

INFORMATION NEED AND PROBLEMS FACED BY THE BANANA GROWERS IN BALOCHISTAN

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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to understand the information needs and problems faced by farmers in Balochistan. The sample size of the study was 80 respondents. Data collection was carried out using an interview schedule designed in line with the study's objectives. The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The findings revealed that farmers sought various types of information: improving shelf life (90%), value chain and processing of bananas (70%), effective pesticides (61.25%), pest management practices (90%), and marketing information (55%). Regarding information sources, all farmers relied on their self-experience, about 87% on fellow farmers, approximately 58% on pesticide dealers/agents, and 38.75% on extension agents. Farmers were also asked about the problems they faced in banana farming. According to the responses, 61.25% were concerned about the short shelf life of bananas, 76.35% reported the absence of processing units in the area, 68.75% had irrigation water-related problems, 67.5% were affected by changing weather conditions, and 63.75% cited a lack of soil testing facilities. There is a need to update the farmers' knowledge regarding innovative technologies and practices to help them adopt these methods and earn higher incomes. It is the responsibility of the extension staff to equip farmers with the latest knowledge and address their problems. Additionally, the government can assist farmers by installing processing plants and providing subsidies on various inputs.

Key Words: Livelihood, Farmers, Production, Problems.

INTRODUCTION

Banana, or *Musa paradica* L., is members of the Musaceae family and among the world's oldest fruits, as well as a crucial horticulture product. It takes anywhere from nine to twelve months of growing a banana plant before you can pick the first bunch of bananas. Pakistan grows bananas more than any other fruit. A total of 154,800 tons are produced from 34,800 hectares of land (Ali et al., 2017). Worldwide, bananas are grown mostly in tropical and subtropical

climates. It is the second most important fruit crop in Pakistan after mango Rajput et al., (2015). In Pakistan, Banana is grown over an area of 30,000 ha (Muhammad et al., 2021). Sindh (province) accounts for 87% of the country's total land area, with KPK, Punjab, and Balochistan following closely after. The entire area of banana crops in Sindh was approximately 32,200 hectares, yielding 127,400 tons (or 87% of the country's total). Of this, 5121

hectares (or 25.9% of the total) were in the district of Khairpur in northern Sindh (Nabi et al., 2020).

There are many problems in Pakistan's banana sector, spanning from production to post-harvest yield management and export promotion (Amin et al., 2008). Pakistani banana growers have been outperforming their regional rivals, like India, in terms of production and yield, by a factor of seven. Poor crop management, inexperience, postharvest losses, replanting diseased suckers, and an absence of healthy, disease-free suckers were among the numerous causes of Pakistan's low yield (Ali et al., 2017). The other major reason of low production is usually farmers contacted different sources of information i.e. male farmers typically rely on fellow farmers, friends, pesticide dealers, and public extension workers for information but their production is not increased as they don't act on the information accordingly (Nazam, 2000).

Many farm families in Pakistan rely on banana farming for their livelihood. Therefore, there is a need to improve the production and profit of the farmers. This can be achieved by providing information on best practices for managing fruit production effectively. Additionally, it is essential to identify the sources of information, their reliability, and the problems faced by the farming community. Based on this information, recommendations can be made to farmers, the government, and extension field staff. Keeping in view this, the present study was designed.

Objectives

- To check the information need of banana growers
- To identify the problems faced by the banana growers
- To compile suggestion based on the findings of the study

Methodology:

This chapter addresses the tools and methods of the data collection and analysis's.

Selection of study area:

Balochistan Province was selected conveniently as the researcher was the residential of the area, moreover there was also limited resource and lack of funding and time the area was selected for the study. Moreover, Labella district was chosen purposively as it has the large number of banana producers as

compare to other districts. Two tehsils of the study district i.e. Uthal and Bela were chosen Randomly.

Population of the study

All the farmers those are producing the banana in the study area constituted the population of the study.

Sample Size

For the purpose of data collection, an appropriate sample size was necessary. As it was impossible to contact every farmer of the area. Therefore, an appropriate sample size was drawn. For this purpose, 80 farmers were selected randomly from the selected teshils, 40 from each selected thesil

Preparation of an Interview Schedule (Data Collection)

For the purpose of data collection, an interview schedule was prepared while keeping in view the objectives of the study. For ensuring its compatibility of Interview Schedule, it was pretested in the actual filed condition.

