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Problems Encountered by Castor Farmers in Cultivation & Marketing and Suggestions to Overcome the Problems in *Mahabubnagar District, Andhra Pradesh, India*

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Introduction

Castor (*Ricinus communis* L.) is an important non-edible oilseed crop cultivated around the world because of the commercial importance of its oil and is grown especially in arid and semi arid region. India is the world's largest producer of castor seed and meets most of the global demand for castor oil. In India Gujarat is major castor state followed by Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh.

The role and significance of agriculture in Indian economy hardly needs any emphasis. It is the backbone of the Indian economy and despite concerted industrialization in the past six decades; agriculture occupies a place of pride. It is the major source of livelihood and employment to around 65 per cent of the total work force in the country besides providing raw material for half of its industrial output. Being the largest industry in the country it accounts for one fourth of GDP but the share of agriculture in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is sharply declining from 34.69 per cent in 1980-81 to 25.21 per cent in 1997-98 to 12.3 per cent in 2009-10. (Source: Central Statistical Organisation, Department of Statistics, GOI).

Castor is a poor man's crop cultivated in Mahabubnagar district and is taken up on large scale by most of the farmers in dry land areas where water is scarce and farmers suffer due to various reasons one among many is yields are low.

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Castor is the major crop in the district occupying a prominent place among the dry land farmers and many problems compound the farmers and if we diagnose the reasons for low yields, it is evident that the farmers in their anxiety to reap rich harvest have been using many local varieties and private hybrids which are not suitable to the district and are poor yielders. In this context high yielding hybrid PCH-111 was released from the local research station, RARS, Palem in the district. This hybrid has spread very quickly not only to the interior pockets of the district but also to other castor growing districts and non-traditional areas because of its unique features like high yielding variety, comes up well even when drought situations prevail during crop growth period, wilt resistant, bold seed type etc. Farmers are reaping good returns due to the hybrid and area under Rabi castor is also increasing in the district

In the light of above facts, it was felt necessary to study the problems faced by castor farmers in cultivation & marketing and suggestions to overcome these problems in Mahabubnagar district of Andhra Pradesh.

Materials and Methods

The study was undertaken in Mahabubnagar district of Andhra Pradesh by adopting Ex-post facto research design. Kothakota, Dharoor, Pebbair, C.C.Kunta mandals were selected purposively. Kanimetta, Konnur, Shankampeta and Konnur thanda were selected from Kothakota mandal. Duppalli thanda from C.C.Kunta, Kancharaopalli thanda & Mallaipally from Pebbair mandal and Bureddypally from Dharoor mandal. Thus eight villages were selected purposively where PCH-111 OFT's and FLD's were given to the farmers. List of castor farmers to whom PCH-111 trials were given was obtained. Ten farmers were selected from Kanimetta, Shankampeta, Duppalli thanda and Bureddypally, five each were selected from Konnur, Konnur thanda, Kancharaopalli thanda & Mallaipally purposively, thus comprising a total of 60 respondents. On the basis of land holding, the castor farmers were divided into three categories namely marginal farmers (less than 5 acres of dry land), small farmers (5-10 acres), and big farmers (more than 10 acres) thus 25 marginal, 20 small farmers and 15 big farmers were selected purposively. Keeping the objectives of the study in view, a structured pretested interview schedule was prepared. With the help of the structured schedule, the castor farmers were asked to express the problems faced in marketing and cultivation and their suggestions to overcome the problems.

Results and Discussion

A perusal of Table 1 indicated that major problems expressed by castor farmers in cultivation were price manipulation by commission agents (95.00 %), high cost of critical inputs (93.33 %), lack of remunerative prices to the produce (91.66), high cost of fertilizers (88.33 %), scarcity of labour during peak operations (86.66 %), high cost of labour (85.00 %) were given I, II, III, IV, V and VI ranks followed by inadequate availability of critical inputs (83.33 %), poor or spurious quality of the inputs (81.66 %), non-availability of hybrid seed to cater the needs of all the farmers in the district (80.00 %) and non-availability of credit on time (78.33 %) which were given subsequent ranks

Price manipulation by commission agents was the major problem expressed by castor farmers. After bringing the produce to the market, the commission agents were forming into a group or syndicate and were lowering the prices whenever huge quantities of produce came into the market but selling the same product at a higher price to the buyers from Gujarat. This secret understanding between them made the farmers to sell their produce at throw away prices many times resulting in losses to the producer. The result was in conformity with Babu *et al.* (2004).

