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A study on the career aspirations and decision-making of agriculture students

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Abstract

The contribution of Agriculture to India's Economic development and Rural Livelihoods along with ensuring Food Security, cannot be overstated, especially as this sector now employs about 43–46% of the national work force and contributes 16–18% to the Gross Domestic Product. But this has brought to focus the sector specific skills gap emerging from the apprehensions of the growing tendency of agriculture graduates to opt out of farming related careers. With this backdrop, the study attempts to capture the reasons behind, inter alia, the choice of agriculture as a discipline, study, differentiated by gender and region, understand the correlation between the monthly family income and the subsequent employment aspirations post-graduation, understand the barriers to agriculture graduates making farming a profession and to understand the challenges confronting agriculture graduates. Primary data collection was done by way of a structured questionnaire, and 100 agriculture graduates were surveyed to obtain a response about the demographic profile, the socio-economic background, the career aspirations, and the perceived constraints in the agriculture-based career. Results show, with regard to the educational background, and with a government secure job on the horizon, students in agriculture perceive there is job security, and there are gender and regional differences that are very distinct. In the survey, the greater majority expressed the preference to be engaged in government service or in a post graduate study and the least preference was expressed towards direct agricultural practice.

Keywords: Agriculture education, career aspirations, agriculture graduates, agribusiness entrepreneurship, farming career preference, youth in agriculture

Introduction

Farming is essential to India's economic development, food sovereignty, and rural populations' survival. Additionally, it is the nation's largest employer, employing roughly 43.5% of the labor force (World Bank, 2023) ^[15], with an estimated 46% of workers engaged in farming and related activities during the 2023–2024 period (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation [MoSPI], 2024) ^[12]. Therefore, it is noteworthy that although though the country employs a large number of farmers, their economic contribution only accounts for 16–18% of the GDP (Government of India, 2024). This low economic contribution highlights the country's persistent structural problems of low productivity, unstable income, and poor economic returns.

At the global level, agriculture Provides almost 25% of all jobs, but this number is reducing yearly as most economies are moving towards a more manufacturing and services-oriented model (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2023. Roser & Ritchie, 2023) ^[9, 14]. In developing countries, agriculture employs a large portion of the population, but the younger members of the population quickly lose interest in farming and look for jobs in other sectors. This

phenomenon of declining interest in farming jobs is noticeable all over the world and is equally evident in the population of graduates from the agriculture faculties.

The last few years have seen a growth in the number of students enrolling in agricultural universities in India, following the development of agricultural educational systems by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR, 2023) ^[11]. However, many of these graduates Chapman have shown a strong inclination toward government services, further studies, and other sectors completely unrelated to agriculture, which is a worrying manifestation of the sector's leadership and innovation. With the dynamic and rapidly changing world due to evolving technologies, the agricultural sector is devoid of innovative thought due to these graduates opting for other fields and sectors.

The career aspirations of these students are influenced by a number of factors, both socio-economic and institutional. These include the family's socio-economic status, the level of income in the family, the job opportunities available and, in particular, the social perception of agriculture as a profession. Paradoxically, students that come from farming

families have the most direct contact with the practice of agriculture, and therefore, direct experience with all these factors, many of them see agriculture and in particular farming as a profession that is financially very risky and far less socially desirable than other employment where workers are placed on salary. Farming as a career also presents significant structural challenges including insufficient access to land, large financial outlays (especially in the beginning), inadequate (or even absent) institutional support (especially in the form of social security), and high levels of financial security. These challenges tend to dissuade graduates from even considering farming as a viable career at all similar challenges have been reported globally, with international assessments highlighting ageing farmer populations and declining youth participation in agriculture.

