

Constraints Faced by Farmers in Agriculture during COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The present study determines the key constraints faced by the farmers during COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, the data was collected from a sample of 120 farmers was interviewed from Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh to analyze the various constraints faced by the farmers during COVID-19 pandemic. Constraints faced by the farmers were ranked on the basis of frequency and percentage. The findings revealed that production constraints like difficult to access farm machinery (95.83%), delayed harvest (95.83%), inadequate labour (95.00%), restricted availability and access to inputs (85.83%) as the major constraints. Difficulty in selling crop produce in the market (97.50%), harvested the crop but could not market it (68.33%), surge in input cost (72.50%), delayed payments for the produce sold (59.17%), inaccessible institutional credit (45.00%) were the major marketing and financial constraints faced by the farmers.

Keywords: *COVID-19, Constraints, Delayed harvest and Farmers.*

Indian farmers are facing risks every year, such as low rainfall, price volatility and rising debts. But risks from COVID-19 pandemic has put new challenges in front of this sector threatening livelihoods and also food security. The nationwide lockdown which came at an unfortunate time for farmers, as it was the harvest season for the crops. The lockdown created shortage of labor and equipment as migrant labour moved to their hometowns during the pandemic and farmers often rent harvesting equipment as this is cheaper than purchasing it. The lockdown has derailed harvest and restrictions on transportation of produce despite being given waivers as essential services.

Agriculture is considered as the backbone of Indian economy. This backbone was under stress during COVID-19 pandemic. To have a comprehensive analysis of the farmers situations during

pandemic it is important to understand the constraints faced by them during that period. As the situation has raised never before and was unanticipated. Farmers have been practicing farming with unpredictable factors beyond their control. COVID-19 pandemic took place and was inevitable. The complexities involved in farming at that time became diverse. It is important to understand the problems faced by farmers in agriculture during COVID-19 pandemic.

Keeping these in view, a field level study was conducted with the objective to rank the constraints faced by the farmers during COVID-19 pandemic.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study was conducted in Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh (A.P.) during 2021-22. *Ex-Post Facto* research design was followed for the

study. Three mandals in the district and 4 villages from each mandal were selected using simple random sampling method. Thus, a total of 12 villages were selected. Ten respondents from each village were selected using simple random sampling method thus constituting a total of 120 respondents for the study. Before giving a final shape to the interview schedule the schedule was pretested with 30 farmers who were actively participating in agricultural operations in non-sample area with identical situation. The data was collected by administering the structured interview schedule to the respondents. For the present study, the 'constraint' was operationalized as something that limits or controls the farmers during COVID-19. Based on the review of literature and interaction with farmers during pretesting and by expert's opinion, a total of fourteen constraints were identified and included in the final schedule and the farmers were asked to rank the identified constraints in the order of their preference.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Constraints faced by farmers in Agriculture during COVID-19 pandemic

Farmers practiced different coping strategies in agriculture timely to cope with COVID-19 pandemic. In this process they face various constraints in adaptation in their field. And these constraints (Table 1) faced by farmers were categorised into production, marketing and financial constraints.

Production Constraints

Difficult to access farm machinery and delayed harvest

Among different constraints faced by farmers, they ranked difficult to access farm machinery and delayed harvest as major constraint (95.83% each). Because of the lockdown, there was lack of agricultural machinery and a consequent shortage of labour to operate it, which in turn increased the rent on farm equipment. Travelling to the fields during this COVID-19 situation grew more challenging since it

Table 1. Constrains faced by farmers in agriculture during COVID-19 pandemic

S.No.	Constraints	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
A.	Production constraints			
1	Difficult to access farm machinery and delayed harvest	115	95.83	I
2	Inadequate labour	114	95.00	II
3	Restricted availability and access to inputs	103	85.83	III
4	Increased cost of cultivation	61	50.83	IV
B.	Marketing constraints			
5	Difficulty in selling crop produce in the market	117	97.50	I
6	Increased middlemen involvement	91	75.83	II
7	Harvested the crop but could not market it	82	68.33	III
8	Distress sale of farm produce	65	54.17	IV
9	Transport bottlenecks	39	32.50	V
C.	Financial constraints			
10	Increased labour wages	108	90.00	I
11	Surge in input cost	87	72.50	II
12	Delayed payments for the produce sold	71	59.17	III
13	Inaccessible institutional credit	54	45.00	IV

took longer for each village to set up a screening checkpoint for COVID-19 infected individuals who passed through the community. As a result, farmers reduced their time working in their fields leads to delayed harvest and another reason was due to labour scarcity. The findings are in consonance with the findings of Deshmukh (2020); Kishor Kumar *et al.* (2020), Jyothi *et al.* (2020).

Inadequate labour

About 95 per cent of the farmers could not labour during COVID-19 pandemic. Due to sudden unanticipated lockdown, most of the labours migrated to their native places so as a result labour scarcity occurred. To overcome this problem most of the farmers deployed their family members as labours. Similar, results have been reported by Yuvaraj (2020); Habanyati *et al.* (2022).

Restricted availability and access to inputs

Restricted availability and access to seeds, fertilizers, pesticides for the next crop season was another constraint expressed by 85.83 per cent farmers. The interruption of public transportation services and the mobility restrictions under lockdown disrupted inputs provision for crop production. Farmers who are less dependent on the market for labour, machinery, fertilizers and other inputs were less impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic than the farmers who were more dependent on the supply of these inputs in the local market. The results are in conformity with that reported by Santhi and Veerakumaran (2019), Yegbemey *et al.* (2021), Habanyati *et al.* (2022), Menon *et al.* (2022).

