EPRA International Journal of Agriculture and Rural Economic Research (ARER)- Peer-Reviewed Journal
Volume: 11 | Issue: 2| February 2023 | Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra0813| Impact Factor SJIF(2023): 8.221| ISSN: 2321 - 7847

A STUDY ON PROBLEMS FACED BY PADDY FARMERS IN KAINAKARY, ALAPPUZHA

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----------ABSTRACT----------

Rice is the primary staple food of the people of Kerala, and has long been a significant part of the state's agricultural economy. Alappuzha ranks second in terms of rice production, area, and productivity in Kerala. The region referred to as the "Rice Bowl of Kerala" is Kuttand, where rice farming takes place below sea level. A survey was conducted in Kainakary, a village within the Kuttanad Taluk, to gain insight into the challenges faced by the local farmers. Fifty farmers were interviewed as part of the study. The farmers in Kainakary are mainly impacted by unpredictable crop prices, flooding and other weather events, and payment delays. The farmers have expressed a need for effective flood control measures and prompt payment delivery.----------

INTRODUCTION

Given the importance of agriculture in Kerala's economy, it is important to have a comprehensive understanding of its past and present performance. The area used for paddy cultivation has been steadily declining at a concerning rate, particularly since 1975-1976, even though Kerala produces far less paddy than it needs and remains a deficit state. Given that rice is the staple food for the people of Kerala, it is crucial to examine the difficulties faced during paddy production.

The two main regions for rice production in Kerala are Kuttanad and Palakkad. Kuttanad is characterized by a fragmented landscape, marked by rivers, numerous paddy fields, backwaters, swamplands, ponds, coconut groves, and a network of canals. Paddy cultivation in Kuttanad has a long history dating back centuries. The inhabitants of the Kuttanad region face difficult decisions about whether to continue growing paddy despite the numerous challenges they face. The study focuses primarily on the difficulties experienced by farmers in Kainakary.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Susha P.S., Hema M., and Devi P. Indira (2011) conducted a study on "Shifting Scenarios of Labour Use in Paddy Cultivation in Kerala." The study found that a large portion of the cost of agricultural production goes towards labour, and for labour-intensive crops like rice, wages can contribute up to 40-50% of the total cost of production. As a result of the decreasing labour supply, agricultural production systems have adopted various adaptive strategies, including shifting to less labour-intensive crops, farm mechanization, and the use of chemicals. This study analysed the changes in labour supply and adaptive strategies in the unique rice production system of Kerala and showed a steady decline in the use of human and animal labour and an increase in the use of machine power and chemicals. The study suggests that profitable farming can be achieved through the proper integration of hydrology, biology, and mechanical technology.

Suresh A and Keshava Reddy T.R. (2006) conducted a study on "Resource Use Efficiency of Paddy Cultivation in Peechi Command Area of Thirissur District of Kerala: An Economic Analysis." The study, conducted in the Peechi Command Area of Thrissur district, examined the resource productivity and efficiency of paddy production. The results showed that the elasticity coefficients for chemical fertilizers, farmyard manure, and human labor were significant and positive, and the average technical efficiency of paddy farmers in the command area was 66.8%. The study found that education and supplementary irrigation during water-stress days could enhance technical efficiency and recommended an equitable distribution of canal water and improved extension services for resource management.

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Zainalabidin Mohamed and Golnaz Rezai (2016) conducted a study on "Determinants of Paddy Farmers' Unsustainable Farm Practices." The study found that sustainable agriculture is closely linked to farming practices, including land preparation, use of fertilizers, and weedicides. Among food crops, paddy requires large amounts of fertilizers, weedicides, and pesticides to remain healthy and productive. The objective of this study was to determine the factors that contribute to the unsustainability of paddy farming practices, using the Paddy Farmer Sustainability Index (PFSI) based on 33 paddy farming practices. Tobit regression analysis found that knowledge and awareness play an important role in determining the sustainability level of paddy farming.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Agriculture is a primary source of income for the majority of residents in Kainakary, Kuttanad Taluk. The local farmers heavily rely on rice farming for their livelihood. Rice cultivation is influenced by various factors such as weather conditions, the attitudes of different social groups of farmers towards agriculture, irrigation, high-yielding variety (HYV) seeds, fertilizer, pesticides and insecticides, the use of mechanical tools, and so on. These aspects of agriculture impact different areas differently. Despite the government's efforts, the performance of the rice farming sector in the state has not improved. It is crucial to understand the challenges faced by the rice farming sector and the farmers to address these issues effectively.

