

Tribal Agricultural Marketing Practices in Marayoor, Kerala: Production Constraints, Market Channels and Farmer Experiences

Ms. Sangeetha M D/O Murugan M

Guest Lecturer, Commerce, Cas Kanthalloor

ABSTRACT

The study looks at how tribal farmers in Marayoor produce and sell their agricultural products. It is based on field data collected from 60 farmers in Marayoor Gram Panchayat between 5 January and 31 March 2024. The study followed a descriptive approach and used convenience sampling. Information was collected mainly through a questionnaire, along with interviews and field observations, and the results were summarized using simple percentages. Farmers were involved in a range of activities, including vegetable and fruit cultivation, livestock rearing, honey production, traditional crops and jaggery making. The responses also brought out several practical difficulties, such as limited access to subsidies and affordable credit, shortage of water, difficulty getting inputs and technology, changing market prices, lack of market information and storage, and the cost of transport. In the survey, 35% of the respondents said that they sold their products directly, while 65% did not. The study therefore points to areas where better extension support, credit, storage, transport and market information could help farmers. Since only 60 respondents were selected through convenience sampling, the findings should be understood as describing the surveyed farmers rather than all tribal farmers.

Keywords: tribal farmers; agricultural marketing; Marayoor; marketing channels; production constraints; Kerala

1. INTRODUCTION

Agriculture and forest-linked livelihoods are important to many tribal communities. In Marayoor and nearby Kanthalloor in Idukki district, farming and related activities include the cultivation of traditional crops and vegetables as well as the sale of fruits, livestock, honey and other products. The source study describes products such as traditional spinach and millet varieties, garlic, maize, coriander, pumpkin, potato, ginger, tomato, beans, chillies, beetroot, turnip and cauliflower. It also refers to the sale of lemongrass oil and other locally produced goods.

Producing a crop does not automatically mean that farmers will receive a good return from it. Transport, finding buyers, getting reliable price information, storing produce and meeting input expenses can all affect the final income. The study refers to a weekly market near the forest range office where tribal farmers can bring their produce and sell it to buyers. It also notes the role of local forest-related institutions in helping farmers market their products. The present study therefore looks at the products farmers produce, the difficulties they face, the channels through which they sell, and the costs and returns connected with marketing.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RATIONALE

The study focuses on the difficulties tribal farmers in Marayoor face while producing and selling their products. In particular, it considers whether farmers can obtain the inputs, public support, market information, storage and transport facilities they need, and whether the available marketing channels provide satisfactory returns. The source also points to low producer prices, limited marketing facilities, transport problems, high input costs, climatic conditions, changes in land use and wildlife-related crop damage as issues affecting farming in the area.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To identify the agricultural and related products produced by tribal farmers in Marayoor.
- To examine the production and marketing problems faced by tribal farmers, including transport, input costs, climatic conditions, land-use patterns and wildlife-related concerns.
- To study the marketing practices and strategies followed by tribal farmers.
- To identify the marketing channels used for selling agricultural products.
- To examine the marketing costs and returns associated with agricultural production.

4. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The literature discussed in the source covers tribal agriculture, livelihood security, access to agricultural information, market participation and development programmes. A common theme across the studies is that tribal farmers often have to deal with weak infrastructure, limited credit and input facilities, inadequate information, uncertain prices and difficulties in reaching markets. Some of the studies also discuss cooperative marketing and the role of institutions in the sale of forest and agricultural products. This background helps place the Marayoor study within the wider discussion of the support available to tribal farming communities. A few references in the source do not contain complete publication details, so only the information available in the original document has been retained.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used an empirical and descriptive research design. Fieldwork was carried out in Marayoor Gram Panchayat, Idukki district, from 5 January to 31 March 2024. Sixty farmers took part in the survey and were selected using convenience sampling. A structured questionnaire was the main source of primary data, while interviews and observation were also used. Secondary information came from articles, journals, newspapers and reports. The data were mainly examined through frequencies, percentages and descriptive interpretation.

Because convenience sampling was used and the sample was limited to 60 respondents in one locality, the results should be interpreted as descriptive findings for the surveyed group. The paper does not claim statistical representativeness or causal relationships.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Respondent profile

The source reports that most respondents were male and that the largest age group was 41–50 years. It also states that most farmers had education below SSLC and that 1.7% had a degree. The gender table lists 49 male respondents (81.7%) and 11 female respondents (18.3%). However, the accompanying narrative contains a conflicting count (50 respondents, including 41 men and 9 women). The table

figures are reproduced here as printed, and this inconsistency should be checked against the original questionnaire or dataset before publication.

6.2 Products and livelihood activities

The farmers surveyed were involved in a fairly wide range of agricultural and related activities. These included vegetables, fruits, livestock, honey, traditional crops and jaggery. The crops mentioned in the study include different spinach varieties, ragi, kodo millet, garlic, maize, coriander, pumpkin, potato, ginger, tomato, French beans, chillies, beetroot, turnip and cauliflower. The findings indicate that farmers were involved in more than one product category in some cases. However, the source does not give a complete and consistently organized table showing the number of respondents for every product.

