



ATTRACTING AND RETAINING YOUTH IN FARMING

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ABSTRACT

There appears a general consensus that agricultural sector in India requires to be revitalized to enable it to respond effectively to the multitude of challenges that it now faces, and include assuring food security and environmental sustainability against the background of declining natural resources, hanging climate and needs to become increasingly competitive. As Rural youth constitute a numerically dominant, potentially resourceful and also adventurous segment of the population, similarly the urban youth are mostly educated and organized in many forms and have access to facilities and institutions meant for youth services, it is the need of the hour to orient themselves to go along the mainstream of the development process of the country. It is well clear that, to engage this youth resources in farming, it must be intellectually satisfying and economically rewarding so as to enable youth to involve in agriculture. Priority entrepreneurship is another way of helping youth since 20% of unemployed youth have the potential to become entrepreneurs despite the potential hitherto not exploited from more than 5% of them. The factors like Vagaries of monsoons aggravated by failure to conserve the received rainfall, scarcity and high cost of labourers, un remunerative income are responsible for migration of the farm youth. Strategies like Exposing the rural children towards their basic livelihood agriculture, Assurance of sustained income, Insurance against risk, Guidance and support during natural calamities, Modernization of technologies, and also gender equity are to be adopted to make the farm youth to stay back in villages and pursue farming as a profitable profession. It will definitely pave the way to shape the lives of the farm youth to be socially responsible, professionally sharp and nationally proud and ultimately change the agricultural scenario in the progressive and desirable way.

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INTRODUCTION

Agriculture can be sustainable when it is not only produces a lot of high-quality food, but also generates income for poor people. That means rural development, improving transport development of market facilities and linkages, improving information participation of the rural poor in decision making, providing access to credit and so on. Though Indian agriculture has made significant strides in the course of the last 50 years of planned development. But, still the farmers today are facing the consequences of host of challenges, namely dependence of monsoon, declining size of land holdings, degradation of soil & water resources, declining investment of public sectors on agriculture. So farmers are increasingly getting indebted and temptation to sell their farm land for non-farm purposes is growing. Over 45 per cent of farmers want to quit farming says a survey conducted by National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO).

Indian agriculture will receive a big boost if the country takes advantage of its young population and persuade them into the farm sector by making it lucrative. Because India has a big advantage as more than half of its population is below 30 years of age. "If we tap this huge demographic dividend by making agriculture exciting for the younger generation a far better result can be achieved," said renowned scientist M.S. Swaminathan.

Agricultural land is still a great source of income. But the practice of unsustainable methods and improper resource management leading to successive crop failures that make agriculture non-profitable and highly risky. So, the interest of youth in agriculture has been declining. While most developing countries are still experiencing high population growth rates, the youth are migrating in significant numbers to urban areas. The younger generation does not consider farming as a profession and they treat it as traditional activities of their family.

There are some consciously recognized and unrecognized factors involving in migration of farm youth from rural to semi urban areas. Some of such factors are visible and some are not

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visible. Coimbatore and Tirupur districts were deliberately selected to find out those factors.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Four taluks namely Mettupalayam and Pollachi from Coimbatore Avinashi and Palladam from Thirupur districts were identified through secondary data. Key informant Technique was employed to locate the exact pockets from which more mobility of farmers towards urban and semi urban areas. Key informants of the study area were contacted to collect information from a wide range of people, including community leaders, professionals and residents who have first hand knowledge about the community. These community experts, with their particular knowledge and understanding, can provide insight on the nature of problems and give recommendations for solutions. A total of 80 samples @ 20 from each taluk were deliberately selected.

FINIDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

In India and in many developing countries majority of the work force is employed in agriculture. However, stagnating agricultural productivity & rural environmental degradation have made agriculture as a last option.

Table 1 Factors influencing farm youth to move away from farming

1.	Risk & uncertainties in farming	83%
2.	Un remunerative/Unattractive nature of agriculture	83%
3.	Non availability of labours/ high cost of labours	78%
4.	Limited scope for career development in agriculture	77%
5.	Seeking social recognition	67%
6.	For better education to children	62%
7.	Preferring urban lifestyle	53%
8.	To get educated spouse	23%

*Multiple Responses

With little education and lack of opportunities within and outside farming, majority of rural youth do not know what to do for earning their livelihood. Further, the youth also see, high cost, high input agriculture being practiced with unpredictable returns. They have been observing their parents, following conventional farming toiling hard in the farms through out their life time, hardly to lead a decent living.

Because of lack of job opportunities in rural areas, and a view that working in farming is low status and does not offer good future prospects, the youth are migrating in significant numbers to urban areas. Economic difficulties are experienced by farmers as a result of low-farm incomes and great instability and variability in the income from farming (83%). Apart from the risk and uncertainties involving in agriculture (83%), the mindset and attitude of the farm youth towards urban areas seeking social recognition (67%) and preferring urban life style (53%) plays a major role in migration for various reasons like, children education (62%) and to get educated spouse (23%).

