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A STUDY ON SOCIO – ECONOMIC STATUS OF INTEGRATED FARMERS IN NORTH WESTERN ZONE OF TAMILNADU STATE

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ABSTRACT

Agriculture is considered as a crucial enterprise for the livelihood and nutritional security of the marginal and small farmers of the country. In this scenario with the limited possibilities of increasing the cultivable land Integrated Farming System plays an imperial role to provide sustainable income for the marginal and small farmers. In this context, knowledge about the socio economic status of the integrated farmers is very much essential for the policy makers to develop an effective programme. The present study was carried out in the North Western Zone of Tamilnadu with the specific objective of finding out the socio economic profile of the integrated farmers. A total of one sixty (160) farmers were randomly selected from four districts of the selected zone of Tamilnadu. The data was collected from selected farmers through a structured interview schedule after pre -testing. The findings of the study revealed most of the farmers (47.5 per cent) were old aged and were illiterates (30 per cent). Cent per cent of them were practicing agriculture as main occupation and 71.87 per cent of them were having medium farming experience. More than half (61.25 per cent) of the farmers were marginal and getting medium level of income (52.5 per cent). Majority (40.6 per cent) of the farmers had medium level of mass media exposure and extension agency contact. The study concludes that the farmers need more extension training regarding Integrated Farming System (IFS) to enrich their knowledge level and to improve their standard of living.

KEYWORDS

Integrated Farming System, socio-economic status, North Western Zone of Tamilnadu.

INTRODUCTION

The population of India is increasing leaps and bounds, demanding more production of food from limited cultivable land and other resources. In this regard agriculture sector plays an imperative role with the contribution of 18 % of the total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) along with more than 60 % population dependence (National policy for farmers, 2007 and Golait, 2007; Hiremath, 2007). The sector is being dominated by marginal and small farmers, having small landholdings of less than 2 hec for cultivation (7th Agricultural Census, 2002). In India, the livestock production is intrinsically linked with agriculture and each one is being dependent on the other and both are crucial for the overall food security of the people (Rao et al., 2003; Birthal and Ali, 2005; Ravikumar and Chander 2006, Singh et al., 2007). The sector contributes 22.14% % to the agriculture and GDP 3.93% (Rs. 2,41,177 crore) of the India's total G.D.P (National Accounts Statistics, 2011). In recent years, land based livelihoods of marginal and small farmers are increasingly becoming unsustainable, since their land has not been able to support the family's food requirements and fodder for their cattle. As a result, rural households are forced to look at an alternative means for supplementing their livelihoods (Vision 2030, 2011). This large proportion of the smallholders is in the unfavorable production environment (Pal et al., 2005) and they are in pressure to move to non-farm activities or better farming activities to augment their income (NCAER, 2009). Since, there are limited possibilities of increasing additional area under cultivation, it is of immense importance to produce more for ever-increasing population as well as to ensure the efficient use of feed resources including the crop residues. It is not possible with the present conventional agriculture system, which is subjected to a high degree of uncertainty of income and employment to the farmers. Hence, it is imperative to evolve a suitable strategy for augmenting the income of the farmer's especially for marginal and small farmers. In this context, the Integrated Farming System (IFS) is considered to be the most powerful tool for enhancing the profitability of the farming systems of marginal and small farmers (Anonymous, 2005; Thamizoli et al., 2006).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present investigation was purposively carried out in North Western Zone of Tamilnadu. To assess the real socio economic status of the integrated farmers in the North Western Zone all the four districts namely Salem, Dharmapuri, Krishnagiri and Namakkal were selected to conduct the present study. From each one of the selected district two blocks were randomly selected and thus a total of 8 blocks forms the study area. Two villages each from the selected blocks and then it comprises a total of 16 villages were randomly selected for the present investigation. The independent variables were selected by using a five point continuum scale from 30 extension specialists from various parts of the country. A sample of one sixty i.e. 40 respondents from each district were selected as sample for the study. A structured interview schedule was prepared and put for pretesting other than the study area. According to the results of pre testing the necessary corrections were made to finalize the interview schedule. The data was collected from the selected farmers through personal interview method by using the interview schedule. The collected data was subjected to the conventional analysis by using the necessary statistical methods. (Snedecor and Cochran 1996). The categorization of the variables was done by using mean and standard deviation and then the respondents were classified accordingly.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

AGE

Table 1 explains about the various age of the respondents. Majority of the farmers (47.5 per cent) were old aged followed by 34.37 per cent of them were middle age group and the remaining 18.2 per cent of them were young age group. These findings are contrast to the results of Bhalerao et al. (2010) who found that the livestock based farming system in Konkan has been taken up mainly by middle age farmers. Similarly, Mahadik et al. (2010) observed that majority of the farmers (68 per cent) of rice and backyard poultry farming were middle aged. This explains that the farmers have been practising the farming activities traditionally and this might be the reason for more number of old age respondents.

