

INFORMATION NEEDS OF FARM WOMEN OF ASSAM RELATED TO CULTIVATION OF VEGETABLE CROPS

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ABSTRACT

An investigation was designed to know the information needs of farm women related to different aspects of cultivation of vegetable crops. The study was conducted in six villages of Jorhat subdivision of Jorhat district of Assam. The total respondents included in the study were 120. Interview cum questionnaire method were used for data collection. Statistical techniques viz., frequency, percentage, mean, standard error, standard deviation and co-efficient of correlation were used for analyzing the data. The findings revealed that 51 per cent of farm women had low level of knowledge regarding cultivation of vegetable crops. It was further observed that majority of respondents needed information in the area of plant protection (90.8%) followed by nutrition management (88.6%) and production practices (57%) respectively.

Key words : Information needs, Farm women, Knowledge of vegetable cultivation

Farm women in India constitute an important work force in agriculture. They play a significant and crucial role in all the stages of crop production from seed selection to post harvest activities and in other allied enterprises such as dairy, cattle management, fish and poultry farming, sheep rearing etc., besides fulfilling their responsibilities of home making and child rearing. In recent years, there has been an increasing recognition of the need to integrate women into mainstream development efforts. The economic rationale behind the approach is that the full use of productive potential of human resources (male and female) cannot be realized if women who make sustainable contribution to food output, do not have adequate access to resources, productivity enhancing inputs and services. Realizing the importance of the full participation of women in development activities the government of India has given much attention to development projects and supportive services to motivate women farmer to become partner in socio-economic development.

Vegetables play a vital role in human diet, which is rich source of minerals, vitamins and carbohydrates. At present, both the production and consumption of vegetables in the country is very inadequate. At the same time the vegetables available for consumption are mostly stale, less nutritive and produced and handled under unhygienic condition. Since, vegetable growing areas are

of very high cropping intensity thus insects, pest and diseases cannot be easily eradicated. Women in rural areas are generally less responsive to improved techniques due to lack of knowledge. To raise the contribution of farm women in development of the nation, it is imperative that the farm women be informed or trained in agriculture and household areas to keep them abreast of the latest innovations. This may help them to work with more competence among the growers for sustainable vegetable production. Farm women generally have no access to new technologies, training and demonstrations and they have to learn from others, mainly from their male counterparts. As such, farm women deserve increased attention in agricultural extension services in every developing nation. There is a need for an action oriented plan to reach the millions of women in agriculture who fill the bread baskets of the third world. With the fast development of new agriculture technologies, it is increasingly felt that the technical knowledge of farm women acquired over the generation is not being updated. They are urgent need of understanding and acquiring new knowledge and skills, so that they could contribute more effectively to the production process. There is some evidences that farm women are not being well served by the existing extension system. Therefore, it is very important to know the farm women need areas to train them for changing their knowledge, skills and attitude.

It is observed from the literature that very few studies have been conducted in the state of Assam in these areas. Hence, it was proposed to undertake the present study

on information needs of farm women of Jorhat district of Assam related to cultivation of vegetable crops.

METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted in Jorhat district of Assam. A purposive cum random sampling method was followed for selection of districts, sub-divisions, blocks, villages and respondents. Jorhat sub division of Jorhat district was purposively selected for this study. The Jorhat sub-division consists of five development blocks namely, North-West development block, Titabor development block, Jorhat development block, Chipahikhola block and Kaliapani block. Out of these, Jorhat development block, Chipahikhola block and Kaliapani block were purposively selected for the study. A list of villages of each selected block from sampled district was prepared with the help of the block office and NGO workers. From this list two villages from each block were selected randomly considering the following criteria-

- The main occupation of respondents should be farming.
- Women should be predominantly engaged in cultivation of vegetable crops and
- The sample village must be easily reachable by the researchers.

Thus, the total number of villages were six. For selection of respondents, a list of women was prepared from each of the selected villages with the help of village leader, worker of NGOs, executive member of Mahila Samittee and Self Help Groups, who fulfilled all the stated criteria and also were within the productive age group *i.e.* between 19 to 60 years. From each list, 20 farm women were randomly selected as the final sample from each villages. Altogether, 120 farm women as respondents were selected for the present study. An interview schedule was prepared to study three different aspects according to the stated objectives. The first part of the interview schedule was designed to collect information regarding personal and socio-economic background of respondents and also the questions relating to the respondents closeness with extension contact, mass media exposure and problems faced by farm women regarding cultivation of vegetable crops. The second part of the interview schedule was designed to identify information needs of farm women regarding cultivation of vegetable crops.