How to retain the Farm Youth in Agriculture?

Technological and managerial up gradations of farm operations will definitely hold the youth in Agriculture and can help them to lead the decent living. For young people to take any profession and sustain in that profession, it should be economically rewarding and intellectually satisfying. And it is applicable to farming also. Unless farming becomes both intellectually stimulating and economically rewarding, it will

difficult to attract or retain rural youth in farming. (M.S. Swaminathan, 2001)

But, this can happen only when the way, farming is done changed. Ecological farming, based on nurturing and nourishing the natural resources is highly sustainable and rewarding.

Table 2 Ways and means to retain the Farm Youth in Agriculture

1.	Capacity building of farm youth using advanced electronic gadgets	92.5%
2.	By Providing market linkages	87.5%
3.	Demand based productions	83.8%
4.	Processing & value addition of produces	83.8%
5.	Tie up with local Agricultural Institutions	77.5%
6.	By establishing more Agri clinics	75 %
7.	Farm mechanization	75 %
8.	Make availability of necessary farm machinery tools at taluk level	68.8 %
9.	Establishing custom service centre for farm implements	55 %

The most attractive thing can be done to suit the current era requirement is usage of electronic gadgets.

- Artificial intelligence (AI) [Expert system (ES), Decision Support System (DSS)] play a role in Transfer of Technology. Net connectivity in every panchayat and the assistance of technical person to utilize the ES, DSS will provide the timely information and dependence on extension personnel and the time spent on travels are cut off (It is possible through video conferencing, mobile technology). Educated and well trained youth gives enormous potential for social and economic development. They should be viewed as the investment opportunity and are treated as partners in the development process. Their knowledge on Indigenous Technical knowledge (ITK) can be utilized effectively and their involvement in Participatory Technology Management is definitely gain better results and make agriculture as a profitable and sustainable profession.
- Apart from crop production and protection aspects, processing & marketing have to be encouraged.
- By promoting opportunities for the service sector to expand in a manner that will trigger the technological and economic up gradation of farm operations.
- Demand Based Production is possible in the metropolitan cities where super markets and apartments are in large nos. It will definitely avoid the interruption of middle men and no need for seeking open market which facilitates the disposal of the produces at door steps of the departments.
- The major focus can be given to “Group Approach” which involves the demand based production and contract and corporate farming.
- Establishing agri clinics have to be strengthened to satisfy the requirement of farmers in an opportune time.
- Corporate farming through mechanization are also possible when the fragmented land holdings of the surrounding areas put together as a single unit which will enable the easy usage of machineries.
- Apart from this, the necessary farm implements and tools should be made available to the farmers in the nearby centres at appropriate times and the service centres will give the indirect employment opportunity

for the rural artisans and school dropouts in the localities concerned.

Suggested Strategies to hold them back in Agriculture

Several areas may be concentrated to retain the farm youth in farming at operational level. But, some efforts should be taken by policy makers at strategic level with the cooperation of tactical level experts to formulate some appropriate strategies to hold them in farming itself.

- Exposing the rural school children towards their basic livelihood agriculture
- Assurance of sustained income
- Insurance against risk
- Guidance and support during natural calamities
- Scope for upgrading livelihood
- Modernization of farming approach
- Setting of special – Agri economic zone
- Ceiling for sale of agriculture lands to non – agricultural purposes

Introducing Agriculture as one of the subjects in the school level itself and exposing the school children to the farming practices will definitely help to realize the importance of farming and the necessity of taking as the profession in future. National Crop Insurance Scheme (NCIS) serves the purpose of safeguarding the farmers from their crop loss, due to various natural calamities. But the nodal offices are in capitals of states. It is not that much easy to approach the office by the farmers who are residing in the villages. So, active involvement of NGOs by adopting a village as a model village to create awareness among the farmers is essential to utilize the benefits of National Crop Insurance Scheme fully.

Precision farming, Farm mechanization, Formation of Commodity Interest Group (CIG), Farmer Interest Group (FIG) are the major areas have to be concentrated to get rid of unproductive conventional farming and also route to marketing outlets in a smoother way.

In addition to this, if special economic zone encompasses Agriculture as a main component established in identified areas and concentrates on export avenues, marketing of value added produces becomes easy.

Very rigid steps to be taken to enforce a ban on the sale of agricultural land for Non- agricultural, commercial purposes which control the declining of agricultural land.

CONCLUSION

While many young farmers are disillusioned with farming as a livelihood choice, it becomes the duty of the young graduates of Agricultural sciences joined with extension personnel with the guidance of Agricultural institutions, to shape the lives of farm youth to be socially responsible, professionally sharp and nationally proud and ultimately change the agriculture scenario in the progressive and desirable way.

If every effort taken regarding the benefits of farming community results in the expected positive way, the farmers and farm youth see and experience the better side of the farming. And they joyfully involve in agriculture. Then the deliberate attempt to convince them to retain in farming is not necessary. They willingly prefer farming as their livelihood choice and also to feed the rest of the ever increasing population in the country.

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