EMERGING *OPPERTUNITIES OF PEASANTS IN NEW ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT: A STUDY IN DHEMAJI DISTRICT OF ASSAM.*

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ABSTRACT: In modern times when commercialization is becoming the order of the day, economic consciousness is increasing even among traditional farmers. The farmers of Dhemaji district of Assam are also reacting to the new wave of crop cultivation on commercial scale. The major finding of present study also confirms that propensity to adopt an enterprise ultimately depends upon its profitability. Therefore, the best alternative for marginal and small farmers of the study area lies in the adoption of vegetables farming and fruit farming, however production of fruit crops by small farmers is ruled out because these need high amount of capital as well as entail long gestation period. Hence, the potential option for upliftment of marginal and small farmers of the dhemaji district lies in their shift to vegetable farming.

Keywords: Commercialization, marginal, small, farming, enterprise

1. INTRODUCTION:

For decades, Agriculture in developing countries has operated in a context of low global prices for food products coupled, in many countries, with unfavorable domestic environment .Low levels of Investment in Agriculture , inappropriate policies, thin and uncompetitive markets, weak rural infrastructure, inadequate production and financial services, and a deterioration natural resources base have all contributed to creating an environment in which it has frequently been risky and unprofitable for small holders to participate in agricultural markets.

Assam is a state of small land holders. With the implementation of various land reform policies as well as fragmentation of land holding during last two decade the proportion of marginal (having land up to 1 hectare) and a small (1 to 2 hectares) land holding have increased respectively. Agriculture, being the mainstay of rural population, shall continue to play an important role in the rural economy of Assam. Besides being the main sources of Income, this sector has great potentialities for providing employment opportunities to the rural population. But the availability of land is limited as would be evident from the fact that average operational land holding is 1.10 hectare, and average land holding is only 0.63 hectare (2011-12). With this resources constraint, the question is whether available land and other resources will be able to generate enough income consistent with the requirements of increase in the size of farm labour force. Under the traditional farming system it will not be possible to provide a satisfactory rate of increase in income and employment opportunities. Because of the traditional cropping pattern (e.g. food grains).

Therefore, keeping in view of these, the best option for Assam framer is to select such cropping pattern which will ensure more production, income and employment per unit of available land resources .During the last decade it has been found beyond doubt that the productivity of land can be increased manifold by raising cash crops like fruits and vegetables. Fruit and vegetable is not only more remunerative as compared to food grain crops but is also labour intensive and thus helps in absorbing ever growing size of farm labor force in the rural areas. It has been found that fruit production is the most profitable compared to cropping

systems in the state. But this avocation is capital intensive and has a long gestation period which the economically wreakers sections of the farmers with very small land holding cannot afford to wait. However vegetable is another viable option which such farmers can usefully consider. This enterprise is already becoming more and more popular particularly in areas, where the climatic condition are suitable and the transportation of the high perishable produce to the markers is not that difficult and expensive. Further, vegetables crops in general yield much higher returns per unit of land than any other crop –group. Hence adoption of this enterprise on small and marginal holding where labour is not a problems is well justified. These not only provide maximum employment to the family labour during the year but also tend to reduce income inequality in rural areas of the state.

Keeping in view the overall farming system, an attempt has been made in this paper to study the economics of various alternative farm enterprises and to bring out the best potential option available to the marginal and small farmers.

1.1 METHODOLOGY.

The production of vegetables and fruits are considered to be one of the main markets enterprises of Assam. The sample units have been selected from the district of Dhemaji .From the district, Blocks and village /clusters were selected on the basis of probability proportional to the area under fruit and vegetables crops. In each selected village cluster 12 vegetable farmers were selected randomly, and then these farmers were classified into three groups Viz. Marginal up to 1 ha. Small 1-2 ha. and medium 2-4 ha. of operational holding. The numbers of large size (above 4 ha.) of farmers is insignificant and hence these were left out of the present study(see table -1) .The data for these farmers was collected by cost accounting method , to estimate the economics of different enterprises , Marketing cost calculated in the present study includes all the expenses borne by farmers from production to selling of the produce.

Table 1 GENERAL CROPPING PATERN OF SAMPLE FARMERS

Sl. No	Particulars	Marginal Farms (Up to 1 ha.)	Small farms (1-2 ha)	Medium Farms (2-4 ha)
1	No. of farm	53	34	07
2	Average operational holding	0.69	1.31	2.17
3	Average family size	5.1	5.8	6
4	Average farm workers: Male Female	 1.70 1.0	 1.57 1.23	 1.97 1.6
5	Literacy percentage: Male Female	 71.89 60.21	 78.9 66.21	 79.84 68.17
6	Occupational distribution (%) Agriculture: Male Female Business & service: Male Female	 63 94 22 2	 61 86 29 1	 50 68 43 3

Sources: Field survey:

Detail of social- economic profile given in Table 1. Reveal that the family size, numbers of farms workers, literacy percentage of male and female is positive related to the size of the farm. The proportion of farm workers engaged in agriculture production varies from 63 to 50 respectively. However, the proportion of workers engaged in off farm activities is more on medium farm as compared to marginal categories.

Table2. LAND RESOURCES AND CROPPING PATERN OF SAMPLE FARMERS.