The prepared research schedule was pre-tested by taking a sample of 30 respondents in one non sampled village of Jorhat district. On the basis of experienced gain and information obtained, necessary modification was made in the schedule and then it was finalized for data

collection. The collected data were coded, tabulated and analyzed in accordance with the objectives of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

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Background characteristic of farm women :

Personal characteristics of the respondents were studied with the following variables *i.e.* age and marital status. Socio-economic characteristics of respondents included education, land holding, type of house, family structure, occupation, family income, caste, material possession, organizational membership, contact with extension agent and mass media exposure.

The findings presented in the Table 1 indicates that majority of the respondents (39.2%) belonged to middle age group ranging from (33-46) years followed by 32.5 per cent in old age group (47-60 years). A large percentage (84.2%) of the respondents was married whereas 9.2 per cent were unmarried. A small percentage (4.2%) of farm women were identified as illiterate while it was observed from the data that majority of farm women (85.8%) were having formal education and they are capable to acquire technical information easily. But due to negligence of extension agencies they were mostly not included in regular extension programme. Majority of the respondents (36.8%) had small size of land holding followed by marginal land holding (19.1%). It is perceived that due to less amount of cultivable land, the extension agents might have had reluctance to work with these categories of farm women. However, it was felt that they must get some cost effective technology to increase their production. Further, majority of the respondents (44.2%) were of medium category followed by 33.3 per cent low and 22.5 per cent high category as far as possession of household assets was concerned. Majority of the respondent (75%) possessed medium level of farm assets followed by low and high level *i.e.* 15 per cent and 10 per cent, respectively. The majority of respondents (50%) had their membership in one organization whereas 28.3 per cent of had concerned with more than one organization, it can be clearly perceived that farm women's knowledge related to cultivation of vegetable crops could easily be increased by organizing training programme to the women in the study area. The data on extension contact presented in the Table 1 also indicate that the majority of the respondents (51.7%) had occasional contact with extension agent while 12.5 per cent had frequent contact with extension agent. From the findings it can be assumed that majority of farm women had knowledge about the services rendered by the extension agents.

The data further indicated that majority of respondents (37.5%) while 32.5 per cent had regular

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Table 1 : Distribution of farm women according to their personal characteristics

N=120

S.N.	Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Age	Young	34	28.3
		Middle	47	39.2
		Old	39	32.5
2.	Marital status	Unmarried	11	9.2
		Married	101	84.2
		Widow	6	5.0
		Divorcee	2	1.7
3.	Education	Illiterate	5	4.2
		Can read and write	12	10.0
		Primary	12	10.0
		Middle school	32	26.7
		High school	45	37.5
		Higher secondary	11	9.2
4.	Land holding	Graduate and above	3	2.5
		No land (less than 1 bigha)	16	14.2
		Marginal (2-4 bigha)	23	19.1
		Small (5-7 bigha)	26	36.8
		Medium (8-10 bigha)	23	19.1
5.	Household assets	Large (more than 10 bigha)	12	10.8
		Low	40	33.3
		Medium	53	44.2
6.	Farm assets	High	27	22.5
		Low	18	15
		Medium	90	75
7.	Organizational membership	High	12	10
		No membership	26	21.7
		Member of one organization	60	50.0
8.	Contact with extension agent	Member of more than one organization	34	28.3
		Office bearer	Nil	Nil
		Frequently	15	12.5
9.	Mass media exposure	Occasionally	62	51.7
		Never	43	35.8
		Regularly	39	32.5
		Irregular	45	37.5
		Never	36	30.0

exposure to mass media and 30 per cent of respondents had regular and no exposure to mass media, respectively. From the findings it can be assumed that due to overburden of work and dearth of leisure time, the farm women may not get opportunity to have regular exposure to with mass media.

Problems faced by farm women in vegetable cultivation :

The problems expressed by the farm women in vegetable cultivation were recorded and were ranked accordingly, in Table 2. Infection of crops by pests and lack of irrigation facility were two of the most important problems faced by farm women in cultivation of vegetable

crops. Similar findings were reported by Hassan (1987), and Devi (2000).

Lack of proper training and lack of availability of good variety of seeds in local market were ranked third. To overcome such problems, the related Govt. departments and NGOs could take initiative to make farm inputs available to farm women.

Existing knowledge level of farm women in different aspects of cultivation of vegetable crops :

Knowledge level of respondents was calculated on different aspects of cultivation of vegetable crops Based on the knowledge score respondents were classified into three categories namely low, medium and high (Table 3).

