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An analysis of constraints experienced by flower growers in Solan and Sirmaur districts of Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract

Himachal Pradesh is a state with suitable agro climatic conditions and ample human resource for commercial farming. Floriculture is still considered a risky undertaking by over 96% of small and marginal farmers in the state and the farmers need to be encouraged to take up the farm activity as floriculture is highly profitable. The officials reveal that although 70 hectares (Business Standard, 2008) of the floriculture area in Himachal is under poly houses but these are the ones with only basic facilities, but if farmers need better results good facilities should be provided. So it is important to understand the problems that farmers are facing in taking floriculture. Cut flowers have a huge potential for increasing income and creating jobs for hill growers. The current study, "constraints in marketing of flowers – study in Solan and Sirmaur districts of Himachal Pradesh," was done to recognise the importance of cut flowers. This is the subject matter of the present study so that the policies can be suggested for the improvement in production and marketing of flowers.

Keywords: Marketing, flower grower, constraint, Himanchal Pradesh

Introduction

Agricultural sector in India contributes about 17.01 per cent to India's GDP. Horticultural crops constitute a significant component (accounting for 30 per cent of the GDP contributed by agriculture) of agricultural production of the country. Floriculture in India includes flower trade, nursery plant and potted plant production, seed and bulb production, micro propagation, and essential oil extraction. Despite the fact that India's annual domestic demand for flowers is increasing at a rate of over 25% and the country exported 15,695.31 MT of floriculture products to the world in 2020-21 for a total value of Rs. 575.98 Crores/77.84 USD Millions, India's share of the international flower market is still very small (APEDA, 2021) [1]. Furthermore, the Indian government has designated floriculture as a sunrise industry with a 100% export-oriented status.

According to a report by the National Horticulture Board (NHB, 2007) [6], the total area under flower crops in 2007-08 was anticipated to be over 160.7 thousand hectares, second only to China in the globe, however cut flowers only account for 600 hectares. India's floriculture exports are dominated by fresh and dried cut flowers. The principal cut flowers shipped from India include roses, marigolds, tuberose, orchids, and chrysanthemums.

More than 300 export oriented units (EOU) are believed to exist in India. More than half of these units are located in the southern states, primarily Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu. West Bengal, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan, for example, have considerable areas dedicated to floriculture. Karnataka has 18,000 acres of flower agriculture, accounting for 75 percent of total flower production, the most contemporary cut flower area, and 40 flower growing and exporting units.

Floriculture in Himachal Pradesh

The cultivation of flowers is no longer limited to plain terrain. The fragrant scent of flowers has been filling the hills of Himachal Pradesh for the past decade, and the state has emerged as a pioneer in flower farming. It's astounding to think that a State with almost no floriculture activity is now creating an annual GDP of around 28 crores, despite the fact that more than 2,800 farmers are directly involved in commercial floriculture (NVO news, 2010) [7]. The flowers grown in Himachal Pradesh are in high demand in Delhi's markets, as well as other regions of the country.

Commercial floriculture has exploded in popularity, and farmers are reaping the benefits. Per capita cultivated land in Himachal Pradesh is 0.12 hectares, whereas per capita irrigated land is 0.02 hectares (Govt HP, 2011). In this case, a cropping plan that maximises income per unit area, labour, and investment is required. This need is met by commercial floriculture.

The agro-climatic characteristics of the state provide significant prospects for floriculture development, both for the domestic off-season market and for exports. Cut flowers, bulbs, seeds, live plants, and other floriculture goods can be produced as profitable cash crops. Although flowers from the state's many agroclimatic zones can be made accessible all year for the domestic market, export quality produce can only be secured by cultivation in greenhouses under controlled environmental circumstances.

Protected flower farming is becoming more popular in the state, with 74 ha of land under protected cultivation and 1340 farmers involved. Sirmaur, Kangra, Mandi, Chamba, Shimla, Solan, Bilaspur, and Kullu are active flower-growing districts in the state, where gladiolus, marigolds, chrysanthemums, Rose, Carnation, Lilies, and other flowers are grown. Alstroemeria, Limonium, Zantedeschia, Iris, Strelitzia, tulips, Gerbera, and Orchids, on the other hand, are considered prospective crops by the state. During 2009-2010, floriculture crops worth Rs. 41.82 cores were grown, helping around 2800 farmers (Gorakh Singh, 2012) [9]. Given the interest of the farmers and the incentives given by the government the floriculture is going to flourish further in the state. Government of Himachal Pradesh is promoting the protected cultivation in the state to improve the earning potential of farmers.