The research questions addressed in this study are:

a) What are the primary challenges faced by paddy farmers?
b) Is paddy farming economically viable?
c) What support does the government provide to farmers for paddy cultivation?
d) What are the key natural disasters impacting farmers?
e) Are farmers satisfied with current crop prices?

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

- To investigate the challenges encountered by paddy farmers
- To evaluate the presence of intermediaries in the paddy farming industry
- To scrutinize the effects of government policies on paddy farming
- To determine the influence of climate change and flooding on the paddy farming sector.

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

In order to identify the challenges faced by farmers, a field research was conducted in the Kuttanad region, which is known as the "Rice Bowl" of the state. The purpose of this study was to examine the current problems facing the paddy production industry in Kerala. The research found that the paddy farming industry in the study region is facing a crisis with farmers grappling with various issues, including a shortage of labour, decreased crop profitability, inadequate marketing facilities, recurrent crop failures, and others. This has had a profound impact on the farmers and their livelihoods. The current study aims to shed light on the micro-level issues that the paddy farming industry is currently facing.

METHODOLOGY OF STUDY

Both primary and secondary data were utilized in this study. A sample of 50 participants was selected and primary data was collected through structured questionnaires and personal interviews. Secondary data was obtained from various academic journals, newspapers, and the internet. The analysis included the use of graphical representations, percentage analysis, and software such as Excel to analyze the primary data.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

A sample of 50 farmers was collected through both questionnaire and personal interview methods. The next step involved processing the collected data, which included editing, categorization, and analysis. The primary data was coded and analysed using charts, graphs, and software like Excel. The interpretation of the data is presented after the graphical representation.

Profile of Respondents

The study was conducted in Kainakary Panchayat, located in the Kuttanad Taluk. A sample of 50 respondents was selected from this area, with over half of them being above the age of 50. 40% of the respondents had a high school education. 55% of the farmers belonged to the Above Poverty Line (APL) category. 60% of the respondents cultivated paddy on their own land.

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Table 1: Fertilizers Used

Response	No. of respondents	Percentage
Yes	50	100%
No	0	0%

Source: Primary Data

It is evident from the above data that all farmers use pesticides and fertilizers in their farming practices, as it has become a requirement in modern agriculture.

Table 2: Yield from a harvest

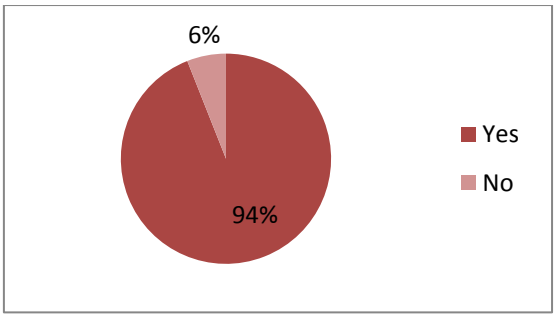
Yield	No. of participants	Percentage
Below 30	17	34%
30-70	15	30%
70-100	13	26%
Above 100	5	10%

Source: Primary Data

It is evident from the data that the yield of paddy farming varies among the respondents. 34% of the farmers received a yield below 30 quintals, 30% received between 30 to 70 quintals, while only 26% received between 70 to 100 quintals. Only 10% of the farmers received a yield above 100 quintals. The yield is primarily dependent on the size of the land and climatic conditions.

Major problems faced by farmers

Figure 1: Scarcity of labourers



Source: Primary Data

94% of the respondents reported facing the issue of labour shortage, while only 6% of the farmers stated that they do not have this issue as they only have a small plot of land under cultivation and therefore do not require additional labour.