In light of this, the current study analyzes demographic traits, socioeconomic status, and professional motives to investigate the career goals and decision-making practices of agriculture students. The study investigates reasons for selecting agricultural education, desired career paths after graduation, willingness to engage in farming, and perceived limitations connected with agriculture-based careers using primary data gathered using a structured questionnaire. In order to encourage more youth involvement in farming, agribusiness entrepreneurship, and related agricultural sectors, this study intends to contribute to evidence-based policy formation and educational planning by identifying important factors impacting career choices.

Objectives

1. To study the reason for choosing agriculture across area and gender.
2. To examine the relationship between monthly household income and most preferred career path after completion of degree.
3. To study the challenges faced by agriculture graduates in farming careers.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The present study adopted a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the career aspirations and decision-making patterns of agriculture students. The research design was appropriate because it allowed for the systematic description of the economic characteristics of students studying agriculture. It also enabled the examination of relationships between variables such as gender and household income. Students pursuing degrees in agriculture participated in the study. To guarantee a broad mix of participants, students were chosen from both rural and urban locations. Students obtaining postgraduate degrees in agriculture were the main focus. A total of one hundred students were selected to collect information. The sample size of one hundred students was considered sufficient to conduct statistical analyses such as contingency table analysis and chi-square tests to examine the relationship between categories, such as area of residence and preferred career choice.

Methods of Data Collection

A purposive sampling method was utilized to choose

participants who were presently enrolled in agriculture-related degree programs and were able to provide knowledgeable insights about career ambitions and decision-making. This approach guaranteed that only pertinent participants with firsthand experience in agricultural education took part in the research. The research relied on primary data gathered through a structured and pre-tested questionnaire. The survey was given directly to the participants via personal interaction and online methods when needed. Before data gathering, participants were made aware of the study's aim, and the confidentiality of their answers was guaranteed.

The survey was developed to gather information concerning

- Socio-demographic traits (sex, location of residence, household income)
- Justifications for selecting agriculture as an area of study
- Chosen professional trajectory following degree attainment
- Readiness to engage in agriculture as a profession
- Identified obstacles in agriculture and farming-related professions

Study Variables

- **Independent factors:** Sex, location (rural/urban), household earnings, family history
- **Dependent variables:** Motivation for selecting agriculture, desired career trajectory, perceived obstacles in farming professions

The gathered data were coded, organized, and examined utilizing Microsoft Excel and Jamovi. The subsequent statistical instruments were utilized:

- Analysis of frequency and percentage to outline socio-economic traits and response spread.
- Analysis of contingency tables to investigate associations among categorical variables.
- Chi-square (χ^2) test for assessing the significance of the relationship between:
 - a) Region and gender along with explanations for selecting agriculture
 - b) Family earnings and chosen professional route upon graduation

Results and Analysis

Reason for choosing agriculture across area and gender.

Table 1: Area and gender-wise distribution of main reasons for choosing agriculture ($n = 132$)

Main reason for choosing agriculture	Rural – Male	Rural – Female	Urban – Male	Urban – Female	Total
Interest in agriculture	18	7	4	3	32
Family background	10	3	8	7	28
Easier admission/available seat	11	1	9	2	23
Government job	14	4	7	4	29
Agribusiness/start-up	8	2	6	4	20
Total	61	17	34	20	132

Table 1 displays the breakdown of respondents based on their primary motivation for selecting agriculture,

categorized by area (rural and urban) and gender. In total, the most frequently cited reason is interest in agriculture (32 responses), with government job orientation (29) and family background (28) following. Simpler admission/seat availability accounts for 23 responses, whereas agribusiness/start-up interest (20) is the least chosen reason. Among rural males, the primary motivations are interest in agriculture (18) and the desire for government jobs (14). Rural women also express interest in agriculture (7) more often than other motives. In city regions, Easier

admission/Available seat (9) and Family background (8) stand out among urban males, whereas urban females display relatively consistent answers regarding family background (7) and Government job (4). Consequently, motivations driven by interest and employment seem to be more significant overall, while entrepreneurial motivation is relatively less prevalent across different areas and genders

Statistical Test (Chi-Square Test of Independence)