Table 1: Policy incentives in Himachal Pradesh for the promotion of Floriculture

S. no.	Policies
1.	Up to 50% subsidy on the total cost of polyhouse to the farmers, which accounts to Rs.467 per metre square under Pandit Deen Dayal Kisan Bagwaan Samridhi Yojna.
2	Up to 80% subsidy for a land up to 1000 sq meters on the total cost for creating irrigation structures like drip and sprinkler irrigation systems.
3.	Up to 50% financial assistance for creation of water resources like shallow wells, pumps and water-drawing systems.
4.	Weather Based Crop Insurance Scheme (WBIC) is introduced by the government of the state. The premium shall be shared on 50:25:25 bases. The subsidy is raised for the small and marginal farmers from 10% to 50%

(Govt HP, 2012)

Methodology

Solan and Sirmaur districts of Himachal Pradesh were purposively selected for the present study. For the selection of the ultimate sample of respondents from the selected districts,

random sampling technique was used. Out of the two districts, equal number of respondents are selected for data collection as per the concentration of the farmers and convenience.

Table 2: Area-wise distribution of the sample farmers

Sr. No.	District			
	Solan		Sirmaur	
	Villages covered	Sample size	Villages covered	Sample size
1	Chail	15	Chakhal	9
2	Kandaghat	5	Chambidhar	4
3	Sadhupul	5	Rajgarh	10
4	-		Salogda	2
	Total	25		25

Problems Specified By the Flower Growers in the Study Area

There were various problems specified by the flower growing farmers in the study area. The various problems along with the number of the farmers facing the specific problem are

specified in the table 3. It shows that the various problems specified by the growers are-improper transportation facilities, unorganized markets, late payments by middlemen, high middlemen commission, unregulated markets , no storage structures and high initial cost.

Table 3: Problems specified by the flower growers in the study area

Sr. No.	Problems	Response	
		No. of growers	Percentage
1	Lack of proper transportation facilities	14	28.00
2	Unorganized markets	13	26.00
	late payments by middlemen	18	36.00
4	High middlemen commission	16	32.00
5	Unregulated markets	10	20.00
6	No storage structures	12	32.43
7	High initial cost	9	18.00

Inference

The data shows that out of the growers sampled late payments by the middlemen is the major problem specified by maximum growers (29.73%) followed by the high commission of the middlemen specified by (24.32%) of the

total growers followed by another important problem of improper transportation facilities specified by the growers (18.92%) following an another problem of unorganised markets accounting to (16.22%) and unregulated markets (8.11%) of the total growers sampled following the problem

of no storage structures and high initial cost specified by (13.51%) and (5.41%) whereas the data also shows 18.92% of the total flower growers as satisfied with the prevailing production, marketing and transportation conditions.

Problems and Constraints Faced By Farmers

1. Lack of proper storage structures in the study area compels the farmers to sell their perishable produce even at the unfavourable prices. The farmer loses the bargaining power once the produce is unloaded in the market. This affects the pricing efficiency in the agricultural markets. Because of the perishable nature of the produce and poor grading of the flower produce by the farmers, physical inspection by the buyers need to be facilitated in order to ascertain just what was being brought. In this regard, improved techniques of

refrigeration and storage along with improved grading procedures in the producing areas needs to be introduced. Farmers should not only be trained and educated in respect of opportunities for value additions to their produce but also be trained in the scientific storage methods and grading procedures.

2. Malpractices in buying and selling affect the marketing system. The commission agents normally remain with the buyers, who are their regular clients, rather than the individual farmer. Many unauthorized deductions are made from the farmers even in the regulated markets. Malpractices are more frequent when farmers have low status, poor education, and weak bargaining power. These malpractices need to be curbed through strict enforcement of market laws.

Table 4: Response of the farmers to the problems related to middlemen

Sr. No.	Problems	Flower growers (in %)			
		Severe	Moderate	Normal	No problem
1.	High middlemen commission	70	12	12	6
2.	Late payments by the middlemen	22	5	5	2
3.	Other malpractices				
	a. In terms of product	45	25	15	15
	b. In terms of product prices	50	35	15	0
	c. Discrimination among the farmers	45	35	5	20

Table 5: Response of the flower growers related to problems faced in the market

S. no	Problems	Flower growers (in %)			
		Severe	Moderate	Normal	No problem
1.	Problem of space to unload the truck	12	56	12	20
2.	Sometimes climatic conditions does not allow to unload the truck	16	16	60	8
3.	Malpractices by traders at the time of auction	64	20	12	4
4.	Others such as storage facilities	70	8	16	6

Table 6: Multiple responses of flower growers related to market information

Sr. No.	Source of market information and its effectiveness	Flower growers (in %)	
		Yes	No
1.	Village trader	64	36
2.	Neighbour farmer	40	60
3.	Radio/ T.V	20	80
4.	Trunk call from wholesaler/ CA	76	24
5.	Telegram/postcard	32	68
6.	Personal visits to important market	72	28

3. Non-availability of sufficient market information also affects operational efficiency of the flower markets (table 6). Farmers often remain deprived of the latest information about prices prevailing in different markets, changes in demand, and prospective prices of the crops, etc. Thus, they miss the opportunities to sell their produce at the right time and place so as obtain the most remunerative prices. Therefore, emphasis should be given to develop a mechanism through which latest market information is displayed and made available to the growers on daily basis.