Increased cost of cultivation

About 50.83 per cent of the farmers expressed that increased cost of cultivation was another constraint during COVID-19 pandemic. It is

directly proportional to the increased input costs and increased labour wage rates and these all factors resulted in increased cost of cultivation. The results are in conformity with that reported by Menon *et al.* (2022); Kishor Kumar *et al.* (2020).

Marketing Constraints

Difficulty in selling crop produce in the market

Farmers stated that difficulty in selling crop produce in the market (97.50%) was one of the major marketing constraints faced making them more prone to disaster vulnerabilities. In the year 2019–20 marketing of rabi crops was most impacted. Farmers were forced to sell their produce in nearby villages, local marketplaces, or grocery stores because the markets were shut. Local markets were open for a brief period of time; however, the local police forbade the evening market from opening. Since no outsiders were permitted at the market, there were more sellers than customers, which reduced the selling price. Unsold goods frequently needed to be transported back home. Some farmers sold the produce to private intermediaries at a lower price. The findings are in consonance with the findings of Yuvaraj (2020), Ceballos *et al.* (2020).

Increased middlemen involvement

Increased middlemen involvement was another constraint expressed by 75.83 per cent of the farmers. It resulted because even the Govt. support system like Rythu Bharosa Kendras (RBKs) have also failed to help farmers taking advantage of the situation, middlemen are paying 10% less than the fixed price besides demanding 10 kg more per bag of paddy (The Hindu, May 29, 2021).

Harvested the crop but could not market it

Respondents stated that harvested the crop but could not market it (68.33%) was another constraint

during COVID-19 pandemic. Collection of harvested produce by private agencies had been impacted adversely. Despite the fact that transit of essential goods was exempt from the restrictions imposed during the lockdown. Private transporters may have encountered restrictions when attempting to collect harvested crop produce from farmer fields. Similar, results have been reported Deshmukh (2020), Elder (2021), Yuvaraj (2020), Jaacks *et al.* (2021).

Distress sale of farm produce

The study shows that 54.17 per cent of the farmers faced the problem of distress sale of the farm produce. Farmers resort to distress sale in case of vegetables owing to COVID-19-induced conditions. They were severely hurt by lack of proper cold storage facilities and then COVID-19 lockdowns made their wounds worse. The distressed farmers prefer to sell the produce at lower price or distribute to the local residents free of cost before the produce get rot. The findings of the study are in conformity with the findings reported by Deshmukh (2020).

Transport bottlenecks

About 32.50 per cent of the farmers expressed that transport bottlenecks was another constraint during COVID-19 pandemic. At the onset of the crisis, the food supply chains were strained as many countries imposed restrictions on movement of goods and people across and within borders. As a result, the challenge was not availability of food but easy access to it. The results are in conformity with that reported by Zala (2008), Yuvaraj (2020), Kumar *et al.* (2021), Menon *et al.* (2022).

Financial Constraints

Increased labour wages

The study shows that 90.00 per cent of the farmers faced the problem of increased labour wages.

Since scarcity of labour being a major constraint due to COVID-19 pandemic there is a huge demand for both men and women labour which is therefore directing towards the increase in labour wages. The findings are in line with the findings of Zala (2008), Ceballos *et al.* (2020), Deshmukh (2020), Jaacks *et al.* (2021).

Surge in input cost

The respondents (72.50%) stated that surge in input cost will obstruct the farmers to take up the adapting measures. Transport limitations during COVID-19 make it particularly challenging for vendors to deliver inputs including seeds, fertiliser, crop protection goods, equipment, and animal feed to rural farmers in time for planting season under the COVID-19 situation. Because of this, there were little inputs available in the local markets. In order to sell the inputs for more money, the local input dealers took advantage of the situation. The findings are in line with the findings of Yegbemey *et al.* (2021), Habanyati *et al.* (2022), Kishor Kumar (2019).

Delayed payments for the produce sold

Respondents stated that delayed payments for the produce sold (59.17%) was another constraint during COVID-19 pandemic. Due to lockdown transport problems occurred as a result the harvested produce was either in their farmers own godowns or with government. Processing took lot of time due to the restrictions during COVID-19 hence government did not pay the money within stipulated time to the farmers. The findings are in consonance with the findings of Santhi and Veerakumaran (2019), Nagamani (2020).

Inaccessible institutional credit

Institutional credit is one of the important factors which helps the farmers to cultivate land and

also for adapting measures to overcome disasters like COVID-19. This is the only way to get credit with lowest interest charges compared to other unorganised lending sectors. In the study region, 45 per cent of the farmers stated that non-availability of institutional credit was one of the constraints to take adaptability measures. It mainly depends on credit availability for getting needed resources for cultivating land and to take various adaptive measures during COVID-19. Lack of finance hinders farmers from getting the necessary resources and technologies that facilitate adapting to COVID-19. Similar, results have been reported Zala (2008), Trivedi (2009), Habanyati *et al.* (2022).

CONCLUSION

From the above observations, it could be concluded that farmers are facing multifaceted problems with no proper solutions during COVID-19 pandemic. In spite of their problems the farmers are striving hard and smart to overcome the problems and practicing different adaptability measures over the period to mitigate and prevent the effect of disasters in the farming. In this connection the constraints quoted by the farmers must be thoroughly examined by all the authorities and agencies involved in planning of strategies pertaining to disasters and provide authentic feedback to the planners, researchers, extension personnel and to all those who are facing problems due to disasters.

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