

LOW RETURNS, INCOME FROM OTHER SOURCES AND DEGRADED STATUS OF AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES PULLS BACK THE FARMERS OF ALAPPUZHA DISTRICT IN KERALA FROM FARMS

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Abstract

The activity of agriculture depends on the attitude of farmers. The Farmers who involve in this activity faces many problems. Financial problems are major constraints for farming activity. The low return of the sector, attractive incentives in other sectors, income from various sources and the degraded status of agricultural activities in the society takes away the interest of the farmers in the farming activity. The land use Pattern of Alappuzha district shows that the area of Cultivable waste land is increasing in the district. This is mainly because the farmers had lost their interest in this activity.

Index Terms: Low returns, degraded status, Income

I. INTRODUCTION

Land, a major factor of earth could be used for different functions. Agriculture is the most important primary activity of human beings. "Land use is characterized by the arrangements, activities and inputs people undertake in a certain land cover type to produce, change or maintain it" (FAO/UNEP, 1999). Land used for one purpose can also change in due course of time. This change of land use depends on factors such as financial, institutional, psychological, physiological, governmental decisions etc. The land use is a human response on the physical attributes of the land. It depends on the human attitude. Land use is the modifications made by human beings on the land. Land can be used for agricultural and non-agricultural activities.

The decision for converting the land to any activity depends on the attitude of the farmers. The attitude of farmers is controlled by certain factors. These factors are either push or pull factors. The pull factors attract the farmers while push factors forces farmers to move out of this activity. The factors like low returns, attractive incentives in other sectors, status degradation are push factors.

II. ALAPPUZHA DISTRICT

Alappuzha district which has an area of 141011 hectares (1414 sq kms) lies in between the longitudes of 76⁰17' and 76⁰44' east and also 9⁰5' north latitude. It lies in south west of the State. The district is bounded by Arabian Sea (Lakshwadeep Sea) on the west, Ernakulam district on north, Kottayam district and Pathanamthitta district in the east and Kollam district in the south. To the east and north between Alappuzha, Kottayam and Ernakulam districts lies, the Vembanad lagoon. Alappuzha district the smallest district in Kerala state in the southern part of India. It is a unique district because this district has got a major share of its agriculture under food crops. A change occurring in the pattern of the agriculture of the region influences the food crop production of the state. Rice is a major crop cultivated in the district. So the district is known as the '*Granary of Kerala*'. According to the census of 2001 there were about 17805 cultivators in the district.

III. METHODOLOGY

The matter was studied through a sample survey was conducted among the farmers of the district. According to the census of 2001 there were about 17805 cultivators in the district. The sample was taken among 5% of the total cultivators of the district. The sample consisted of tenants and land owners as well as farmers of all ages. They were given the questioners and which were filled by them. From the survey the trend, attitudes, behavior pattern of the farmers were deducted.

IV. FINANCIAL AND STATUS ISSUES FACED BY THE FARMERS

The activity of farming depends fully on the attitude of the farmers. There are certain factors which attracts the farmers as well as push them away from the farming activity. Here some of the factors which push out farmers from farming is discussed.

4.1 Low returns from agricultural sector

The agricultural sector provides only a low income. The cost of production is high in this sector. The cost of production for wetland is higher than that of the garden lands. It is high in the case of preparation of the field and maintenance costs. The wetland crops are seasonal crops. So there will be seasonal income only from these crops. Paddy is the main wetland crop of Alappuzha district. The average cost of production for paddy for an acre is 40,000Rs. The average income a farmer can get from an acre is Rs. 20,000 per season. They get this if only there is good yield and no natural hazard. So the monthly average income will be less than Rs. 5000. This is inadequate to live decently. The tenants won't get even this income. Majority of the farmers of the district have an area of less than one acre of land. So their income will be less than Rs. 20000 per season. The income is not same in all parts of the district. This is the average income of a farmer of Kuttanad region which is considered to have more yield than other areas of the district. In other areas the net income is less than this. So farmers consider paddy cultivation unprofitable.

