

A Case Study :

DIVERSIFICATION IN AGRICULTURE THROUGH HORTICULTURAL CROPS- A STUDY OF BILASPUR DISTRICT OF HIMACHAL PARDESH

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ABSTRACT

Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA) of Bilaspur district of Himachal Pradesh is engaged in bringing diversification in agriculture by introduction of different horticultural crops. To study the effectiveness of crop diversification activities and the constraints experienced by the farmers, data was collected from 50 respondents of 37 villages of Bilaspur district of Himachal Pradesh. Socio-economic profile of the selected respondents indicated that 54 percent were in middle age group. Majorities of them grow wheat and Maize as major cereal crops. Study revealed that majority of the farmers practise mixed farming of crop and dairy husbandry having small and fragmented land holding under rain-fed condition. Since five years under the diversified cropping system farmers have introduced various combination of pulses and horticultural crops. Analysed data indicated that from the traditional cropping system a large part of the land holding owned by 30 percent of the selected farmers had been brought under cultivation of mangoes, 5 percent for litchi and 2 percent have adopted cultivation of pomegranate. Majority of the farmers said that the marketing of the horticultural crops is not ensure as they sell citrus fruit like lemon at a very low price and for vegetables at times they do not even get the price of production. Based on the focused analysis of the farming system, it was found that during winter the Deoth, Bandla, Danwin and Harloog belts of the district have varied climates therefore, different horticultural crops need be recommended for these belts of the same district as farmers have experienced varied constraints. Majority of the farmers from lower belt revealed that their crops of mangiferra got destroyed and also the consumers do not favour the taste of citrus fruits. It was found that in village Samlohal a private small-scale food-processing unit handled very less amount of different fruits and even the prices were not remunerative. Data revealed that there was no farmer organization however, now farmer interest groups are being organized. These groups provide feedback and their needs to ATMA.

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It is being advocated by the agricultural practitioners that diversification in crop production through horticultural crops can bring additional income and employment in the rural areas as compared to the traditional cereal based farming. Agriculture is the main activity in the villages of Bilaspur district of Himachal Pradesh. Wheat, maize and the rice are the major crops grown in the district. In addition pulses, oilseeds and vegetable crops are also grown. The cultivation is widely done on terraced fields and fragmented land holding owned by the farmers. The crop yields are generally low primarily due to tough terrain farming and poor irrigation facilities.

In Himachal Pradesh vegetable production had

increased from 25 thousand tonnes during 1951-1952 to 53 thousand tonnes during 1966-1967 and 627 thousand tonnes during 2001-2002. It is well known fact that vegetable cultivation is more paying and remunerative as compared to cereal crop. There is a lot of potential for growing vegetable crops like tomato, bitter gourd, Bhindi (Okra), Chilies and cucumber under rain-fed conditions of hilly regions especially during the rainy season.

Some farmers of Bilaspur district of Himachal Pradesh are growing vegetables under rain-fed conditions and are getting remunerative returns because these vegetables are getting market in the plains. As the shelf life of these fresh vegetables is less hence farmers have experienced various constraints in growing various horticultural crops.

Keeping all these factors in view a study was contemplated to study the effectiveness of crop diversification activities and the constraints experienced