(Percentage)

Particular	Marginal farmer	Small farm	Medium farms
Total Land	100.00 (1.24)	100.00 (2.17)	100.00 (4.11)
Cultivated land	47.30	45.67	56.22
Uncultivated land	52.7	54.33	43.67
Net area sown	45.76	44.12	54.35
Irrigated land*	34.78	43.56	31.56
Proportion area under:			
Cereals	44.81	48.01	36.38
Pulses	5.78	7.98	10.09
Oilseeds	6.34	8.56	7.98
Vegetables	38.79	30.89	40.05
turmeric	2.97	3.31	3.98
Others crops	1.31	1.25	1.52
Total crops	100	100	100

*Percentage to cultivated land

Sources: field survey

Land resources of sample farms presented in Table 2 reveal that the proportion of uncultivated land is highest on small farms. Followed by marginal and medium farm. Out of total cultivated land the proportion of irrigated land is also more on medium farm. The cropping pattern depicted in table 2 reveals that the share of food grain crops is more on small and marginal farms while vegetables account for larger share on medium farms.

2. ECONOMICS OF ALTERNATIVE FARM ENTERPRISES.

The economic analysis of the performance of different sample farm is based on the data in Table 3.and 3a.The data shows that in spite of large area under food grain crops the return are almost the lowest on all size of farms as compared to other crop groups. The output of food grains produced on all categories of farms is so small that the question of marketable surplus does not arise. Hence no marketing cost is involved in the production process of these crops on sample farms. The net return from cereals on small farms is observed to be the highest while from pulses and oilseeds the net return are more on marginal farms. The cash crop grow by sample farmers is turmeric which gives net return of Rs.1330 per hectare on small farm and Rs.540 on marginal farms.

The per hectare return from vegetables are more on marginal farms compared to small and medium farms. Similarly, the per unit returns from fruits on marginal farms are also the highest

Table3. Cost and return from cultivation of cereals, oilseeds and other crops on sample farms. (Rs./ farm)

Items	Marginal farms	Small farms	Medium farms
(i) Cereals			
Cost A	1470	2674	4087
Cost B	-	-	-
Cost C	1470	2674	4087
Gross returns:	1820	3184	4842
Net return: Over cost –C	350	510	755
(ii) Pulses and oilseed			
Cost A	145	330	750
Cost B	-	-	-
Cost C	145	330	750
Gross returns	230	470	1050
Net returns: Over cost –C	85	140	300
(iii) Other Crops(Turmeric)			
Cost A	440	1850	870
Cost B	45	120	60
Cost C	485	1970	930
Gross returns	758	3300	1470
Net returns;			
Over cost –C	273	1330	540

Note: Cost A= Cost of cultivation, Cost B= cost of marketing and cost C = Total cost of production. Sources: Fields survey.

Table 3a. Cost and return from cultivation of Vegetable and fruits on sample farms.

Items	Marginal farms	Small farms	Medium farms
VEGETABLES			
Cost A	1540	1870	3580
Cost B	345	789	745
Cost C	1885	2659	4295
Gross returns	3600	4500	7645
Net returns:			
Over cost – A	1060	2630	4065
Over cost - C	1715	1841	3350
FRUITS			
Cost A	210	740	2400
Cost B	80	550	1050
Cost C	290	1290	3450
Gross returns	1200	3500	7500
Net returns			
Over cost –A Over cost - C	990 910	2760 2210	5100 4050

Sources : field survey.

3. INTER –FARM SIZE PROFIT –LEVEL OF ALTERNATIVE FARM ENTERPRISES.

The details of profit generated from different enterprises on sample farms given in Table 4 reveal that net returns per unit of land devoted in vegetables and fruit. On the other hand the small farmers are getting higher returns from food grain crops as compared to other categories of farmers. The profit levels on marginal farms are higher in vegetables and fruits enterprises. On the whole, the profit levels of different enterprises being performed by sampled farmers clearly indicate that production of high value cash crops such as vegetables gives higher net return to marginal farmer while for small medium farmers fruits gives more profit as compared to other enterprises.

Table 4. Profit level of different enterprises on sample farms. (Rs/ Farms)

Types of enterprises	Marginal farms		Small farms		Medium farms	
	Rs.	%	Rs.	%	Rs.	%
1.Cereals +Pulses + Oilseeds+ other crops	408	13	940	19	760	9
2.Vegetables	1715	57	1841	37	3350	41
3.Fruits	910	30	2210	44	4050	50
4. All (Farms income)	3033	100	4991	100	8160	100

Sources: Field survey

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS.

Under the changing economic environment, when commercialization is becoming the order of the days, farmers are reacting to the new wave of crop cultivation on commercial scale. The major finding of present study also confirms that propensity to adopt an enterprise ultimately depends upon its profitability, because of the even greater dominance of small holding in the Dhemaji district compare to other district, the farmers have to be motivated to shift to more remunerative cropping patterns from the traditional, less profitable ones. The study found that vegetable farming is more profitable on marginal and small farmers of the district .Hence, the potential option for up liftment of marginal and small farmers of the district lies in their shift to vegetable farming. It is suggested that farmers should be given incentive in terms of cheap credit, quick and cheap transportation, irrigation facilities, quality seeds, marketing assistance and assured floor price to encourage the farmer to shift to more remunerative and profitable cropping pattern.

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