modernisation. |
| Attack the question: In 1958 Mao launched his Great Leap Forward – an ambitious attempt to transform China from a rural, agricultural economy to becoming an urban, industrial one which would turn China into an Industrial Superpower. Key to this was collectivisation of Agriculture and the creation of Communes which would provide the raised agricultural production levels needed to support the growing industrial workforce in the cities. |
| Outline your argument: Although politically aspects of the GLF in Agriculture were a success for Mao, in economic terms the GLF in agriculture was a massive failure which had a devastating impact on the Chinese people. |
| **PARAGRAPH 1** | Point: The failure to raise food production during the GLF coupled with an unwillingness to admit mistakes created the greatest man made famine in History. |
| Evidence: Despite collectivising agriculture, food production in China declined severely after 1958. Grain production fell from 200 million tonnes in 1958 to 143.5 million tonnes in 1960. Meat production also fell. Moreover between 1958 and 1961 the amount of land in use for crop production was reduced by 9% as orders were given to leave a 1/3 of the land fallow because the existing storage facilities would be sufficient to contain the expected enormous grain yields. The disruption caused by the ending of private farming also played a part in these reductions in production as farmers were no longer incentivised to produce food beyond his or her own immediate needs. Over ambitious targets and quotas were constantly set and reset. |
| Explanation: These reductions in agricultural production created an ‘arc of misery’ across Central China. Historian’s estimate that over 50 million people died as famine swept through China. Despite facing criticism during the Lushan conference in 1959, Mao failed to acknowledge that the disaster was a result of his policies and as a result the crisis deepened. |
| However: |
| Link: The famine therefore represents the greatest failure of the GLF in agriculture. |
| **PARAGRAPH 2** | Point: China’s food shortages were further exacerbated by the adoption of Socialist science methods in the Countryside. |
| Evidence: The theories of Soviet ‘scientist’ Trofim Lysenko were made official policy by Mao at the beginning of the GLF. Lysenko claimed that super crop yields could be produced by following an eight point programme which included the use of new planting techniques as well new methods to control pests. |
| Explanation: Taken separately, these instructions might have had some value. But the demand that all instructions be applied universally, regardless of the type of crop or of the soil and the climate of the region, destroyed whatever benefits they might have brought if applied intelligently. |
| However: |
| Link: As a result Crop yields remained low and the famine intensified. |
| **PARAGRAPH 3** | Point: The imposition of the Commune system on the peasantry had a devastating impact on agriculture and family life |
| Evidence: In 1958 Mao issued the order to merge the 750,000 existing collective farms into 26000 huge communes ending the last remains of private farming in China. All Farming was now put under the direct control of the state including the setting of prices from above. |
| Explanation: This had a devastating impact on family life as Peasants were ordered to live communally in dormitories, eat in mess halls and tear down their existing houses. Furthermore Peasants lost freedom of movement and required internal passports to travel from one commune to another.  Peasants in the communes also went short of food because it was being exported to Russia to pay for Soviet advice, and sold cheaply to the cities to feed urban workers. |
| However despite the failure of the Commune system to produce more, it could be argued that politically they were a success for Mao as the peasants had now been brought under central control. |
| Link: Nonetheless the human cost of the Commune system was devastating to family life and was also a key cause of the famine. |

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| **PARAGRAPH 4** | Point: The imposition of mass campaigns on the countryside during the GLF also had a devastating impact on agriculture. |
| Evidence: Instead of building big factories in cities, the CCP encouraged peasants to set up small-scale industries in the countryside. The most notable example being the launch of campaign to produce steel through the backyard furnace scheme begun at the beginning of the Great leap Forward. |
| Explanation: In order to work on the scheme it is estimated that a quarter of the peasants gave up farming to take part. The campaign failed to produce steel of usable quality and put an unsustainable strain on food production. Furthermore not only was the campaign economically damaging it also had negative ecological consequences in the countryside since it led to the destruction of vast swathes of woodland to supply fuel for the furnaces. This, in turn, led to faster soil erosion and worse flooding, increasing the need for huge labour intensive water conservancy schemes. |
| However despite the failure of this mass campaign it could be argued that it was of huge propaganda value to Mao in his attempt to get the Chinese economy ‘walking on two legs’. |
| Link: Despite the undoubted propaganda value of the campaign, the backyard furnace scheme was a contributing factor to the devastating famine of 1958 to 1962. |
| **PARAGRAPH 5** | Point: In contrast it could be argued that here were some minor successes for Mao in his reform of Agriculture. |
| Evidence: For example the imposition of full scale collectivisation on the countryside with the creation of the commune system represented an important ideological success for Mao. Despite leading a peasant revolution, Mao viewed the peasantry with suspicion and believed they were holding back the revolution and the transition to socialism in the countryside. The successful imposition of Collectivisation and the Commune system in the countryside on the peasantry was therefore a huge triumph for Mao and his economic planners. |
| Explanation: Mao could now claim that Communist spirit was now deepening in the countryside and strengthening the party’s hold over the entire country. |
| However whilst the CCP claimed that ‘the people have taken to organising themselves along military lines leading to a happier collective life’, in reality the system was imposed on them with devastating consequences for both agriculture and family life. |
| Link: |
| **CONCLUSION** | Signpost your conclusion: In conclusion… |
| Summarise your argument: it is evident that the Great Leap Forward was an unmitigated failure for Agriculture and the Chinese people. Although the use of land in the countryside had been transformed by the establishment of Communes during the GLF, this did not lead to the huge expected rises in productivity demanded by Mao in his quest to achieve rapid industrialisation. |
| Consider significance: Moreover the unwillingness of Mao to listen to the warnings given by Peng Dehuai at the Lushan conference in 1959 about the unfolding disaster in the countryside only intensified the misery of the Chinese people during this period. |
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