Validity and Reliability of an Instrument

Face validity and content validity was performed by the experts of Institute (UAF), correction were made in the interview schedule according to the recommendation of the experts.

Moreover, for ensuring the reliability of an instrument, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated by Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), the calculated value was 0.83 that depicts the Interview schedule was highly reliable.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected by the researcher in face to face interaction with the farmers. Before the data collection, repot was developed by the researcher with the farmers. The questions were explained to the farmers in their local language for ensuring the clarity of question and its answer.

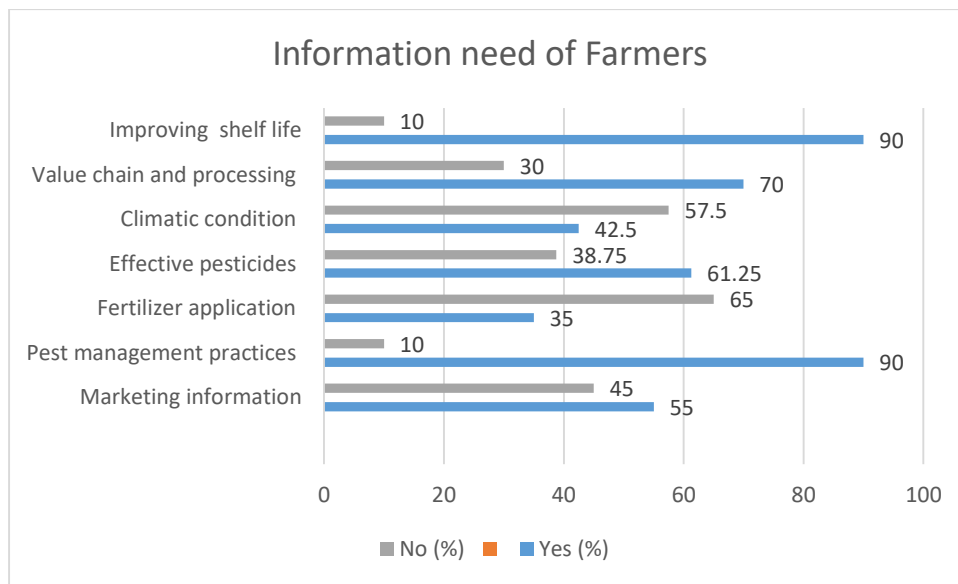
Process of data collection too about two weeks, after the collection of data, it was analyzed by using Statistical Software named as Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Different statistical values were computed by this software.

Results and Discussion

This section included different values of statistics computed by the researcher, discussion and comparison of the current practices with other researchers' findings.

The farming community is often less educated and primarily relies on traditional farming methods. They sometimes need information about orchard management. With this in mind, they were asked what type of information they required.

Information need



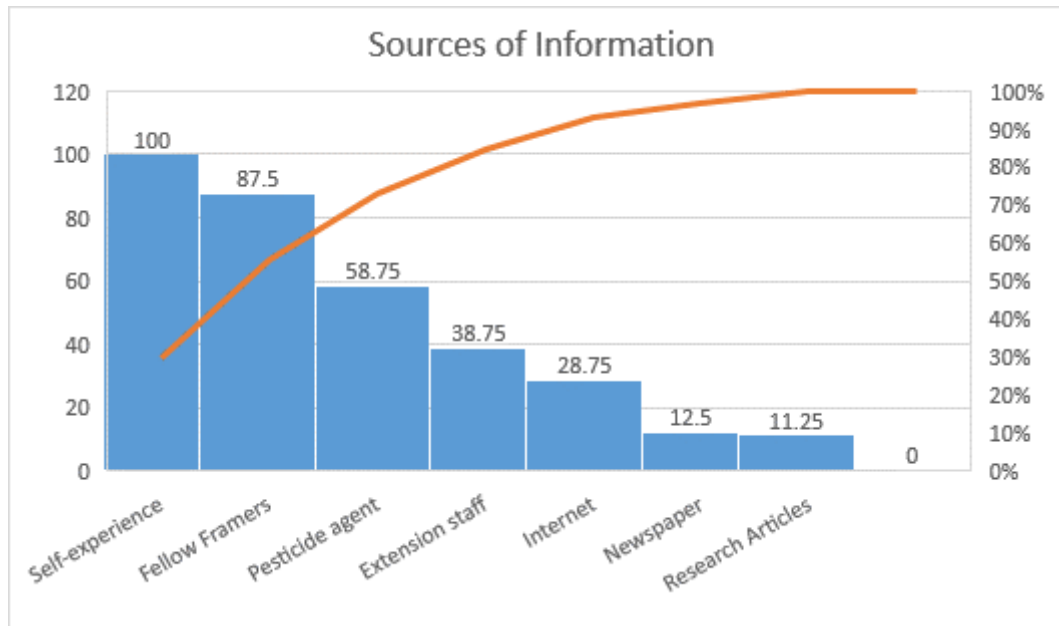
It is often observed that the farming community is illiterate or has less education, especially in remote areas that lack basic facilities and resources to afford education. Keeping this in view, every respondent was asked about the information they needed regarding banana farming. An overwhelming majority (90%) of the farmers were seeking information on improving the shelf life of bananas. Farmers revealed during discussions that the fruit deteriorates after a few days, resulting in a loss of taste and odor. Similarly, another overwhelming majority (90%) of the farmers stated that the most useful information for them was pest management. Furthermore, they also expressed a desire to know the names of different types of insecticides and pesticides to control insect pests.

