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Constraints of organic tea production encountered by small tea growers of Assam

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ABSTRACT

Tea is considered as one of the main agricultural produce in India. The Tea industry is directly contributing to the economic development of the country. Assam is the only region in the world that has its own variety of tea, called *Camellia Assamica*. Tea industry in Assam is 200 years old by now. The growing awareness of health and environment as well as consumer preference has led to the production of organic tea in India. Over the decades, inorganic tea cultivation practices using synthetic fertilizer and pesticides has jeopardized the soil health resulting in instability in yield and reduced product quality. Such threat has led to the emergence of organic farming practices in tea cultivation. The present study was conducted in the Dibrugarh district of Assam. Twenty-five (25) Small Tea Growers from each village (8 nos.) were selected by using simple random sampling method. A total number of two hundred were finalized for the study. The collection of data was done by using structured interview schedule. Inadequate training was found to be reported by 100 percent of the respondents and fluctuation of high market price was a constraint felt by majority of respondents 65.00 percent.

Keywords: Small Tea Growers (STGs), Organic Tea, Tea Board of India (TBI)

Introduction

Tea is the ancient beverage and most popular drink in the world. Tea is cultivated in around 35 countries in the world and the major exporters are China, Sri Lanka, India, Kenya, Vietnam, and Indonesia (Ganguli 2014) [1]. Tea is considered as one of the main agricultural produce in India. The Tea industry is directly contributing to the economic development of the developing country like India. Tea is primarily grown in fifteen states of India, of which Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala are the major producer accounting for 97 percent of country's total production (Guha, 2018) [2]. The cultivation of tea on small holding is comparatively a recent development. Since the late seventies and early eighties century many rural unemployed educated youth started cultivating tea in small scale in the available highland areas. The concept of small tea cultivation in home stead gardens and to sell the green leaf to the existing big factories for enhancing farm income was initiated during the seventies but the increase of small tea gardens began in early 90's and peaked in late 90's. Small tea cultivation significantly contributes to the country's total tea production along with the big commercial estates. Presently the small growers segment is very important as this sector produces over 44.06 percent of India's tea as per the statistics of Tea board of India (TBI, 2017). As per the membership of various Small Tea Growers association in different states the number of small holders in India currently stands for 176741 (TBI 2018).

The aim of Organic small tea growers is to produce tea naturally without the application of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Organic farming is an eco-friendly farming process where farming is done with the help of natural resources without abolishing the soil health. In India, organic tea farming began in 1986 in Darjeeling and later expanded to Assam and South India (Baruah *et al.*, 2019) [3]. Currently, in international market the demand for organic tea is around 3 million kg per year. As the price of organic produce is high in the market which benefits the small tea growers in uplifting their socio-economic status. Organic small tea cultivation requires the adoption of soil and water conservation measures. Mulching is done in order to revive the soil before cultivating organic tea. Pest and diseases control in organic tea is basically preventive but if infestation or diseases occurs than non-toxic biological methods are applied like the use of Neem products, light traps etc. Weeding in organic tea cultivation is done manually which requires a large number of labours, ultimately providing opportunity in employment generation.

Certification of organic tea requires different measures by different certifying agencies. The requirement varies from agency to agency such as INDOCERT, Onecert Asia Agri Certification Private Limited, IMO control etc. India's first organic certification body is INDOCERT which conforms to the National Standards for Organic Products. The certificate is issued by testing centres accredited by APEDA. Many of the Small Tea Growers has started producing tea naturally under the label of "Natural Tea" which does not require organic certification. Since certification cost a fortune to the growers who are yet to be financially stable.

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Organic Framing relies on natural parameters of soil and its surroundings. To convert from conventional farming to organic farming, farmers faced many constraints due to lack of knowledge and skills. There are many issues regarding the marketing channels that are faced by the Organic Small tea Growers. The production cost of organic tea is higher than that of inorganic tea. The benefit from the production will not be immediate and small tea growers need financial assistance for first few years.

Methodology

A list of Small tea Growers was prepared along with the help of Tea Board officials. From the prepared list 200 Small Tea Growers were selected using simple random sampling. The objective of the study was to enumerate the constraints faced by Organic Small Tea Growers. Based on the consultation with scientist and reviewing liter-

atures, lists of 20 constraints which are encountered by the Organic Small Tea Growers were identified. During data collection, respondents were asked to reveal the constraints encountered from the list of items. The score of two and one were given for “Yes” and “No” responses respectively. Percentage analysis was used to bring the major constraints faced by the Organic Small Tea Growers and was given rank from highest to lowest.

Findings

Constraints analysis is an important component of extension research. Without analysing the constraints, it is impossible to diffuse the related technology into the farming community.