Table 2: Contingency analysis of main reasons for choosing agriculture across area and gender

Contingency Table						
Main reason for choosing agriculture		"Area & gender"				Total
		Rural Male	Rural Female	Urban Male	Urban Female	
Interest in agriculture	Observed	12.00	7.00	8.00	5.00	32.0
	Expected	11.39	5.82	8.48	6.30	32.0
	% within row	37.5%	21.9%	25.0%	15.6%	100.0%
Family background	Observed	10.00	6.00	5.00	7.00	28.0
	Expected	9.97	5.09	7.42	5.52	28.0
	% within row	35.7%	21.4%	17.9%	25.0%	100.0%
Easier admission/available seat	Observed	7.00	5.00	9.00	2.00	23.0
	Expected	8.19	4.18	6.10	4.53	23.0
	% within row	30.4%	21.7%	39.1%	8.7%	100.0%
Government job	Observed	10.00	4.00	7.00	8.00	29.0
	Expected	10.33	5.27	7.69	5.71	29.0
	% within row	34.5%	13.8%	24.1%	27.6%	100.0%
Agribusiness/start-up	Observed	8.00	2.00	6.00	4.00	20.0
	Expected	7.12	3.64	5.30	3.94	20.0
	% within row	40.0%	10.0%	30.0%	20.0%	100.0%
Total	Observed	47.00	24.00	35.00	26.00	132.0
	Expected	47.00	24.00	35.00	26.00	132.0
	% within row	35.6%	18.2%	26.5%	19.7%	100.0%

The contingency table presents the distribution of respondents' main reasons for choosing agriculture across area and gender categories (Rural Male, Rural Female, Urban Male, Urban Female). For each reason, the table compares the actual responses given by students (observed values) with the values that would be expected if area and gender had no influence on the choice of reason (expected values). It also provides percentage distribution within each row, indicating how responses are spread across the four demographic groups. This comparison allows examination of whether variations in reasons for choosing agriculture are systematically associated with area and gender or whether they occur randomly.

Hypothesis Formulation

Null Hypothesis (H_0)

There is no association between area/gender (Rural Male, Rural Female, Urban Male, Urban Female) and the main reason for choosing agriculture. In other words, the reason for choosing agriculture is independent of area and gender.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1)

There is an association between area/gender and the main reason for choosing agriculture. That is, the reason for choosing agriculture depends on area and gender.

Test Results

Table 3: Chi-square test of association between area–gender categories and main reasons for choosing agriculture

χ^2 Test			
	Value	df	p
χ^2	7.28	12	0.838
N	132		

Degrees of Freedom (df = 12)

$$= (\text{rows} - 1) \times (\text{columns} - 1)$$

$$= (5 - 1) \times (4 - 1)$$

$$= 4 \times 3$$

$$= 12$$

Chi-Square Value ($\chi^2 = 7.28$)

This statistic measures the difference between observed and expected frequencies under the assumption that area and gender have no effect on the reason for choosing agriculture.

$$\chi^2 = 7.28, df = 12, p = 0.838, n = 132$$

Interpretation

The chi-square results indicate the p-value is 0.838, far

above the common value of significance 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis still stands accepted. Since the p-value is bigger ($0.838 > 0.05$), we fail to reject H_0 at level. This, indicates that there is no statistically significant proof to determine that area and gender are linked to the primary reason for selecting agriculture among the participants in this sample. In this instance, the p-value is significantly above the threshold level, unlike borderline results, suggesting that the differences noted between rural–urban and male–female groups are probably the result of random variation rather than a systematic connection.

This study did a Chi-square test of independence to examine the relationship between area/gender and major reason for choosing agriculture. The test gave a χ^2 of 7.28 on 12 degree of freedom, with $p = 0.838$. While there is

some variation in response frequencies across demographic groups according to the contingency table- *e.g.*, relative higher endorsement among rural men- the chi-square test confirms the lack of statistical significance. Thus, the null hypothesis of independence cannot be rejected, which indicates that the determinants of agricultural selection in this region are similar across gender and area in this region. This indicates that motivational elements like personal interest, family impact, and governmental job inclination function consistently across demographic groups in the study population.