On the other hand, a large majority (70%) reported that due to the short shelf life, they were looking for information on the value chain and processing of bananas so that they could earn a better income by selling different products and by-products of bananas. Farmers were worried because they were selling the banana fruit at cheaper rates due to the short shelf life.

A similar study conducted in Tamil Nadu by Doss et al. (2020) found that farmers were searching for information regarding weather, land preparation, varietal information, transplanting time and methods, fertilizer management, weed management, irrigation management, and plant protection methods. Bhat et al. (2017) found that in Kashmir, there is a need to provide apple producers with informal training in processing, preservation, and off-season production so that they can better handle business issues, increase farm size, and profitability. Vengatesan et al. (2019) found that banana growers have voiced a great deal of interest in the following technology areas: post-harvest management, weed control, varieties, plant growth regulators, plant protection, and fertilizer management.

Sources of Information

After asking the farmers what type of information they required, they were also inquired about the sources they consulted for obtaining this information. The responses of the farmers is mentioned below.



As indicated above, farmers were looking for information, so every respondent was also asked about their sources of information. Every farmer reported relying on their own experience for orchard management. The second major source of information was fellow farmers, as reported by 87.5% of respondents, who said they contacted fellow farmers when they could not solve orchard-related issues.

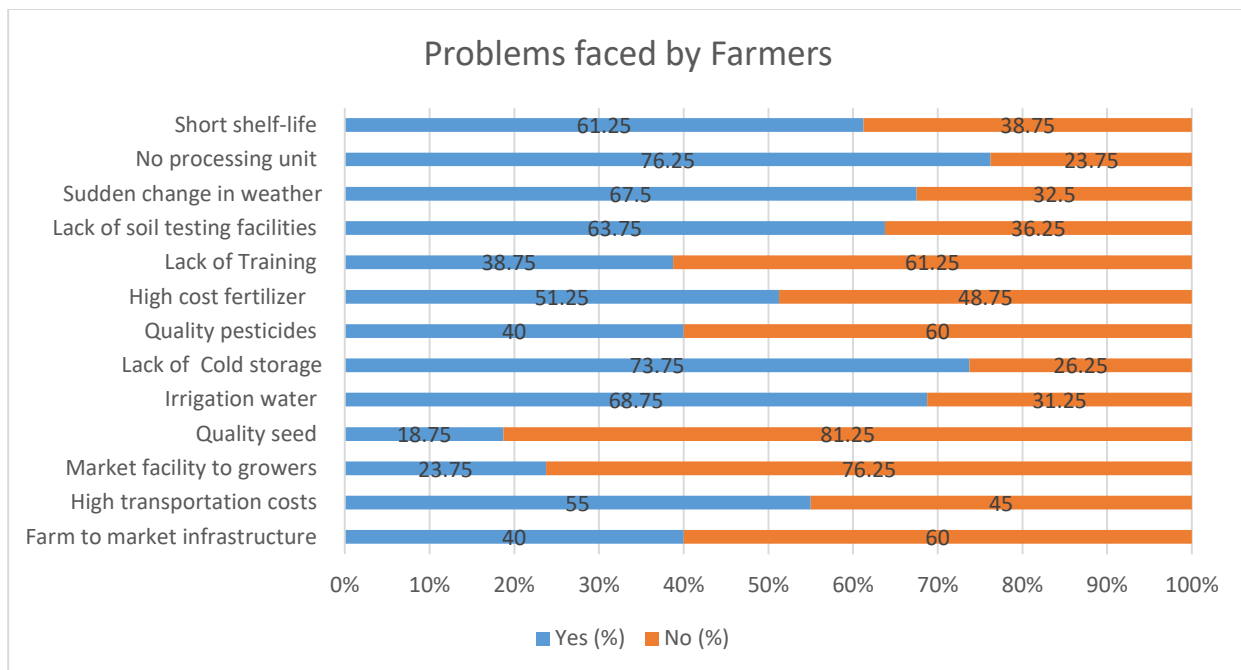
Farmers further added during discussions that different pesticide companies are established in their area, and their sales officers visit the area. Farmers reported receiving information from these pesticide agents regarding orchard management. In some areas, extension agents were also delivering information, as reported by 38.75% of farmers. Moreover, the internet, newspapers, and research articles were used by a few farmers, although most were illiterate or had low education levels.