Table 1: Problems encountered by castor farmers in marketing & cultivation

(n = 60)

S. no	Particulars	Overall farmers		Rank
		F	P	
1.	Selection of soil and preparatory cultivation in your field			
a)	Do you feel that soil is not fit for hybrid cultivation	35	58.33	
b)	Non-availability of improved implements to till the land	42	70.00	
c)	Adequate quantity of FYM is not available	44	73.33	
d)	Lack of moisture to prepare seed bed during kharif	37	61.66	

e)	Land is unproductive so castor is taken up	45	75.00	
2.	Critical inputs			
a)	High cost of critical inputs	56	93.33	II
b)	Inadequate availability of critical inputs	50	83.33	VII
c)	Lack of money for buying critical inputs	40	66.66	
d)	Poor / spurious quality of the inputs	49	81.66	VIII
3.	Varieties and availability			
a)	Lack of knowledge about hybrid varieties	30	50.00	
b)	Non availability of hybrid seed to cater the needs of all the farmers	48	80.00	IX
4.	Information source utilization			
a)	Lack of market information from extension personnel	36	60.00	
b)	Lack of knowledge about hybrid varieties	42	70.00	
c)	Lack of knowledge of recommended practices	44	73.33	
d)	Lack of training	35	58.33	
5.	Seed			
a)	Poor germination of seed	32	53.33	
b)	Seed material is impure & diseased	23	38.33	
c)	Lack of technical guidance about seed treatment	29	48.33	
6.	Labour constraint			
a)	Inadequate family labour	35	58.33	
b)	Inadequate farm labour	27	45.00	
c)	High cost of labour	51	85.00	VI
d)	Unskilled labour	15	25.00	
e)	Scarcity of labour during peak operations	52	86.66	V
7.	Fertilizers			
a)	High cost of fertilizers	53	88.33	IV
b)	Travel long distance to buy fertilizers	44	73.33	
8.	Credit facilities			
a)	Insufficient finance to agriculture	44	73.33	
b)	Non availability of credit on time	47	78.33	X

c)	Inadequate institutional finance	45	75.00	
d)	Cumbersome institutional financial procedures	46	76.66	
e)	High rate of interest	46	76.66	
f)	Less time for repayment of loans	45	75.00	
9.	Inter-culture operations			
a)	Non-availability of suitable implements	31	51.66	
b)	Poor mechanization in the district	35	58.33	
10.	Plant protection			
a)	Lack of knowledge about pests & diseases	44	73.33	
b)	High cost of plant protection chemicals	42	70.00	
c)	Lack of knowledge about preparation of spray solution	43	71.66	
d)	Non-availability of plant protection equipments	35	58.33	
e)	Improper diagnosis	32	53.33	
f)	Fraudulent methods adopted by shop dealers for pesticides	45	75.00	
11.	Storage facilities			
a)	Lack of cold storage units/ godowns	40	66.66	
b)	Deterioration of quality during storage	39	65.00	
c)	High establishment cost of storage units	41	68.33	
12.	Marketing			
a)	Lack of remunerative prices to the produce	55	91.66	III
b)	Lack of procurement facilities by the govt	41	68.33	
c)	Poor marketing practices	45	75.00	
d)	Fluctuation of prices	46	76.66	
e)	Price manipulation by commission agents or middlemen	57	95.00	I
f)	Markets are far off from the place of production	35	58.33	
g)	Inadequate transport facilities to the markets	33	55.00	

The private shop dealers were hiking the prices of critical inputs like fertilizers, plant protection chemicals etc when the farmers need them mostly. High cost of critical inputs were lowering the profit margins hence farmers were also feeling that the prices were uneconomic. Non-availability of the labour at the time of peak requirement is also increasing the cost of production as the labour was engaged at higher wage rates. Majority of the

farmers expressed spurious quality of the inputs, non-availability of hybrid seed in adequate quantities, non availability of credit on time as the major problems.