EDUCATION

The findings made in the study indicate that 30.00 per cent of the respondents were illiterates, 7.5 per cent of them can read and 16.8 per cent of them were able to read and write. Almost equally i.e. 13.7 per cent of the respondents were completed primary school and 15 per cent of them were high school level educated. Further, 8.12 and 5 per cent of them were in secondary and higher secondary levels respectively. A very meager i.e. only 3.75 per cent of the respondents were graduates in the study. These results are similar with the findings of Bhalerao et al. (2010) who reported that the IFS farmers were possessing high school level of education. Likewise, Prasad et al. (2011) reported that the integrated farmers from Sahibganj and Pakur districts of Jharkhand were having

low level of education. In contrast to these findings, Mahadik et al. (2010) observed that majority of the integrated farmers (36.8 per cent) were educated up to secondary level.

GENDER

It could be observed from the table 1 that majority of the respondents i.e. more than three fourth of the respondents (88.75 per cent) were male and only 11.25 per cent of them were females. The findings of the study indicate that male has taken up the farming activities traditionally.

OCCUPATION

PRIMARY OCCUPATION

From the table 1 it is observed that all the respondents were practising agriculture as main occupation. It was because of the reason that, the farmers with agriculture were basically selected as respondents for the study.

SECONDARY OCCUPATION

Table 1 indicates that most of the farmers (88.75 per cent) were doing livestock farming as their secondary occupation and 7.5 per cent of them were practising vermicomposting. A very meagre each 0.62 per cent of them were having horticulture and agro-forestry and only 1.8 per cent of them were agricultural labourer. The study is basically on integrated farming systems and the respondents were selected based on the land and livestock possession hence, the majority of the respondents were practising livestock farming as secondary occupation. In IFS livestock component can easily integrated with the agriculture and this might be the reason for possessing livestock as their secondary income source by more number of respondents. The observations in this study by the researcher is in line with Vision 2030 (2011a) among the various components of farming systems milch animals (cows and buffaloes), irrespective of breed and productivity, is the first choice of the farmers as an integral part of their farming system.

FARMING EXPERIENCE

Table 1 reveals the level of farming experience of the respondents. Nearly three fourth (71.87 per cent) of the respondents were possessing medium level of farming experience and more or less equal i.e. 15 per cent and 13.12 per cent of them had low level and high level of farming experience respectively. Traditionality of the farmers might be the reason for having more number of farmers in medium level of experience. These findings are in line with the results of Bhalerao et al. (2010) found that the respondents in their study were possessing medium level of farming experience.

OPERATIONAL LAND HOLDING

In the present investigation the respondents were classified (according to Government of Tamilnadu classification) based on the operational land possessed by them. It is clearly seen from the Table 1, that majority (61.25 per cent) of the respondents was marginal farmers, followed by small (38.75 per cent) farmers. It reflects the nature of study since IFS is suitable to the small and marginal farmers. Moreover in this study the IFS farmers were selected and this might be the reason for having only small and marginal farmers. In concordance with these findings Nageswaran et al. (2009) reported that majority of the IFS following farmers (47.3 %) were marginal farmers (with land holdings below 2.5 acres) and 29.4 per cent of them were small farmers (with land holdings between 2.5 to 5.0 acres). Similarly, Prasad et al. (2011) reported that majority of the integrated farmers from Sahibganj and Pakur districts of Jharkhand were belonged to small and marginal farmers. According to Thamizoli et al. (2006) IFS is considered to be the most powerful tool for enhancing the profitability of the farming systems of small and marginal farmers. In contrast to these results Hendrickson et al. (2008) reported that the IFS is more favored to medium farmers.

