Family Farming Pattern among the Households of Progressive Farmers in Central Kerala

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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted among the progressive farmers of Thrissur District of Central Kerala to analyse the existing pattern of family farming practices among the households of selected progressive farmers. Majority of the respondents (60%) were of the age between 40-60 years. It was noted that only negligible per cent of younger generation was fully depending on farming as primary occupation. Majority of the senior citizens were found to be engaged in farming activities and younger generation was engaged in off-farm activities. Most of the families were headed by males (95%) and they fully participated in farming activities. A little more than one-fourth of the farm women (30%) reported that they fully participated and half the percentage of the farm women (50%) partially participated in farming activities. A little more than one-third of the children (37%) expressed that they partially participated in farming activities. There is a scope for creating interest among the children (37%) towards farming who were partially engaged in farming activities. It could be concluded that majority of the progressive farmers (77%) utilised family labour at the maximum extent possible even though majority of the adult family members were found to be engaged in off-farm activities.

Key words : *Family farming, Progressive farmers, Participation, Family labour utilisation*

Family farming is a traditional system of farming practice for the food as well as the livelihood security of the entire population of this world. Family farming preserves not only traditional food products but also contributes to a balanced diet in turn responsible for the healthy population, sustainable use of natural resources and protects the world's agro-biodiversity. Family farming represents an opportunity to boost local economies aimed at social protection and well-being of communities. When the trend of family farming started fading away throughout the world, the United Nations announced 2014 as International Year of Family Farming (IYFF), aiming to focus world attention on the significant role of family farming in eradicating hunger and poverty, providing food security and nutrition, improving livelihoods, managing natural resources, protecting the environment and achieving sustainable development in rural areas. Improving the situation of family farmers is a burning need, and as they produce an estimated 70 per cent of the world's food, it is an issue that affects all of us. The 2014 International Year of Family Farming aimed to create a better understanding of family farming and support the development of pro-family farming policies. (Bruil, 2014). In this context, a study was conducted among the progressive farmers of Thrissur district of Central Kerala to analyse the existing pattern of family farming practices among the households of selected progressive farmers.

METHODOLOGY

Thrissur district of Central Kerala was selected purposively for conducting the study. Sixty progressive farmers were selected randomly who had received awards for their outstanding performance in various farming activities at panchayat, block, district and state level from the Department of Agriculture over a period of ten years. A well structured interview schedule was used to collect data from the selected progressive farmers during March 2014. Simple statistical tools were adopted to analyse the data. Based on the analysis of collected data the results are presented below:

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From the Table 1, it was noted that majority of the respondents (60%) were of the age between 40-60 years. It was found that 58 years was the average age of the respondents. More than one-third of them (37%) belonged to the age group of above 60 years. Among them majority were retired couples managing farming activities with minimum support from their children who were otherwise engaged in either off-farm activities or employed in government/ private/gulf countries. Among the families of progressive farmers, even 78 years old elders were found actively involved in farm activities. Only negligible per cent of younger generation was fully depending on farming as primary occupation.

More than fifty per cent of the respondents had an experience of above 30 years in farming. Less number of respondents had below 30 years of experience which indicated that majority of the senior citizens were engaged in farming activities and younger generation was found to be engaged in off-farm activities. Ploeg (2013) reported that the family farm was the place where experience accumulated. Learning took place and knowledge was handed over, in a subtle but strong way, to the next generation.

Analysis of the level of education among the respondents indicated that 60 per cent of them were

Table 1
Profile characteristics of progressive farmers (n=60)

S. No.	Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Age	Below 40 years	02	03.00
		40-60 years	36	60.00
		Above 60 years	22	37.00
2	Experience	Below 10 years	04	06.00
		10-20 years	10	17.00
		20-30 years	14	23.00
		Above 30 years	32	54.00
3	Education	Secondary	11	18.00
		Higher secondary	36	60.00
		Graduation	12	20.00
		Post graduation	01	02.00
4	Family type	Joint	16	27.00
		Nuclear	44	73.00
5	Possession of land area	Below 1 ha	04	07.00
		1 to 2 ha	14	23.00
		Above 2 ha	42	70.00
6	Occupation	Farming alone	32	54.00
		Farming + Government service	11	18.00
		Farming + Pension	09	15.00
		Farming + NRIs	06	10.00
		Farming + Business	02	03.00

educated up to higher secondary. Around 20 per cent of the farmers were educated up to graduation. It was found that majority of the respondents (73%) belonged to nuclear type of family and the remaining farm families were in joint family. Utilisation of the labour of senior healthy family members were found among joint families. More than seventy per cent of the families (73%) possessed the land area of above 2ha. Among them majority were cultivating in leased land. Below one fourth of the families (23%) possessed the land area between 1ha and 2ha.

With regard to the major occupation of the families, more than half the percentage of them (54%) depended on faming alone. Less than one fifth of the families (18%) engaged in Farming + Government service as their livelihood option. Few families depended on Farming + Pension (15%) and Farming + Non Resident Indians (NRIs) (10%) for earning their livelihood.

