PROBLEMS IN PRODUCTION AND MARKETING OF COCONUT IN THENI DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

The analysis of problems encountered by the farmers in cultivation of coconut in Theni District of Tamilnadu by using Garrett’s Ranking Technique reveals that ‘incidence of pests and diseases’ is the major problem in coconut cultivation faced by the village farmers with a mean score of 56.36, followed by the second vital problem ‘high cost of input’ faced by the coconut cultivators with a mean score of 54.67. ‘Shortage of tree climbers’ ranked fourth with a mean score of 42.00, followed by ‘lack of scientific knowledge among the cultivators’ ranking the last with the least mean score of 39.92. On other hand, by analysing the problems faced by the coconut farmers in marketing it could be understood that price fluctuation is the major problem with a mean score of 55.09, followed by ‘Lack of Market Information’ is the third important factor with a mean score of 44.37. Usually, coconut is stored in the grower’s own house, which is normally unhygienic. Thus, ‘inadequate storage facility’ is the fourth important problem with a mean score of 41.25. ‘Exploitation by middlemen’ is found to be the least important problem faced by the growers in the study area, with the lowest mean score of 37.17.

KEYWORDS

Coconut Production and Marketing, Problems, Garrett’s Ranking Technique.


INTRODUCTION

Coconut is considered to be the most important and useful tree among the tropical palms. It has been in cultivation in India from time immemorial. Since coconut is a multiproduct crop, small and marginal farmers involved in coconut growing depend solely on the palm for their domestic requirements such as food, fuel and shelter. Among the coconut based industries, coir manufacture, copra making and oil milling are significant and coir products constitute one of the major items of export every year.[¹] Coconut occupies a place of importance in the social and religious functions of the people of India. Coconut contributes over Rs. 7000 crores/year to the Gross Domestic Product of India and it earns foreign exchange to the value of Rs. 292 crores by way of export of coir and coir products. Coconut based farming system provides large quantity of biomass to satisfy the fuel requirements of a small family.[²] As a result of diversification, coconut has become the main agro-based raw material for many industries producing new coconut products such as coconut cream, spray-dried coconut, coconut milk powder, tender coconut water, coconut vinegar, etc. as well as for the manufacture of several handicrafts. In terms of productivity, India ranks number one among the coconut growing countries in the world. The average productivity of coconut in the country is 6,898 nuts per hectare. Among the four major coconut growing states in the country, Tamilnadu has the highest productivity (11,620 nuts/per hectare), followed by Andhra Pradesh (8,296 nuts/per hectare), Kerala (5,893 nuts/per hectare) and Karnataka (5,214 nuts/per hectare) in that order.

Importance of Coconut

Coconut palm is considered as the benevolent and benign tree, which provides food, drink and shelter to mankind. Coconut oil is an important raw material for many industrial products such as toilet soap, liquid soap, natural shampoo and shaving cream. The tender coconut water is a base for many ayurvedic preparations.

Indian coconut products are rated as premium quality products in the World. Its coconut oil sale has a huge potential in the Gulf countries, Europe and America. Activated carbon has been increasing its share in the bio-energy segment and the demand from USA, UK, Germany, France and Japan has been increasing. Processed and packaged tender coconut water has an increasing demand in the Gulf countries. Russia and China are emerging as major markets for coconut oil. Handy crafts, ice cream cups and spoons made of coconut shell are increasingly being exported to European countries and they hold good potential.

Review of Previous Studies

D. Choudhury[³] in his study of “Problems and Prospects of Coconut Cultivation in Assam”, pinpoints the following problems of coconut cultivation in Assam. First, there is lack of awareness of the farmers on recent developments related to crop improvement, crop protection, production and cropping system. Secondly, there is a lack of quality planting materials to the farmers; Thirdly, lack of proper management practices, as coconut is grown in a very uncared condition without applying fertiliser and irrigation. Fourthly, pest problems and diseases caused by fungi and phytoplasma result in different degrees of crop loss.

Srinivasan[⁴] reports that the productivity of the coconut crop is constrained by various stresses. Among them, the root (wilt) disease is the major problem in southern districts of Kerala and Tamil Nadu and also in Goa. Srinivasan also reports that the root (wilt) affected palms are also affected by leaf rot. Incidence of leaf rot increases with increase in the incidence of root disease (wilt).
Srinivasan and Gnanasekharan\(^{[3]}\) have assessed the nature of the leaf rot disease. Leaf rot disease is considered as one of the devastating problems. They have assessed the quantitative pattern of fungal association and species composition of the disease. He also found that the black rat (R. rattus) is an important rodent pest of coconut in most of Lakshadweep Islands. It damages 35-50 percent of the standing crops.