Table: 3 Uncertainty in Prices

Response	No. of respondents	Percentage
Yes	45	90%
No	5	10%

Source: Primary Data

About 90% of the paddy cultivating farmers believe that there is uncertainty in paddy prices, while only 10% of the farmers think that there is no uncertainty in paddy prices. The uncertainty in paddy prices has greatly impacted the farmers.

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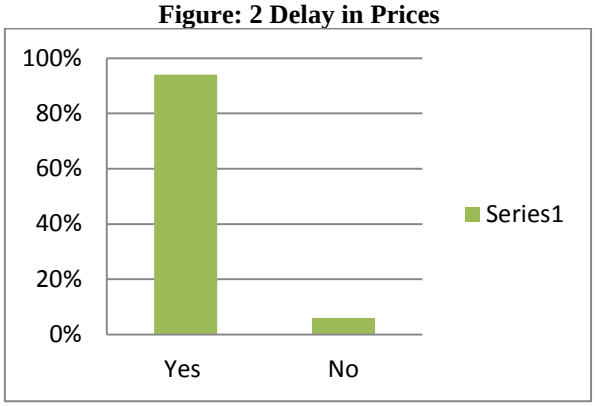
Figure: 2 Delay in Prices



Source: Primary Data

It is evident from the results that 94% of the respondents face the issue of delayed payments, while only 6% of farmers do not encounter any payment-related problems. The delay is due to the functioning of the banks in which the farmers have opened their accounts.

Table: 4 Satisfaction in prices

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	25	50%
No	25	50%

The table clearly shows that half of the respondents are satisfied with the paddy price, while the other half are not satisfied. The respondents who are satisfied argue that if the paddy prices increase, the labour charges and input prices will also increase.

RESULTS AND SUGGESTIONS

- Paddy cultivation in the Kainakary Panchayat has seen significant growth, reflecting the overall development of the region. The main findings of the study are:
- Over half of the sample farmers cultivating paddy were aged between 50 and 65.
- Approximately 40% of the farmers had completed high school education. The study found that farmers with more than 20 years of experience accounted for 60%, which suggests that middle-aged farmers with higher literacy levels and a long-standing connection to farming activities resulted in better yields and returns.
- Most of the farmers used inputs like fertilizers and pesticides and believed they were necessary for better crop cultivation.
- The most commonly cultivated variety was Uma and was harvested twice a year.
- Analysis of cost and return structure revealed that large farmers owning more acres of land received higher returns than small farmers with less than an acre.
- Nearly all farmers faced a labour shortage, as the majority of workers were employed in the MGNREGA programme and others demanded wages that the farmers could not afford. The preference of the younger generation for white-collar jobs over farm labour also contributed to the shortage.
- 94% of farmers reported facing a delay in payments, with the remaining farmers who did not face this problem having accounts in cooperative banks. Farmers with accounts in private banks faced a delay of 3 to 6 months, which is a significant challenge as they need cash for next crop activities.
- Most farmers were satisfied with the paddy price because if the price was high, labourer wages and the prices of inputs like fertilizers, pesticides, and other agricultural products would also increase.
- All farmers experienced problems during floods and incurred losses. Despite receiving benefits from the government, they were not satisfied and expected more support.
- Based on these findings, it is recommended that the government take steps to address the labour shortage issue by promoting agriculture as a viable career option and increasing support for farmers, such as subsidies for inputs, better access to credit, and improved marketing and storage facilities. Additionally, the delay in payments must be addressed by improving the functioning of banks and providing better financial support for farmers.

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SUGGESTIONS

- Proper scientific planning and management should be implemented in paddy cultivation.
- Measures should be taken to control flood and salinity issues.
- The government must take prompt action to make timely payments to farmers.
- The work of agricultural labourers should be included in the MGNREGA program.

CONCLUSION

Agriculture plays a crucial role in the Indian economy as more than half of the population depends on it for their livelihood. The majority of the residents in Kuttanad, a low-lying region, are farmers. The focus of this study is on the challenges faced by paddy farmers in Kainakary Panchayat within Kuttanad Taluk. Despite the importance of paddy farming, many farmers in this area are abandoning the profession due to its low profitability, scarcity of labour, and unfavourable weather conditions. This study aims to bring attention to the struggles of farmers in these circumstances.

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