TABLE 1: PROFILE FARMERS PRACTICING IFS (N=160)

Sl.No.	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
1	Age		
	Young (Up to 33 years)	29	18.12
	Middle (34-43 years)	55	34.37
	Old (> 43 years)	76	47.5
	Mean \pm SD: 43.36 \pm 10.79		
2	Education		
	Illiterate	48	30
	Can read only	12	7.5
	Can read and write	27	16.8
	Primary	22	13.7
	High school	24	15
	Secondary	13	8.12
	Higher secondary	8	5
Graduate and above	6	3.75	
3	Gender		
	Male	142	88.75
	Female	18	11.25
4	Occupation		
	Primary occupation		
	Agriculture	160	100
	Others	0	
	Secondary occupation		
	Livestock farming	142	88.75
	Vermicomposting	12	7.5
	Horticulture	1	0.62
	Agro-forestry	2	0.62
	Agricultural laborer	3	1.8
5	Farming experience		
	Low (up to 11 years)	24	15
	Medium (11-25 years)	115	71.87
	High (>25 years)	21	13.12
	Mean \pm SD: 18.08 \pm 7.14		
6	Operational land holding		
	Landless	0	
	Marginal	98	61.25
	Small	62	38.75
	Semi-medium	-	
	Medium	-	
Large	-		
7	Land use pattern		
	Cultivation	12	7.5
	Grazing	5	3.12
	Both cultivation & grazing	143	89.37
	Others	-	

Source: The data are original on the basis of a survey work conducted by the investigator.

LAND USE PATTERN

It could be observed from the table 1, 7.5 per cent of the respondents were using their lands for cultivation purpose only whereas a meager 3.12 per cent of them were using it only for grazing animals. But, more than three-fourth (89.37 per cent) of the respondents were using their lands both for cultivation and grazing purpose. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAOSTAT, 2011) defines agricultural land as the sum of arable land, permanent crops, permanent meadows. The findings of the study is in accordance to this definition i.e. the land in IFS can be used both for grazing and cultivation purposes.

CROPPING PATTERN

The cropping pattern in the selected districts is presented in the table below. It could be observed from the table that all the crops namely paddy, tapioca, groundnut, sorghum, sugarcane and cotton are being cultivated in almost all the districts because these selected districts are from the same zone. This might be the reason for such kind of commonness. Only the month of cultivation varies depends on the availability of water facilities. Further, the area under cultivation depends on the water availability, labor availability and the convenience of the farmer. Apart from these crops, the farmers were cultivating cereal and pulses, vegetables and fruits based on the water availability and need. Besides farmers were cultivating pulses as intercrops.

TABLE 2: CROPPING PATTERN IN THE SELECTED DISTRICTS

Sl. No.	District	Crops cultivated	Month of cultivation
1.	Dharmapuri	Tapioca Groundnut Pulses / Gingelly Cotton Fodder Sorghum	January - December June - September February -May August - February June - September January – April
2.	Salem	Turmeric Tapioca Cotton Pulses/groundnut Sugarcane Paddy Sorghum Groundnut	June - March November - October August - January Feb- Apr& Jun- Sept Dec - November December - March January – March April &September
3.	Krishnagiri	Paddy Ragi Sugarcane Groundnut	December - March July -Oct January - Dec July – Oct & December - Mar
4.	Namakkal	Tapioca Groundnut & pulses Gingelly Cotton Paddy Sugarcane Sorghum	January- December June - September October - January August - January September - January Nov - October January - April

Source: The data are original on the basis of a survey work conducted by the investigator.

LIVESTOCK POSSESSION

It is clearly seen from the table 3, 20 per cent of the farmers were possessing cattle alone and 4.37 per cent of them having buffaloes. 15 per cent and 1.25 per cent and 5.62 per cent of the respondents were having goat, sheep and poultry respectively. Whereas, the majority (53.75 per cent) of the respondents were having the combination of above said animals. The results indicate the nature of integration of animals along with agriculture. The reason for possessing dairy by more number of respondents might be of getting more income. These findings are in line with Vision 2030 (2011a). Moreover, goats plays major role in enhancing income source of the farmers due to the demand of goat meat (chevon) and these findings are correlated with the results of Prabu et al.(2011) who stated that the goat enterprise was observed to be a profitable income generating avenue in Tamilnadu. Further, among the combination of the animal's majority of the farmers were possessing dairy and goat as main enterprises.