6.3 Public support and access to finance

Respondents were asked about subsidies and bonuses. In the reported table, 33.3% were neutral about the statement that they were not receiving subsidies or bonuses, 26.7% agreed, and 21.7% strongly agreed; 15.0% disagreed and 3.3% strongly disagreed. Thus, responses were mixed, with a sizeable share expressing agreement or strong agreement that support was not being received. The findings narrative also identifies difficulty obtaining agricultural loans at low interest rates and states that existing loan amounts may be inadequate relative to production costs.

6.4 Production constraints

Several problems were reported on the production side. Water shortage, limited knowledge of agricultural technology, high electricity charges and difficulty obtaining raw materials were among the issues mentioned. The study also refers to climatic conditions, damage caused by wildlife and changes in land-use patterns. These problems can make it harder for farmers to maintain production and control expenses. However, the study did not separately measure the effect of each factor.

6.5 Marketing conditions and information

Farmers also reported problems after production, particularly changing prices, limited market information and inadequate storage. In the market-price responses, 33.3% agreed and 15.0% strongly agreed that price fluctuations affected the prices they received. Another 30.0% were neutral, while 20.0% disagreed and 1.7% strongly disagreed. Thus, price changes were an important concern for many respondents, although the responses were not the same for everyone.

6.6 Marketing channels

The study looked at three broad ways of selling: direct sales, sales through intermediaries and sales through the forest office. Only 21 of the 60 respondents, or 35%, said they sold their products directly. The remaining 39 respondents, or 65%, did not. The findings indicate that sales through the forest office were common among the respondents, while other intermediary or institutional channels were less frequently selected. The weekly market linked with the forest office gives farmers a place to bring their produce and receive payment from buyers. However, the available data are not sufficient to say that this channel always gives farmers a higher net income than the other options.

6.7 Marketing costs and returns

Transport and storage expenses, availability of labour and the balance between income and expenditure were also raised by the respondents. When asked whether the income they earned was lower than their costs, 33.3% were neutral. About 18.3% agreed and 11.7% strongly agreed, while 25.0% disagreed and another 11.7% strongly disagreed. This shows that farmers did not have a uniform experience of profitability. The information available in the source is not detailed enough to calculate average production costs, marketing costs, net returns or profit margins.

7. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- The surveyed group was predominantly male; the source's demographic table reports 81.7% male and 18.3% female, though its narrative has inconsistent counts.
- The largest age group was reported as 41–50 years, and most respondents had education below SSLC.
- Farmers produced a mix of vegetables, fruits, livestock, honey and traditional crops.
- Respondents reported concerns about subsidies, affordable credit and the adequacy of financial support.
- Water scarcity, limited technical knowledge, high electricity charges and input availability were identified as production constraints.
- Price fluctuation, limited market information and insufficient storage were reported as marketing difficulties.
- Only 35% of respondents reported direct selling; 65% did not.
- Transportation and storage costs, labour availability and uncertainty about whether income covers costs were among the reported economic concerns.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Strengthen location-specific agricultural extension services and practical demonstrations on crop management, post-harvest handling and appropriate technologies.
2. Improve farmers' access to affordable and adequate institutional credit, with clear information on eligibility, application procedures and available support.
3. Support reliable access to essential inputs and explore locally appropriate responses to water scarcity and other climate-related production risks.
4. Develop accessible storage and aggregation facilities and improve transport connectivity to reduce avoidable post-harvest losses and marketing expenses.
5. Provide timely and understandable market information on prices, demand and potential buyers through community-level communication channels.
6. Review the operation of existing weekly market arrangements with farmer participation, including transparency of pricing, payment timing and the costs borne by sellers.
7. Encourage collective marketing or producer groups where farmers consider them suitable, while preserving farmers' choice over marketing channels.
8. Conduct follow-up studies with a larger and more representative sample and collect crop-wise records of production costs, sale prices, transport costs and net returns.

9. LIMITATIONS

The study is geographically limited to Marayoor and uses a small convenience sample of 60 respondents. The results depend on information provided by respondents and cover a short data-collection period. Some passages in the source contain internal inconsistencies, including the gender-table narrative, and detailed cost-and-return data are not sufficiently available to calculate financial indicators. The findings therefore should be interpreted cautiously and should not be generalized to all tribal farmers in Kerala.

10. CONCLUSION

The study shows that production and marketing problems are closely connected for the tribal farmers surveyed in Marayoor. Respondents spoke about difficulties in getting inputs and technology, water shortages, financial support, changing prices, market information, storage and transport. Direct selling was reported by 35% of the respondents, while the forest-office market is described in the source as an important place for selling produce. The findings point to the need for practical support in areas such as agricultural extension, credit, storage, transport and market information. A larger study with product-wise records of costs, prices and net returns would give a clearer picture of which marketing channels work better for different products.

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