Table 2: Suggestions given by the castor farmers

(n = 60)

S. no	Particulars	Overall farmers		Rank
		F	P	
1.	Selection of soil and preparatory cultivation in your field			
a)	Cultivate hybrids in good soil	34	56.66	
b)	Provide improved implements on hire to the farmers	35	58.33	
c)	Provide adequate quantity of FYM during crop season	44	73.33	
d)	Take up hybrids only under assured irrigation	37	61.66	
e)	Cultivate castor in productive land	45	75.00	
2.	Critical inputs			
a)	Timely supply and regulation of costs & supply of critical inputs on subsidy	55	91.66	II
b)	Provide adequate quantity of critical inputs	49	81.66	VIII
c)	Credit for buying critical inputs	40	66.66	
d)	Frequent checking for quality of the inputs	45	75.00	
3.	Varieties and availability			
a)	Provide knowledge about hybrid varieties	30	50.00	
b)	Increase area under seed production of hybrids to cater the needs of all the farmers	50	83.33	VII
4.	Information source utilization			
a)	Provide market information	36	60.00	
b)	Provide information about hybrid varieties	42	70.00	
c)	Create awareness thru trainings about recommended practices	44	73.33	
5.	Labour constraint			
a)	Inadequate family labour	35	58.33	
b)	Tie up NREGS labour to farm operations	51	85.00	VI
c)	Stop NREGS work during peak operations	52	86.66	V
7.	Fertilizers			

a)	Provide needed fertilizer on subsidy	53	88.33	IV
b)	Door to door supply of fertilizers	44	73.33	
8.	Credit facilities			
a)	Provide finance allocations to agriculture	44	73.33	
b)	Provide credit on time	48	80.00	IX
c)	Make institutional financial procedures easy	46	76.66	
d)	Provide loans to farmers on less rate of interest	46	76.66	
e)	More time for repayment of loans	45	75.00	
9.	Inter-culture operations			
a)	Create availability of suitable implements	31	51.66	
b)	Improve mechanization in the district	35	58.33	
10.	Plant protection			
a)	Create awareness about pests & diseases	44	73.33	
b)	Regulate cost of plant protection chemicals	42	70.00	
11.	Storage facilities			
a)	Provide cold storage units/ godowns	40	66.66	
b)	Subsidy on establishment of storage units	41	68.33	
12.	Marketing			
a)	Provide MSP to the produce by the govt before harvest comes to market	54	90.00	III
b)	Create procurement facilities in the villages by the govt	41	68.33	
c)	Regulate marketing practices	45	75.00	
d)	Regulate the prices & See that ups & downs are prevented	46	76.66	
e)	Regulating prices and eliminate middlemen in the markets	56	93.33	I
f)	Sale at the place of production	35	58.33	
g)	Provide transport facilities to the markets	33	55.00	

It is evident from Table 2 that castor farmers suggested to regulate prices and eliminate middlemen in the markets (93.33 %), timely supply and regulation of costs & supply of critical inputs on subsidy (91.66 %), provide MSP to the produce by the govt before harvest comes to market (90.00 %), provide needed fertilizer on subsidy (88.33 %), Stop NREGS work during peak operations (86.66 %), tie up NREGS labour to farm operations (85.00 %), increase area under seed production of hybrids to cater the needs of all the farmers

(83.33 %), provide adequate quantity of critical inputs (81.66 %) and provision of credit on time (80.00 %).

Majority of the castor farmers suggested to regulate the prices and eliminate middlemen so as to get good price for their produce and for economic returns, timely and adequate supply of critical inputs in sufficient quantities at subsidized costs before the commencement of the season will help the farmers to plan their agricultural activities and it also helps to extend their area under castor cultivation. Inputs when supplied at the right time at reasonable costs will surely be utilized by the farmers and improve credit facilities so that the role of commission agent can be avoided. Government should decide the MSP before the harvest comes to the market. A large number of farmers suggested to supply hybrid seed for better higher yields. The need of the hour for agriculture is to tie up NREGS with agriculture or stop NREGS during peak agricultural operations and a policy has to be made by the govt in this regard.

The study revealed that the castor farmers faced enumerable number of problems in cultivation as well as marketing their produce. Unless attention is not taken in these aspects the fate of the farmers becomes uncertain and in a drought district like Mahabubnagar where vagaries of monsoon are common every single false step leads further down. Now in the present scenario of agriculture, farmer should compete with other countries, maintain quality standards to get profits. The government has to take steps and improve the extension system and motivate farmers and promote market led extension.

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