Table 2 : Ranking of problems faced by farm women in cultivation of vegetable crops

S.No.	Problem area	Rank
1.	Attack of crops by pests	I
2.	Lack of irrigation facility	II
3.	Lack of proper training	III
4.	Lack of availability of good variety of seeds	III
5.	Lack of contact with extension agent	IV
6.	Over work in the house hold activity	V
7.	Natural calamities (flood, heavy rain fall etc.)	VI
8.	Lack of money for cultivation	VII
9.	Lack of knowledge about post harvest technology	VIII
10.	Too much of expensive of fertilizer, chemicals	IX
11.	Less amount of cultivated land	X
12.	Lack of involvement in decision making	XI
13.	Lack of market place	XII

Majority (50.8%) of respondents were having low level of knowledge about nursery production, 26.7 per cent had medium and remaining (22.5%) had high level of knowledge in this regard. Due to less exposure to mass media they might have not got proper information related to this aspect of cultivation of vegetable crops. Majority of the respondents (46.6%) had medium level of knowledge in land preparation and planting, followed by

27.6 per cent and 25.8 per cent of respondents had low and high level of knowledge respectively. It might be due to the traditional practice of cultivating the vegetable crops and less exposure to mass media. The results are in the line in the findings of Khandelwal (1991).

The findings further revealed that only 46.0% of the respondents had medium level of knowledge regarding production practices. This might be due to the poor access to agricultural extension services or poor habit of farm women in using of mass media. The same data also indicated that majority of the respondents (54.2%) had low level of knowledge regarding nutrition management where as number of respondents, found in medium and high knowledge category were 25.0 per cent and 20.8 per cent respectively (Table 3). This might be due to the unawareness of farm women about improved practices of nutrition management. Hence, they were mechanically involved in these activities. It is evident from the same Table that the knowledge of 60.8 per cent of farm women was low in the aspects of plant protection. It might be due to the fact that these type of activities were normally undertaken by male members of the family. The findings also showed that majority (46.7%) of respondents had medium level of knowledge regarding harvesting. It might be due to the fact that traditionally farm women are engaged in harvesting of agricultural products. Similar findings were reported by Das and Mishra (2002). Regarding overall knowledge level of respondents, it was

Table 3: Distribution of farm women according to their level of existing knowledge in different aspects of cultivation of vegetable crops

Aspects	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Nursery production	Low	61	50.8
	Medium	32	26.7
	High	27	22.5
Land preparation and planting	Low	33	27.6
	Medium	56	46.6
	High	31	25.8
Production practices	Low	22	18.3
	Medium	55	46.0
	High	43	35.7
Nutrition management	Low	65	54.2
	Medium	30	25.0
	High	25	20.8
Plant protection	Low	73	60.8
	Medium	31	25.8
	High	16	13.4
Harvesting	Low	30	25.0
	Medium	56	46.7
	High	34	28.3

N=120

Table 4: Percentage distribution of farm women according to their information needs in different aspects of cultivation of vegetable crops

Aspects	Response categories (N = 120)			Mean score	Rank
	Most needed	Some what needed	Least needed		
Plant protection	90.8	9.2	Nil	2.88	I
Nutrition management	88.6	11.4	Nil	2.78	II
Production practices	57.5	40.8	2.2	2.53	III
Nursery production	55	35.8	9.2	2.36	IV
Land preparation and planting	15.8	64.2	20	1.95	V
Harvesting	4.4	76.4	19.2	1.27	VI

revealed that maximum number of respondents (51%) had low level of knowledge in cultivation of vegetable crops where as 29 per cent of respondents had medium level of knowledge and only 20 per cent of respondents had high level of knowledge about cultivation of vegetable crops. It might be due to the reasons that they have poor access to agricultural extension training for which necessary efforts are needed to increase the knowledge of farm women on these aspects. On the other hand most of the trainings on agricultural technologies were mainly focused on men. The findings are in agreement with the results of Govind *et al.* (1991) and Solanki (2001).

Information needs of respondents in the different aspects of cultivation of vegetable crops :

As is seen from Table 4 that the first two major areas in which the farm women needed information mostly were plant protection (90.8%) and nutrition management (88.6%) according to mean score and ranking, as against this, 76.4 per cent and 64.2 percent of respondents needed moderate information regarding harvesting and land preparation, respectively and planting because they were accustomed of these two practices. Similar findings were reported by Das and Mishra (2002) and Kaur and Saini (1993).

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that majority of the respondents belonged to medium socio-economic status and they faced several problems as well as possessed low level of knowledge with respect to cultivation of vegetable crops. Majority of the respondents needed most information in the aspects of plant protection followed by nutrition management and production practices.

Extension service could not reach the farm women for which they were unaware of new technologies which inhabits their production. Hence, suitable costs effective technology should be developed and also proper women specific agricultural extension trainings have to be

organized on the basis of identified needs in cultivation of vegetable crops. They should be made aware of different aspects of vegetable cultivation in which they lack knowledge for increasing their overall production.

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