The identified constraints have been presented under the sub-head namely production and processing constraints, technological and marketing constraints in the following table.

Table I. Distribution of respondents according to the constraints faced in production of organic tea

Sl.No.	Statements	Percentage	Ranked
Production and processing constraints			
1	Non availability of credit in the appropriate time	50.00	I
2	Shortage of labour	22.50	II
3	Insufficient subsidy	20.00	III
4	Land patta problem	17.50	IV
5	High rate of interest by the credit sources	05.00	V
6	Extremity of weather	02.50	VI
7	High wages demand from the skilled labour	02.50	VI
Technological constraints			
1	Inadequate Knowledge for use of latest technologies	62.50	II
2	Inadequate technical advice from the experts	10.00	IV
3	Lack of timely visit of extension personnel/ scientists	40.00	III
4	Inadequate training	100.00	I
Marketing constraints			
1	Non availability of incentives for quality tea supply	15.00	VIII
2	Lack of adequate transport facility	47.50	III
3	Lack of minimum support price/ Low margin	20.51	VII
4	Delay in payment	40.00	IV
5	High market price fluctuation	65.00	I
6	Unethical competition	20.00	VI
7	Lack of quality control measures	62.50	II
8	Exploitation of Middle man	35.00	V
Other constraints			
1	Certification problem	75.00	I

Data from Table I disclosed that under production and processing constraints 50.00 per cent of the respondents had faced problem because of non-availability of credit in appropriate time (ranked I). Shortage of labour was a big constraint as felt by 22.50 percent of the respondents (ranked II) followed by insufficient subsidy by 20.00 percent of the respondents.

The reason for non-availability of credit in the appropriate time might be due to high rate of interest by the credit sources. Apparently for shortage of labour might be due to the fact that the tea garden labourer are mostly engage in big tea estates which cause the shortage of labour in small tea gardens. The conversion period from inorganic to organic tea farming is 3 years which is a long amount of time for poor farmers who wish to convert without earning in those years. The subsidy for the period of conversion is insufficient for the small tea growers.

Under technological constraints, inadequate training was found to be reported by 100 percent of the respondents and was ranked I. Since organic tea making is a delicate job hence proper training is needed for quality production of organic tea. Apparently, inadequate knowl-

edge for use of latest technologies was a constraint faced by 62.50 percent of the respondents (ranked II). The reason being due to inadequate training and lack of timely visit of extension personnel/ scientist which was felt as constraint by 40.00 percent of the respondents (ranked III).

The data from Table I also reveals that fluctuation of high market price was a constraint felt by majority of respondents 65.00 percent and was ranked I. Lack of quality controlled measures was ranked II by 62.50 percent of respondents followed by lack of adequate transport facility by 47.50 percent of the respondents which was ranked III. Another problem faced by the organic small tea growers was to acquire organic certification (75%).

The reason for market price fluctuation is because there is no proper guideline or fixed price for organic tea. Hence, there are many unethical competition to increase the production of leaves. Due to the uneven growth of organic tea gardens without proper monitoring of authorities it has become impossible to keep a track on every grower. Consumers are blindly buying tea just by knowing organic label or

natural label which does not always have proper quality control measures.

Conclusion

Small tea cultivation significantly contributes to the country's total tea production along with the big commercial estates. Small Tea Growers are facing problems in organic tea production due to insufficient training, as they have started growing tea naturally without sufficient training which has led to the lack of knowledge in managing the tea garden properly. In the processing of organic tea which is handmade, basically requires proper skills in operations like steaming, rolling, panfrying, drying and making tea that will affect the final product (green tea) and ultimately affect the cost of the product. Without sufficient knowledge in the productions of green tea by using latest technology requires expert advice and proper guidance that can increase the value of the end product in the market. The data in the study shows that the price fluctuation of the green leaf which was basically due the unethical competition. Many Small Tea Growers have shown concern about unethical competitions as some of the growers are mixing inorganic green leaf to increase the quantity of the product and selling it at a high price. These kind of incidents happens because of the unregulated growth of the small tea sector. There is a requirement of strict quality testing of every farmers produce and proper inspection from time to time by the Tea Board officials that can prevent these unethical competitions. Government should formulate policies to regulate the price of the green tea so that every Small Tea Growers can benefit from it. Small tea growers are facing problems in obtaining organic certification as the process requires a vase number of steps and also cost a fortune which requires to be renewed every year. Most of the Small Tea Growers are selling their tea in the label of natural tea because to obtain organic certificate they are charged with a huge amount of money which is difficult to pay for the growers who have just started cultivating organic tea. In view of this there is a re-

quirement of initiatives from the Government to open certification agency and provide the Small Tea Growers with Organic certificate at a subsidy rate.

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