Table 2
Distribution of family members of progressive farmers according to their nature of participation in farming activities (n=60)

S. No	Nature of relationship in the family	No. of members in the family	Percentage of members in the family	Nature of participation					
				Full participation		Partial participation		Non participation	
				No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1	Grand parents	16	27.00	10	17	02	03	04	07
2	Father	57	95.00	46	77	05	08	06	10
3	Mother	56	93.00	18	30	30	50	08	13
4	Adult members	76	127.00	03	05	16	27	57	95
5	Children	42	70.00	-	-	22	37	20	30

Analysis of data presented in the Table 2 revealed that just above one-fourth of the families (27%) were joint families and 17 per cent of the families were getting assistance from healthy grand parents who were fully involved in farming activities. Most of the families (95%) were headed by male members. Among, more than three- fourth of the families (77%), farmers took major responsibilities and reported full participation in farming activities. A little more than one-fourth of the farm women (30%) were found to be fully participated and half the percentage of the farm women (50%) partially participated in farming activities. Most of the adult members (95%) expressed their non participation in farming since they were engaged in either non-farm activities or employed in government/ private/gulf countries. It was disappointing to note that majority of the adult members (youth) who were in the stage of contributing at the maximum to their vocation were not involved in farming activities even among the families of progressive farmers. Hegde (2014) pointed that the most disastrous trend was on the younger generation farmers who did not have the required experience and skills to manage the soil and other resources. It was not just the passing of skills, but was a culture of learning which required constant attention and deep rooted attachment to the land, which was apparently lacking in the younger generation. They did not see agriculture as a desirable occupation to pursue.

A little more than one-third of the children (37%) partially participated and little less than one-third of the children (30%) reported their non-participation in farming activities. More than one-third of the children (37%) were found to assist their parents during holidays and out of school hours. There is a scope for creating interest among the children (37%) towards farming who were partially engaged in farming activities. Family farming relies upon family members with different labour power, skills, capacities, opportunities and constraints, which vary in part depending upon gender and age. These characteristics influence intra-household relations, which in turn influence the distribution of resources, roles and responsibilities (Crowley, 2013).

Table 3
Utilisation pattern of family labour among the families of progressive farmers (n=60)

Sr. No.	Utilisation pattern of family labour	Frequency	Per cent
1	Full extent	15	25.00
2	As far as possible	31	52.00
3	Least extent	12	20.00
4	Never	02	03.00

Analysis of data from Table 3 showed that one-fourth of the progressive farmers utilised family labour and just half the percentage of progressive farmers (52%) utilised family labour whenever possible, below one-fourth of the farmers (20%) utilised family labour to the least extent and negligible percentage of them never utilised family labour in farming activities. It could be concluded that majority of the progressive farmers utilised family labour at the maximum extent possible even though majority of the family members were found to engage in off-farm activities. Family farm is the place where the family provides the main part of the labour force. (Ploeg, 2013)

Table 4
Distribution of progressive farmers based on the possession of various farm based components (n=60)

Sr. No.	Type of enterprise	Frequency	Per cent
1	Vegetables	54	90.00
2	Cash Crops	50	83.00
3	Fruit Crops	46	77.00
4	Rice	32	64.00
5	Tuber crops	29	48.00
6	Poultry	28	47.00
7	Spices	22	37.00
8	Medicinal plants	17	28.00
9	Timber trees	15	25.00
10	Dairy	15	25.00
11	Floriculture	12	20.00
12	Psciculture	08	13.00
13	Fodder	06	10.00
14	Biogas plant	03	05.00
15	Goat rearing	03	05.00
16	Duck farming	03	05.00
17	Apiculture	02	03.00
18	Piggery	01	02.00
19	Mushroom	01	02.00

It was identified that 47 combinations of enterprises with nineteen farm based components among the sample of sixty progressive farmer households. From the Table 4, it can be derived that most of the progressive farmers (90%) cultivated vegetables viz; cowpea, amaranthus, bhendi, bitter gourd, cucumber, brinjal, chillies etc. Majority of the households (83%) were having cash crops such as coconut, nutmeg, rubber, arecanut, cocoa, cashew etc. More than three-fourth of the farmers (77%) cultivated fruit crops. Major fruit crops were: banana, mango, jack, guava, papaya etc. Rice as the staple food of Kerala, was cultivated by 64 per cent of the progressive farmers. Just below half the percentage of the progressive farmers possessed poultry (48%) units and only one –fourth of the farmers (25%) had dairy units.

Helen and Smitha (2013) found fruit crops in all the households except only one among the surveyed families of Palakkad district. Majority of the households (78.33%) were having cash crops, vegetables (73.33%) and spices (65.00%) as the major intercrops in coconut based homesteads. Poultry (55 per cent) and dairy (43.33%) were the livestock enterprises adopted by majority of the households. Similar trend was observed in Thrissur district with less percentage of raising various crops and allied enterprises.

CONCLUSION

Majority of the senior citizens were engaged in farming activities and younger generation was found to be engaged in off-farm activities. It was noted that only negligible per cent of younger generation was fully depending on farming as primary occupation. Most of the senior citizens were retired couples managing farming activities with minimum support from their children who were otherwise engaged in either off-farm activities or employed in government/ private/gulf countries. Most of the families were headed by males, took the lead role and fully participated in farming activities. Majority of the adult members were not involved in farming activities. A little more than one-third of the children (37%) expressed their partial participation in farming activities. There is a scope for creating interest among the children (37%) towards farming who were partially engaged in farming activities. It could be concluded that majority of the progressive farmers utilised family labour at the maximum extent possible even though majority of the family members were found to engage in off-farm activities. It was identified that 47 combinations of enterprises with nineteen farm based components among the sample of sixty progressive farmer' households. Vegetables followed by cash crops were the major crops cultivated by majority of the progressive farmers.

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