Relationship between monthly household income and most preferred career path after completion of degree

Table 4: Distribution of respondents across income groups and preferred career aspirations ($n = 100$)

Income Group	Govt. job (Agri-related)	Govt. job (Non-agri)	Private sector	Agribusiness/Start-up	Own farming	Higher studies (MSc/PhD)	Higher studies (Abroad)	Total
≤ ₹1.5 lakh	9	2	2	4	2	4	3	26
₹1.5–3 lakh	8	4	2	1	2	7	1	25
₹3–6 lakh	6	2	1	3	1	5	2	20
₹6–10 lakh	4	3	2	2	2	5	1	19
> ₹10 lakh	1	2	1	2	2	1	1	10
Grand Total	28	13	8	12	9	22	8	100

Table 4 shows the distribution of respondents according to their preferred career path after earning a degree, broken down by monthly household income. A government job relating to agriculture is often the most popular career choice, with 28 responses. Pursuing further education (MSc/PhD) comes in second with 22 responses. Government employment (non-agricultural) comes in second with 13 responses, followed by agribusiness/start-up with 12, Farming (9 responses), the private sector (8 responses), and studying abroad (8 responses) are relatively less favored choices. Among participants earning less than ₹1.5 lakh, there is a significant preference for Government jobs (Agri-related) (9) and Higher studies (4). In the ₹1.5–3 lakh category, Government jobs (Agri-related) (8) and

Higher studies (7) are the most preferred options. In the ₹3–6 lakh and ₹6–10 lakh categories, Government jobs (Agri-related) and Higher studies still attract significant interest. In the top income bracket (>₹10 lakh), responses are more uniformly spread, showing a comparatively lower concentration in any one category. Consequently, government jobs—especially in agriculture—and advanced education stand out as the leading career goals among various income levels, whereas involvement in personal farming and private sector positions are relatively less desired choices.

Statistical Test (Chi-Square Test of Independence)

Table 5: Contingency analysis of income group and preferred career path after degree completion

Contingency Table									
		What is your most preferred career path after completing your degree							
income Group		Govt. job (Agri-related)	Govt. job (non-agri)	Private sector	Agribusiness/start-up	Own farming	Higher studies (MSc/PhD)	Higher Studies (Abroad)	Total
<1.5 lakh	Observed	9	2	2	4	2	4	3	26
	Expected	7.28	3.38	2.080	3.12	2.340	5.72	2.080	26.0
	% within row	34.6%	7.7%	7.7%	15.4%	7.7%	15.4%	11.5%	100.0%
1.5-3 lakh	Observed	8	4	2	1	2	7	1	25
	Expected	7.00	3.25	2.000	3.00	2.250	5.50	2.000	25.0
	% within row	32.0%	16.0%	8.0%	4.0%	8.0%	28.0%	4.0%	100.0%
3-6 lakh	Observed	6	2	1	3	1	5	2	20
	Expected	5.60	2.60	1.600	2.40	1.800	4.40	1.600	20.0
	% within row	30.0%	10.0%	5.0%	15.0%	5.0%	25.0%	10.0%	100.0%
6-10 lakh	Observed	4	3	2	2	2	5	1	19
	Expected	5.32	2.47	1.520	2.28	1.710	4.18	1.520	19.0
	% within row	21.1%	15.8%	10.5%	10.5%	10.5%	26.3%	5.3%	100.0%
>10 lakh	Observed	1	2	1	2	2	1	1	10
	Expected	2.80	1.30	0.800	1.20	0.900	2.20	0.800	10.0
	% within row	10.0%	20.0%	10.0%	20.0%	20.0%	10.0%	10.0%	100.0%
Total	Observed	28	13	8	12	9	22	8	100
	Expected	28	13	8	12	9	22	8	100
	% within row	28.0%	13.0%	8.0%	12.0%	9.0%	22.0%	8.0%	100.0%