Desai and Others\(^{[6]}\) point out that coconut palm is attacked by 107 pests. Among them, the leaf eating caterpillar is one of the major pests. It infests the coconut palm throughout the year with varying intensities. Under varying conditions, sporadic outbreaks lead to severe damage. A peak infestation occurs during the months of February to May, which may even prolong to June in case of delayed monsoons.

**Need of the Study**

A study of production and marketing practices of coconut farmers in Theni District in Tamil Nadu has thrown light upon the problems of coconut industry in this region. The growing domination of small sized operational and holding, high incidence of senile and unproductive palms, indiscriminate planting of trees, high cost of cultivation, absence of scientific price determining system, constraints in area of marketing and lack of adequate institutional finance for coconut industry are some of the problems that came to light during the study. In this context, an extensive study of production and marketing of coconut palm appeared worthwhile.

**Objectives**

The main objective of this paper is to study the problems encountered by the coconut crowers relating to cultivation and marketing in Theni District.

**Methodology**

Theni district is located at the foot hills of Western Ghats which bifurcate Tamil Nadu form Kerala. Agriculture is a prominent vocation in the district with nearly 51.9% agricultural labourers depending on it. District has tropical climate and the weather is pleasant for the most part of year and receives rain during the South-west and North-east monsoons. Agriculture in the district is taken up enthusiastically by the farmers. In as much as 85,672 hectares of land, food crops are cultivated in the district. Coconut is an important crop that is grown in all parts of the district. The by-products of coconut like coir are used as raw materials for many tiny industries. The coconut is famous in the study area, its credits are cultivation area 12,888 hectares, 1,552 metric tonnes and with productivity of 12,041 kilograms per hectare. Theni District consists of five blocks namely Uthamapalayam, Bodinayakanur, Andipatti, Periyakulam and Theni, selected based on area under coconut cultivation. A sample of 150 coconut growers was selected at the rate of 30 from each block. Thus, the total sample size was 150 consisting of 45 marginal farmers, 60 small farmers, and 45 large farmers. Simple random sampling was used. The present study is based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data were collected from growers, through personal interview method, interview schedule was designed, pre-tested and finalised.

**Tools**

To study the problems in production and marketing of coconut cultivation, Henry Garrett’s Ranking Technique was used.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Most of the farmers in the study area face many problems relating to the cultivation of coconut in their farms. They include incidence of pests and diseases, high cost of input, lack of irrigation, shortage of tree climbers and lack of scientific knowledge.\(^{[7]}\)

1. **Disease and Pests**

Generally, biological organism is influenced by the external factors like heat, air and water; fluctuations in its level of content there is a chance for bacterial load positively or negatively. It affects the growth and productivity of the coconut. It should be treated in time to prevent losses.

2. **Investment**

Money is main blood of any business. For cultivation of coconut, the farmer should invest more or less depending upon the level of farming. The farmers are facing problems in raising funds, labour, water and fertilisers.

3. **Irrigation Facilities**

Due to lack of rain fall, the farmer should have to find source of water namely well, bore or drip irrigation system. It demands heavy investment.

4. **Tree Climbers**

The nut should be collected from the tree when it is ripe. It needs tree climbers, but they were not readily available in the study area.

5. **Scientific Knowledge**

The coconut is a biological plant that can be modified in breed, variety, height, weight, nutrient value, yield and size. The farmers are not aware of those high yielding varieties.

The various problems faced by the farmers in coconut cultivation are analysed and presented in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Problems</th>
<th>Garrett’s Mean Score</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Incidence of pests and diseases</td>
<td>56.36</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>High cost of input</td>
<td>54.67</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Lack of irrigation facilities</td>
<td>47.18</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>短线 of tree climbers</td>
<td>42.00</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Lack of scientific knowledge</td>
<td>39.92</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Primary data*

Farmers are operating in the production centres. The growers can sell their produce on any day and at any time to the village traders. It is evident from table that ‘incidence of pests and diseases’ is the major problem in coconut cultivation, faced by the village farmers with a mean score of 56.36.
When the farmers want to produce more by applying the latest technology, they have to incur high cost of input which ranked as the second vital problem faced by the coconut cultivators with a mean score of 54.67. Many a time, the monsoons fail and lead to reduction in yield due to lack of proper irrigation facilities and this factor ranked third with a mean score of 47.18. ‘Shortage of tree climbers’ ranked fourth with a mean score of 42.00, followed by ‘lack of scientific knowledge among the cultivators’ ranking the last with the least mean score of 39.92.

