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Perception of farming problems and demographics: A study of pomegranate growers in Kullu district of Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract

Farming is beset with many problems and it was hypothesised that higher knowledge and capabilities on part of the farmers by way of education and experience would enable them cope with the challenges/problems in a better way. A sample of 60 pomegranate farmers from Bhunter Tehsil was studied for this exploratory study. Primary data was collected by way of structured questionnaires with questions that related to perception of problems faced by the farmers and demographic data of the farmers. Spearman's correlation analysis was used to test the hypothesis about the relationship between education and age of farmers on one hand and perception of problems on the other hand. It was found that farmers with higher education perceived marketing problems to be less severe and farmers in higher age group saw labour and marketing problem to be less daunting. In this context the study suggests methods for enabling farmers.

Keywords: Farmer problems, age, education

1. Introduction

Any and every venture is prone to challenges. Agriculture throws up myriad challenges which are seen as problems by the farmers. Some of the problems as related to the perishability of agricultural produce and limited scope for differentiation in case of agricultural commodities, which arise from the nature of the agricultural produce. Some others problems like limited bargaining power of farmers arise from the small size of the farms. We can see that a problem faced by a farmer may have multiple causes for example low bargaining power of the farmer can be attributed to both the commoditised nature of agriculture produce and the fragmented landholding in India which results in a farmer being unable to influence the supply side. These challenges are pronounced in pomegranate as it is delicate fruit which needs extra care both in rearing and in marketing, thus this fruit was chosen for this study.

Yet, challenges have been overcome by people and in our case by farmers since time immemorial. It is overcoming of a challenge that marks progress. Education and experience are said to be harbingers of higher competencies and thus it was hypothesised that farmers with higher education or more experience would be able to overcome challenges and problems more effectively.

Thus, the following 2 overarching null hypothesis were formulated:

H_{01} : There is no variation in the perception of farming related problems with education of the farmer.

H_{02} : There is no variation in the perception of farming related problems with age of the farmer.

While formulating the null hypothesis H_{01} , it was assumed that farmers with higher education may not see as many problems as they may either know the solutions or may have overcome the problem in advance due to superior knowledge base.

For null hypothesis H_{02} , it was assumed that age is a proxy variable for experience based knowledge and that people with more age would have more experience and hence knowledge to overcome farming related problems. This would make them perceive fewer farming related challenges.

2. Methodology

Kullu district was selected purposively as it is a prominent pomegranate producing district of Himachal Pradesh. Of this district, Bhunter tehsil is known for its premium quality of pomegranate was the focus of the study. For this study, 10 villages from Bhunter tehsil which grow pomegranate were the population of the study of these five villages were randomly selected. A sample of 12 farmers from each village was selected conveniently, thus forming a

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sample size of 60 farmers from the study area. This was considered adequate as the study was primarily exploratory in nature.

The data were collected by survey method with the help of specially designed questionnaire. The questionnaire focused on key themes i.e. demographic variables and the perception of the problems faced by farmers. Data were summarized by using simple frequency and percentages to obtain meaningful results. Spearman's rank correlation and cross tables were used as inferential tools to study the relationship between age and education on one hand and the perception regarding the extent to which different problems are faced by farmers on the other hand. Spearman's rank correlation was used to analyse the data as the variables used likert type scale which is a ranking variable.

The formula used to work out rank correlation was

$$R = 1 - \frac{6 \sum D^2}{N(N^2 - 1)}$$

Where, R=Rank coefficient of correlation.

D^2 = Squares of the rank differences between two series
 N = Number of observations.

The Spearman's correlation coefficient can have values in the range of +1 to -1. The positive or negative sign of the Spearman's correlation shows the direction of the relationship between the two variables. If the Spearman's correlation coefficient is positive then both the variable change in the same direction, i.e. if one variable increases so does the other and vice-versa. If the Spearman's correlation coefficient is negative, then it indicates that if one variable increases the other variable will decrease and vice-versa. When the Spearman correlation is zero it points out that there is no relationship in the variations of the two variables being studied.

3. Result and Discussion

Table 1: Problems Faced

Particulars	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	
Labour	11.7	48.4	23.4	0.6	0	100
Grading	6.7	13.4	60	20	0	100
Packing	5	23.3	50	18.3	3.4	100
Storage	6.7	11.7	56.6	23.3	1.7	100
Transportation	5	30	55	8.3	1.7	100
Marketing	51.7	36.7	6.7	5	0	100
Mal practices	5	25	66.7	3.4	0	100

The table 1 is about the problems faced by pomegranate farmers. It is seen that 51.7 percent strongly agree and 36.7 percent agree that marketing is a problem, making it the most important problem. Further, it is seen that 48.4 percent and 30 percent farmers respectively agree that labour and

transportation are problems, making them second and third most important problems faced by the farmers of pomegranate. It can be thus, concluded that major problems faced by farmers are marketing, labour and transportation.