TABLE 3: DISTRIBUTION OF THE RESPONDENTS ACCORDING TO LIVESTOCK POSSESSION AND ANNUAL INCOME (N=160)

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Livestock possession	Cattle	32	20
	Buffalo	7	4.37
	Goat	24	15
	Sheep	2	1.25
	Poultry	9	5.62
	Mixed	86	53.75
	Others	-	-
Annual income	Low	17	10.62
	Medium	84	52.51
	High	59	36.87

Source: The data are original on the basis of a survey work conducted by the investigator.

Note: The classification of low, medium, high were done by using mean \pm deviation.

ANNUAL INCOME

It is seen from the table 3 that majority of the farmers getting low and medium income with the existing farming system. The observations revealed that majority (52.5 per cent) of the respondents belong to medium income group (around Rs. 1lakh) followed by low (10.62 per cent) income group (about 70 thousands) and high (36.87 per cent) of more than 1lakh rupees income group. The reason for maximum of medium and low income is poor knowledge about the farming system models and lower adoptability of improved technologies. The findings of the study is in accordance with the observations of Mahadik et al. (2010) who observed that majority of the farmers (68 per cent) of rice and backyard poultry farming were earning medium level of income.

MASS MEDIA EXPOSURE

According to mean and standard deviation majority of integrated farmers had good exposure to the mass media channels. Table 4 explains that nearly half of the respondents (40.62 per cent and 37.5 per cent) were exposed to medium and high level of mass media channels respectively. Even then 21.8 per cent of the farmers remained in low level of mass media contact. Further among many mass media channels radio plays significant role i.e. 80.6 per cent of them were using it for getting information in different frequencies. Television comes next to radio as main mass media source i.e. 76.25 per cent of them were using it.

Nearly half of the respondents (48.12 per cent) were using newspaper as main mass media source and each 21.87 per cent of them using field tour and exhibition for getting the needed information. 27.5 per cent of the farmers were using meeting as a mass media channel at various frequencies. A meager 5 per cent of them only using internet as a mass media source. In all the categories a considerable amount of the respondents were in never use of any mass media channels for their information source (Table 4). These results are in line with the reports of Mahadik et al. (2010) who stated that the integrated farmers were having good mass media exposure.

TABLE 4: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS ACCORDING TO MASS MEDIA EXPOSURE (MME)

MME	Frequency of use			Total	Never use
	Regular	Occasional	Rare		
Radio	19 (11.87)	67 (41.87)	43 (26.87)	129 (80.6)	31 (19.37)
T.V.	29 (18.12)	50 (31.25)	43 (26.87)	122 (76.25)	38 (23.75)
Newspaper	2 (1.25)	24 (15.0)	51 (31.87)	77 (48.12)	83 (51.87)
Internet	1 (0.63)	3 (1.87)	4 (2.50)	8 (5)	152 (95.0)
Field tour	4 (2.50)	9 (5.63)	22 (13.75)	35 (21.87)	125 (78.13)
Exhibition	3 (1.87)	12 (7.50)	20 (12.50)	35 (21.87)	125 (78.13)
Meeting	2 (1.25)	10 (6.25)	32 (20.0)	44 (27.5)	116 (72.5)
Other	0	0	0	0	160 (100.0)
Level of MME		Frequency		Percentage	
Low (up to 1.17)		35		21.87	
Medium (1.18 to 4.6)		65		40.62	
High (more than 4.6)		60		37.5	

Note: The classification of low, medium, high were done by using mean ± standard deviation (Mean ± S.D: 4.65 ± 3.48)

Source: The data are original on the basis of a survey work conducted by the investigator.

Figures in the parenthesis indicate percentage.