During the discussion, it was revealed that the preference for information sources varies from person to person. Parrey & Hakeem (2015) reported that a decline in the utilization of information sources is caused by a lack of awareness. To raise awareness, the study recommended tailoring the choice of media sources to the specific needs of the intended audience. Educated farmers prefer the internet and print media, while illiterate or less educated farmers

prefer interpersonal communication for information exchange. According to their findings, 26.5% of farmers use TV, 78.5% listen to the radio, and 36.25% read newspapers. Additionally, 26.5% read farm magazines, while only 2% use cell phones for internet access to get agricultural and orchard maintenance information. Ravichamy et al. (2017) highlighted that the availability of information is necessary for good production, as poor yield and returns from farming were most felt by farmers due to a lack of timely and accurate information. Communication channels are crucial for the timely broadcast of farm information, which is essential for making important decisions. Mwombe et al. (2014) found that farmers used different information sources to stay informed about the production and marketing of their bananas: 83.6% listen to the radio, 19.8% watch television, and 31% use their mobile phones.

Problems faced by farmers

Farming is not an easy task, as there are many fluctuations that farmers face daily. These fluctuations might occur in the market, weather, price of inputs, etc. These fluctuations lead to production-related problems. Therefore, farmers were asked about the nature of the problems they face while managing banana orchards. Their responses are given below.



Farmers were inquired regarding the challenges they face in banana farming. A majority (61.25%) of the farmers identified the short shelf life of the fruit as a significant limiting factor in income generation. Additionally, 76.25% of farmers reported lacking a processing unit, and 73.75% lacked access to cold storage facilities in their area. Consequently, farmers are often compelled to sell their produce at lower rates due to these constraints. Other major issues highlighted by farmers included sudden weather changes (67.5%), absence of soil testing facilities (63.75%), and irrigation problems (68.75%). During discussions, farmers emphasized that these issues need resolution, or else they may consider alternative income sources, such as cultivating orchards of other fruits or pursuing different economic activities. A study conducted in Bangladesh by Kamal et al. (2014) reported similar challenges. They identified low output prices, lack of storage facilities, high input costs, absence of advisory services, poor quality suckers, and insufficient access to loans and credit for purchasing inputs as key issues faced by farmers. Saleem et al. (2015) also reported similar problems in their study. According to them, the major problems faced by farmers included lack of technical knowledge, finance, and costly inputs. Other problems were low-quality pesticides, natural calamities, etc. Ghafoor et al. (2008) reported that the farmers in Toba Tek Singh faced the problems of high input prices, lack of irrigation, lack of finance,

distant markets, adulteration in pesticides, and unavailability of fertilizer. From this, it can be concluded that in Pakistan, the nature and severity of farmers' problems are more or less similar.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study's findings suggest that

- The primary limitation to achieving high banana production is the limited availability of high-yielding variety (HYV) suckers. So, suckers should be conveniently delivered to farmers' doorsteps at an affordable price and within an acceptable timeframe.
- To enhance banana production, it is crucial to provide timely provision of fertilizers and insecticides to producers at reasonable prices.
- To secure reasonable market pricing for bananas, it is necessary to increase the availability of storage facilities and build diverse food processing enterprises.
- Efforts should be made to enhance transportation and marketing infrastructure in the research area.
- The farmers in the study area strictly adhered to traditional production practices. Extension services should be delivered to farmers in order to expedite banana output.
- Subsidy should be provided to the farmers on different inputs by the government,

moreover, soil testing facilities should also provide to the farmers

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