The distribution of respondents' preferred job paths following degree completion across various monthly household income groups (<1.5 lakh, 1.5–3 lakh, 3–6 lakh, 6–10 lakh, and > 10 lakh) is shown in the table. The table contrasts the observed frequencies (actual student responses) for each income group with the expected frequencies that would arise if household income had no bearing on profession preference. The table also shows the percentage distribution within each income group, showing the distribution of preferences across many economic sectors, including government positions, private sector employment, agribusiness, own farming, and higher education. This comparison makes it possible to determine if the observed trends exist regardless of income level or if changes in chosen career pathways are consistently linked to variations in household income.

Hypothesis Formulation

Null Hypothesis (H_0)

There is no association between monthly household income and the most preferred career path after completion of degree. In other words, career preference is independent of household income.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1)

There is an association between monthly household income and the most preferred career path after completion of degree. That is, career preference depends on household income.

Test Results

Table 6: Chi-square test of association between income group and preferred career path

χ^2 Test			
	Value	df	p
χ^2	11.0	24	0.989
N	100		

Degrees of Freedom ($df = 24$)

$$\begin{aligned}
 &= (\text{rows} - 1) \times (\text{columns} - 1) \\
 &= (5-1) \times (7-1) \\
 &= 4 \times 6 \\
 &= 24
 \end{aligned}$$

Chi-Square Value ($\chi^2 = 11$)

This statistic measures the difference between observed and expected frequencies under the assumption that household income has no effect on preferred career path.

$$\chi^2 = 11, df = 24, p = 0.989, n = 100$$

Interpretation

The chi-square test findings indicate that the p-value is 0.989, which is substantially greater than the usual significance limit of 0.05. As a result, the null hypothesis (H_0) is still accepted. At the five percent significance level, we do not reject the null hypothesis because the p-value (0.989) is higher than 0.05. This suggests that there is no statistically significant proof to determine that monthly household income relates to students' preferred career choices in this sample. The p-value is significantly above the threshold level, indicating that the differences noted

among income groups are probably a result of random variation instead of a consistent income-related effect on career selection.

A chi-square test of independence was performed in this study to investigate the connection between monthly household income and the preferred career choice following degree completion. The chi-square statistic from the test was 11 with 24 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.989. Although the contingency table displays attention differentials and higher preferences in government jobs as well as education for various income levels, the statistical test suggests a lack of statistical significance. To that extent, the null hypothesis of independence is not rejected, that is, favoured job preferences do not significantly differ across income brackets in our sample. This suggests that household income is not the only factor influencing agriculture students' career aspirations, such as their preference for government jobs, higher education, starting their own businesses, or farming. Instead, these goals appear to be fairly similarly distributed across various economic origins, suggesting broader structural, educational, or motivational factors influencing career decisions.

To study the challenges faced by agriculture graduates in farming careers

Table 7: Distribution of Reported Challenges Influencing Career Choice in Farming

Option/Challenge	Number of Selected Individuals	Percentage
Family support	19	13.67
Safety and transport issues	13	9.35
Land restriction	35	25.18
Financial support	37	26.62
Farming seen as a male profession	12	8.63
Would not choose farming as a career	23	16.55
Total	139	100

The results shown in Table 7 highlight the main obstacles that agriculture graduates must overcome in order to pursue a career in farming. The total number of responses exceeds the number of people polled because respondents were permitted to choose more than one response. Lack of funding is the most frequently mentioned constraint (26.62%), closely followed by land shortage (25.18%). Both of these represent more than half of all responses, suggesting that structural related constraints as well as resource related constraints are the key barriers to pursuing a farming career. A sizeable proportion of respondents (16.55%) indicated that they would definitely not choose farming as a profession, indicating an attitude of uncertainty or insufficient long-term dedication to primary agricultural production. Moderate reactions were noted regarding family support matters (13.67%), indicating the impact of home encouragement or discouragement on career choices. Reduced percentages were noted for safety and transport concerns (9.35%) and the view that agriculture is regarded as a male-dominated field (8.63%), suggesting that social and mobility issues, although existent, are relatively less significant than economic obstacles. The findings indicate that financial constraints and land access are the primary

obstacles that agriculture graduates encounter when starting farming, while socio-cultural aspects serve as a secondary yet significant factor.