EXTENSION AGENCY CONTACT

As per the mean and standard deviation majority of integrated farmers had good contact with extension agencies. Table 5 reveals the level of extension agency contact by the respondents and it is found to be medium (41.25 per cent) and high level (36.75 per cent). It is clearly evident from the table 5, that among all extension agencies friends and relatives (82.5 per cent) and progressive farmers (77.5 per cent) followed by veterinarians (56.25 per cent) and livestock inspector (49.37 per cent) were found to be the prime source of information. However, very less i.e. 26.25 per cent and 13.75 per cent of the respondents were using Non Government Officials (NGOs) and Panchayat Union Office (PUO) as main extension agencies. It may be due to the fact, that there are hardly any NGOs and PUO working for the IFS development in the study area. In all the type of extension agencies a considerable amount of the respondents were in never use of any mass media channels for their information source (Table 5). These results are in line with the reports of Mahadik et al. (2010) who stated that the integrated farmers were having good level of extension agency contact. Similarly Jini (2008) in his study on tribal farmers revealed that the main source of extension contacts were gram sewak, KVK personnel and agriculture extension officers. Roy (2009) revealed that still today major source of communication for tribal farmers are localite channels.

TABLE 5: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS ACCORDING TO CONTACT WITH EXTENSION AGENCY (N=160)

CEA	Frequency of contact					Total	Never use
	Daily	Weekly	Fortnightly	Monthly	More than a month		
VAS	0 (0.00)	12 (7.5)	23 (14.37)	22 (13.75)	33 (20.62)	90 (56.25)	70 (43.75)
LI	0 (0.00)	20 (12.5)	26 (16.25)	30 (18.75)	23 (14.37)	79 (49.37)	61 (38.12)
Progressive farmers	0 (0.00)	15 (9.37)	19 (11.87)	46 (28.75)	44 (27.5)	124 (77.5)	36 (22.5)
Friends & relatives	0 (0.00)	23 (14.37)	14 (8.75)	52 (32.5)	43 (26.87)	132 (82.5)	28 (17.5)
Non Government Officials	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	10 (6.25)	17 (10.62)	15 (9.37)	42 (26.25)	118 (73.75)
Panchayat Union Office	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	4 (2.5)	7 (4.37)	11 (6.87)	22 (13.75)	138 (86.25)
Others	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	160 (100)
Level of CEA		Frequency			Percentage		
Low (up to 3.13)		32			20		
Medium (3.14 to 6.78)		66			41.25		
High (more than 6.78)		62			38.75		

Note: The classification of low, medium, high were done by using mean ± standard deviation (Mean ± S.D: 6.78 ± 3.65)

Source: The data are original on the basis of a survey work conducted by the investigator.

Figures in the parenthesis indicate percentage.

SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

From the table 6 it could be seen that the considerable amount of participation in the co-operatives (30 per cent) may be due to successful co-operative movement in milk and agriculture sector. About 19.37 per cent of the integrated farmers were participated in village panchayath whereas 19.7 per cent of them were participated in farmers groups in the study area. Representation of integrated farmers in farmers association, panchayat union was remained low. None of them were participated in market association. In all the categories majority of the respondents were not participating. This clearly explains about their poor participation in social organizations and this might be due to unavailability of time, work load in farming activities etc.

TABLE 6: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS ACCORDING TO SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

Social participation	Office bearer in present	Member in present	Office bearer in past	Member in past	Total	No participation
Village panchayat	6 (3.75)	11 (6.87)	8 (5.0)	6 (3.75)	31 (19.37)	129 (80.62)
Panchayat union	0 (0.00)	5 (3.12)	0 (0.00)	3 (1.87)	8 (5.0)	152 (95)
Cooperative society	5 (3.12)	15 (9.37)	13 (8.12)	15 (9.37)	48 (30)	112 (70)
Farmers groups	6 (3.75)	11(6.87)	8 (5.0)	6 (3.75)	31(19.37)	129 (80.62)
Farmers association	0 (0.00)	3 (1.87)	0 (0.00)	3 (1.87)	6 (3.75)	154 (96.25)
Market association	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	160 (100)
Others	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)
Level of Social participation		Frequency			Percentage	
Low (up to 0.87)		85			53.12	
Medium (0.88 to 1.83)		16			10	
High (more than 1.83)		59			36.87	

Note: The classification of low, medium, high were done by using mean \pm standard deviation (**Mean \pm S.D: 1.83 \pm 2.67**)

Source: The data are original on the basis of a survey work conducted by the investigator.

Figures in the parenthesis indicate percentage.

CONCLUSION

The findings shows that majority of the respondents were old aged, illiterates, medium farming experience and marginal farmers category. Majority of the respondents were having medium level of extension agency contact and mass media exposure. Hence, the policy makers and extension agencies should focus on the integrated farmers by planning viable development programmes at the block and village level.

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