In the case of garden farming the income is much less than that of wetlands. There are also seasonal crops in the garden lands. The income from many of these crops is little. Coconut is the second important crop on the basis of income. But at present this crop is facing a loss. The nuts do not fetch good price now. The farmers are getting an income of less than Rs. 10,000 per plucking from one acre of land. This is because of high labour cost and low price of coconuts. In the case of other garden farming the income is much less. Vegetables are another important crop of the district. But the income from this is also too low. In areas which are fragmented and are small holdings these garden crops are cultivated only for self-consumption. Tubers and plantains also provide low income for the farmers. This low income of the farmers is evident from the shifting of crops from one crop to another by the farmers. If it was profitable the farmers would have stuck to a particular crop. One profitable garden crop is rubber cultivation which is seen in the rolling plains of Chengannur. Only this region is suitable for rubber plantations.

As the income is less in this sector the farmers try to move away from farming. They find it useless to take risks. So they try to shift their attention to other sectors. Such a situation reduces the interest in farming and the farmers leave the farm lands without farming. This is also a factor for increasing the area of cultivable waste land.

4.2 The income of other sectors

The income from the agricultural sector is not only less but it is low when compared to other sectors. Even when the income from agricultural sector is compared with the income of agricultural labourers it is less. If an agricultural labourer is getting an average work for 20 days per month, he earns at least Rs. 11,400 per month, while the average income of farmer per month is below Rs. 5000. The pathetic condition of a farmer becomes clear when compared with the last grade servants in the government sector. The monthly salary for the last grade servants in government sector under Kerala government is Rs. 7000 plus DA. According to the new recommendation this basic salary rises to Rs. 16,000 plus D A. There is also job security as well as pension. The pension for farmers is only Rs. 800 per month. There is also high risk of loss in the field of agriculture. So, most of the farmers, are attracted by jobs other rather than farming. Farming becomes only a passive activity. So when they can't find time for agriculture practice or if they find other jobs they will leave the activity of farming. This leaves the farm land as cultivable waste. So it is not only the low income from the agricultural sector but also the attraction or pull of other jobs that cause increase in the area of cultivable waste land.

4.3 Income from other sources

Due to low income from this sector most of the farmers depend on other jobs. When they are employed in other sectors they get extra or better income. This income is more than the income that they get from the agricultural sector. So they concentrate on or shift to the other jobs. This shifts the interest of the farmers away from agriculture.

From the survey conducted it is clear that majority of farmers are either employed in other sectors or at least a person of the family is employed in other sectors. So the income from farming is not their major income. It will be only a passive income. So farmers lose their interest in taking risk in farming and leave the land fallow.

4.4. The income from NRIs.

The district has large populations who have migrated to foreign countries. There are many family members outside the country. In many cases the heads of the family are employed in foreign countries. So they get a fairly big income from the jobs in those countries. These farmers are less interested in farming as they are earning from other jobs. So these people keep their farm land fallow and it leads to the increase of cultivable wasteland of the district.

4.6 Agriculture: A degraded occupation

Agriculture is not a statuesque symbol. It is considered as a job which is taken by a person if he does not get any other job. So no one is interested in doing this job. The main cause for considering this occupation as low is that it gives no life security. There is the high risk of failures and also it depends on season. The income from the agriculture sector is less when compared to all other sectors. In all other sectors it is sure that they get income while in agriculture if any failure occurs there will be only loss, not to speak of income. Pensions and other benefits are given in other sectors while, the agricultural sector lacks those privileges. Pension granted in this sector is very little and is inadequate.

Government considers other sectors with sympathy while the agricultural sector is neglected. The traditional land owners or farmers who have only a little plot of land to cultivate are considered as big land lord or 'bourshwasie' by the community. They are not sympathized even at the face of their loss. Compensations and other funds demanded by the labour unions from those farmers are high. For them the agriculture becomes a burden.

These insecurities faced by the farmers forced them to consider this occupation as degraded or insecure or undependable. They usually try to shift their occupation to other areas leaving their fields. They usually keep their agricultural land without farming and thus keep it as waste land.

V. CONCLUSION

Agriculture is "the deliberate effort to modify a portion of Earth's surface through the cultivation of crops and the raising of livestock for sustenance or economic gain". (Rubenstein, J.M.). This activity fully depends on the attitude of the farmers. The attitude of farmers is controlled by certain factors. These factors are either push or pull factors. The pull factors attract the farmers while push factors forces farmers to move out of this activity. The factors like low returns, attractive incentives in other sectors, status degradation are push factors. These factors affect the farming of Alappuzha district in Kerala. These had been a factor in increase of waste or idle land in Alappuzha district recently.

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