Table 7: Multiple responses of the flower growers related to problems faced in getting market- related information

Sr. No	Problems	Flower growers (in %)		
		Yes	No	Somewhat
1.	Late information	64	20	16
2.	Information available for limited markets	36	24	40
3.	Misleading information	28	60	12
4.	Inadequate information	50	40	10

Table 8: Multiple responses of the farmers related to the problems of transportation

Sr. No.	Problems	Flower growers (in %)				
		Severe	Moderate	Normal	No problem	Total
1.	Improper road networks	70	20	10	0	100
2.	Improper timings	55	25	10	10	100
3.	High cost of transportation	40	40	10	10	100

4. The conditions of the market yard are not always good. Problem of protection of the produce from sun and rains, etc. Always adds to the problems of wastage and quality deterioration. In market sanitary conditions must also be given due attention.
5. Though flower crops are relatively more profitable as compared to cereals and other crops, yet lack of irrigation, high yield instability, uncertain and fluctuating prices limit their widespread cultivation. The higher price variability of flowers due to weak vertical linkage between production, marketing and processing. There must be development of institutional arrangements for minimizing the price uncertainty.
6. Infrastructure like market access to the motorable roads, transport and communication facilities, market yards, irrigation, rural literacy, etc. has enabled efficient flower marketing, even in the remote areas. This resulted in improved income status, enlarged employment, improved structure and conduct of agricultural marketing. There is still more scope to expand and improve infrastructural and other facilities, so that the farmers residing in the interiors can also be benefitted.
7. It's also been discovered that growing cut flowers requires a lot of money. Carnation had a capital investment per hectare of Rs. 33 lakh in planting material, agricultural infrastructure, machinery and implements, and irrigation structure investment. On average, each farm's total capital investment was estimated to be Rs. 1, 01,785, with planting material accounting for almost 64% of the entire cost. The flower producers covered around 63 percent of the entire capital investment with their own funds, 11 percent with bank loans, and nearly a fourth with government subsidies.
8. Being delicate and highly valued, cut flowers require large quantities of good quality fertilizers, insecticides, fungicides and growth hormones and assured irrigation facilities which increases the cost of cultivation of flowers. Also the cut-flowers require intensive care and management as such, floriculture is highly labor intensive.
9. The agro-climatic conditions of Himachal Pradesh have been found to be quite favourable for flower cultivation. However, the productivity of the planting material is determined by the type of flowers, the quality/quantity of planting material, and the flower farmers' crop management procedures. Carnation cultivation in a poly/green house environment yielded the highest net returns. The second best cut flower was found to be roses, followed by chrysanthemum. In terms of returns per dozen, Lilies and Orchids were shown to have remunerative values in various markets.
10. Cut-flower marketing has been discovered to be more sophisticated and important than production. The timely supply of planting material and the remunerative selling of the output in the proper shape, place, and time were so important that they may alter the entire flori-business process.
11. It was discovered that the marketed surplus ranged from 97 to 98 percent of overall production, implying that the whole cut-flower crop represented the marketable surplus. Only those spikes with malformations or other issues were kept, as well as those that couldn't be sold.
12. The major cut-flower marketplaces are located in large cities and were recently developed; however, no principal

market has been established in the producing area as of yet (Himachal Pradesh). The main markets are in Delhi and Chandigarh, with other markets planned for Ludhiana, Amritsar, Jalandhar, and Pathankot. The markets are not strictly regulated, and there is no open auction of flowers. The pricing spread widens as more intermediaries enter the picture. Although the mandi has recently been formed in the Delhi market, the producers continue to encounter issues with exorbitant commissions and late payments from the middlemen. However, some growers were also sending their produce for sale to Chandigarh markets and nearby markets.

13. The cut-flower marketing strategy was determined to be ineffective, as it lacked suitable amenities and infrastructure. According to the report, farmers are having a difficult time promoting their products. Instable prices, poor transportation, malpractices, exorbitant market costs, and a lack of established regulated markets/open auction centres were the key issues. The floral co-operative societies also reported delayed payments from commission agents, which impacted the society's and growers' financial performance.

Conclusion

In this study, it shows that the various problems specified by the growers are-improper transportation facilities, unorganized markets, late payments by middlemen, high middlemen commission, unregulated markets, no storage structures and high initial cost.

Therefore, there should be established an appropriate infrastructural facilities like proper storage structures, timely and adequate availability of the transportation facilities both at the farmer's level as well as in the market to reduce the distress sale of the produce as well as the produce can reach the consumers in good conditions. Transportation services like refrigerated vans will not only reduce the transportation costs but also will help the producer in assured sale of their produce in good quality fetching higher prices in the market.

Apart this, proper institutional arrangements must be there for minimizing the price uncertainty in order to avoid the higher price variability of flowers. This can be supported by introducing the minimum support price for flowers also as in the other agricultural commodities.

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