Discussion

The results of the study show that demographic factors like area and gender do not have a significant impact on the reasons for selecting agriculture as an area of study. The motivational factors seem to be similar across rural and urban areas, as well as male and female categories, with interest in agriculture and job-related reasons topping the list. This points to the fact that systemic labor market cues and institutionalised expectations have a more definitive role to play in influencing agricultural education choices than rural-urban and male-female differences.

Also, household income does not have a significant impact on the desired career path after graduation. Government service and higher education are the most sought-after career options, with independent farming being less preferred. The lack of differentiation based on income suggests that agricultural career choices are not simply a matter of economic necessity. Instead, it is reflection of the collective perception that government service is a stable, secure, and socially acceptable career choice. This observation fits well with the larger paradigm of the Indian higher education system, where the acquisition of credentials and subsequent employment within the system are seen as a means of social mobility.

However, the fact that the preference for direct farming is relatively low despite enrolment in agricultural education indicates a structural discrepancy between educational engagement and participation in primary production. The interpretation of perceived constraints supports this implication. Financial constraints and lack of access to land are identified as the most significant factors against the preference for farming as a professional career. These structural elements lower the long-term viability of farming as a career choice and raise the entrance risk. Economic and resource-related limitations appear to be more significant than socio-cultural variables, despite their relevance. Overall, the results show that the economic feasibility of farming as a career is the issue rather than a lack of interest in agriculture as a topic. Instead of being directly involved in farming, agricultural education has evolved into a means of obtaining employment and pursuing further education. In this regard, entrepreneurial participation in farming is often avoided in favour of risk reduction and economic security. From a policy point of view, the issue of generational renewal in agriculture cannot be addressed by increased participation in agricultural institutions alone. Structural policies, such as improved access to institutional credit, facilitation of land leasing schemes, graduate start-up initiatives, and risk management approaches, need to be implemented to ensure that participation in agricultural education translates into agricultural entrepreneurship. Otherwise, the human capital that participates in agricultural education is likely to remain in the institutional and non-farm sectors.

Conclusion

The present study examined the reasons for choosing agricultural education, the relationship between household

income and career choices, and the major barriers influencing engagement in farming among agriculture students. The results show that demographic factors such as region and gender do not influence the reasons for choosing agriculture as a study field. Similarly, household income does not influence the preferred career path after graduation. Government service and higher education were found to be the most preferred career options, while farming was found to be relatively less attractive. The major barriers to farming were structural, primarily related to financial constraints and lack of access to land rather than socio-cultural factors. These results suggest that agricultural career choices are more influenced by institutional labor market conditions and economic risk than demographic factors and income-related factors.

The study also shows that agricultural education, as it is currently practiced, is increasingly becoming a pipeline to employment and higher education rather than to farming. This reflects a shift in the career orientation of youth in the agricultural sector. To improve youth engagement in agriculture and improve the participation in primary production, interventions should target entry barriers.

In order to better understand job outcomes, future research should use longitudinal designs to track graduates and expand their coverage to encompass several states. It is important to incorporate behavioral factors like self-efficacy, entrepreneurship, and risk perception. A mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative methods would also help clarify the reasoning of agriculture students.

In summary, the long-term sustainability of agricultural human capital not only requires an expansion of educational capacity but also the creation of an enabling environment that makes farming a secure, viable, and competitive career choice for trained graduates.

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