Problems faced by the Farmers in Marketing Coconut

It is a common phenomenon that many a time the farmers are put to hardships in marketing their produce in the markets where they can get a better price. An attempt has been made to identify the problems faced by the growers in marketing coconut which include Price fluctuation, Absence of a cooperative society, Lack of market information, Inadequate storage facility and Exploitation by middlemen.[8]

1. Price Fluctuation

Price is fixed based on the demand and supply which are not in linear always. Production is varied from season to season and also based on the method of cultivation and so as the case of demand. Trend of price in the market is unpredictable. The farmers found price fluctuation as one of the problems encountered.

2. Cooperative Society

The importance of a cooperative society is realised in our society for long time. The cooperation in this society leads to unsupportive situation to the coconut farmers. It is also a problem identified by the farmers.

3. Market Information

The farmers are not accessed to market, so they are not able to find the trend in the market to sell their produce. The coconut farmers are also similar.[9]

4. Storage Facility

Agriculture produce could not be stored in its normal condition for a long time due to its perishable nature. The farmers do not have sufficient storage facilities to wait and sell for a reasonable price or to sell during price hikes due to heavy demand.

5. Middlemen

Produce is always not consumed by the consumers directly as all products are not available in all places. To make it available in all places, middlemen are needed. But more number of middlemen leads to higher prices of product.

The identified problems of growers in the marketing of coconut are ranked by making use of Garrett’s Ranking Technique and the details are presented in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Garrett’s Mean Score</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Price fluctuation</td>
<td>55.09</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Absence of Cooperative society</td>
<td>48.35</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Lack of Market Information</td>
<td>44.37</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Inadequate Storage Facility</td>
<td>41.25</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Exploitation by Middlemen</td>
<td>37.17</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Problems Faced by the Producers in Marketing Coconut

Source: Primary data

It could be observed from Table 2 that price fluctuation is the major problem faced by the growers with a mean score of 55.09. Growers could not get the right price for their produce in the assembling market, which is far away from the production centres. They have to incur more transportation cost and spend more time. Therefore, they feel that they cannot enjoy price benefits in other markets. There is absence of cooperative societies in the study area also. Hence, ‘absence of a cooperative society’ is the second important problem with a mean score of 48.35. ‘Lack of Marketing Information’ is the third important factor with a mean score of 44.37. Usually, coconut is stored in the grower’s own house, which is normally unhygienic. This results in deterioration in quality and weight loss and thus they do not fetch a reasonable price. Thus, ‘inadequate storage facility’ is the fourth important problem with a mean score of 41.25. ‘Exploitation by middlemen’ is found to be the least important problem faced by the growers in the study area with the lowest mean score of 37.17.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of problems in cultivation of coconut reveals that ‘incidence of pests and diseases’ is the major problem in coconut cultivation faced by the village farmers with a mean score of 56.36, followed by the second vital problem ‘high cost of input’ faced by the coconut cultivators with a mean score of 54.67. Many a time, the monsoons fail and lead to reduction in yield due to lack of proper irrigation facilities and this factor ranked third with a mean score of 47.18. ‘Shortage of tree climbers’ ranked fourth with a mean score of 42.00, followed by ‘lack of scientific knowledge among the cultivators’ ranking the last with the least mean score of 39.92. By analysing the problems encountered by the coconut farmers, it could be understood that price fluctuation is the major problem with a mean score of 55.09, followed by ‘absence of cooperative society’ is the second important problem with a mean score of 48.35. ‘Lack of market information’ is the third important factor with a mean score of 44.37. Usually, coconut is stored in the grower’s own house, which is normally unhygienic. Thus, ‘inadequate storage facility’ is the fourth important problem with a mean score of 41.25. ‘Exploitation by middlemen’ is found to be the least important problem faced by the growers in the study area, with the lowest mean score of 37.17.

REFERENCES