Table 2: Education Qualification and Perception of Problems

	Educational Qualification	Labour	Grading	Packing	Transportation	Marketing	Mal practices	Storage
Correlation Coefficient (Spearman's rho)	1	-0.048	0.041	-0.033	.105	-.475**	-.053	.027
Sig. (2-tailed)	.	0.716	0.755	0.801	.423	.000	.689	.836
N	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60

In the above table displays Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation which assumes educational qualification was independent variable and others as dependent variables i.e. perception of problems related to Labour, Grading, Packing, Transportation, Marketing, Malpractices and Storage. The 2-tailed significance for the rank correlation between educational qualification and perception of marketing problems is seen to be 0.000, which indicates that there is a correlation between education and perception of marketing problem. For perception of all the other problems the 2-tailed significance is greater than 0.05 which indicates that the null

hypotheses (H_{01}) holds for perception of all the problems, i.e. there is no the correlation between education and perception of problems, except for perception marketing problems. The correlation coefficient rho between education and perception of marketing problem was -0.475, where the negative sign indicates that the perception of marketing problems decreases with increase in educational qualification, which is perhaps due to the reason that more educated farmers are able to resolve marketing problems and hence don't see marketing as much of a problem.

Table 3: Educational Qualification and Perception of Marketing Problem

	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
Educational Qualification	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
High School	0	0	33.33	66.67	100
Sr. Secondary	0	0	31.81	68.18	100
Graduation	0	15.78	52.63	31.56	100
Post Graduation	75	25	0	0	100
Total	5	6.6	36.66	51.66	100

The above table confirms that people with lower educational level i.e. higher and secondary school (66.67 percent and 68.18 percent respectively) strongly agreed to facing marketing problems. Whereas graduates tended to agree that they face marketing problems (52.63 percent). This is probably because graduates perceive lesser problems, though

they do perceive marketing problems. This is corroborated by post graduate farmers who disagreed (75 percent) that they face marketing problems, perhaps due to their ability to resolve marketing problems due to the knowledge gained formally.

Table 4: Age and Perception of Problems

	Age	Labour	Grading	Packing	Transportation	Marketing	Market Malpractices	Storage
Correlation Coefficient Spearman's rho	1.000	-.433**	-.043	.033	-.192	-.470**	-.116	-.085
Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.001	.743	.803	.071	.000	.189	.260
N	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60

The above table presents the results of Spearman's Rank-Order correlation where age was independent variable and perception of problems related to labour, grading, packing, transportation, marketing, market malpractices and storage were considered as dependent variables. From the table above rank correlations is significant for relationship between (a) age and perception of labour problems and (b) age and perception of marketing problems, i.e. null hypothesis (H_{02})

does not hold in these cases, but it holds in the relationships between age on one hand and perception of problems related to grading, packing, transportation, marketing, market malpractices and storage. Spearman correlation coefficients were negative in both cases, which imply that perception of labour problems and marketing problems tends to decrease when age of the farmer increases.

Table 5: Age and Perception of Labour Problem

Age	Disagree Percent	Neither agree nor disagree Percent	Agree Percent	Strongly agree Percent	Total Percent
20-30 Years	0	0	70	30	100
31-40 Years	6.90	34.48	48.27	10.34	100
41-50 Years	38.09	19.04	38.09	4.76	100
Total	16.66	23.33	48.33	11.66	100

The above table confirms that all age groups perceive labour related problems but people in younger age i.e. 20-30 years mostly agreed (70%) to facing labour problems. Whereas farmers in the age group 31-40 years tended to agree (48.27%) that they face labour problems which are less in comparison to younger farmers. The more interesting result in

table 5 is that a large proportion (38.09%) of farmers aged 41-50 years disagreed with the prospect of facing labour problems. This is probably due to the fact that with the age farmers get experienced, which makes them more knowledgeable and capable to manage labour related problems.

Table 6: Age and Perception of Marketing Problem

Age	Disagree Percent	Neither agree nor disagree Percent	Agree Percent	Strongly agree Percent	Total Percent
20-30 Years	0	0	20	80	100
31-40 Years	0	3.44	34.48	62.08	100
41-50 Years	14.28	14.28	47.61	23.80	100
Total	5	6.66	36.67	51.67	100

The above table shows that younger farmers in the age group of 20-30 years and 31-40 years farmers (80% and 62.08% respectively) strongly agreed with facing marketing problems. Whereas older farmers in the age of 41-50 years tended to agree that they faced marketing problems (47.61%). This difference in perception in intensity of marketing problems is probably because the older farmers face lesser problems as compared to younger farmers. The possible reason for this is that more experienced farmers have better experience and hence knowledge of tackling marketing related problems.

4. Conclusions

The results of the study on the perceptions of the problems faced by pomegranate farmers in Bhunter indicate that:

- Marketing is seen as the most important problem by the farmers. The farmers see labour and transportation related problems as second most problems which are of nearly equal import.
- Perceived gravity of marketing problems tends to decrease as educational qualification of the farmers

increases. Perhaps this is due to the better knowledge and self confidence of better educated farmers, which helps them overcome these problems.

- Farmers who are older perceive labour and marketing problems to have a lesser gravity as compared to younger farmers. This may be attributed to the better knowledge and capabilities of the more experienced farmers, who are possibly able to resolve marketing and labour related issues at an incipient stage.

As knowledge and experience seem to help farmers address problems related to marketing and labour, the policy implications of the study are that subjects of agriculture marketing and general management need to be introduced as vocational courses at Sr. Secondary level. For all farmers in general and for those farmers who are below the age of 40 in particular strong network of marketing extension is very much necessary to enable farmers to manage various aspect of marketing. Experience sharing sessions at the panchayat level where experienced farmers act as resource persons would also

equip the younger farmers with knowledge required to overcome marketing and labour related challenges.

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