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Information Needs of the Rural Farmers : A Study from Maharashtra, India: A Survey

ABSTARCT

Nowadays, information is a basic necessity of everyday life. For anything and everything information is required. Information can be obtained or retrieved from a variety of sources. Farmers constitute a particular group of users whose information needs is very specific. The present paper deals with the information needs of the farmer community in rural areas. The study conducted through survey method and reveals that 71 (40.58%) farmers requires daily information for various agriculture work. It is also found that the first preferred sources of the information of the farmers is colleague or fellow farmers following by newspapers and Government office.

Keywords : Information, Information Needs , Indian Farmers, Rural Farmers.

INTRODUCTION:

The present age has been rightly called as an Information Age. Information has become the most important element for progress in society. According to Kemp “information has been described as the fifth need of man ranking after air, water, food and shelter”. Everyone needs information about everything even in his day to day life.

In agriculture environment, relevant and timely information helps farmers community to take right decision to sustained growth of agriculture activity. Use of information in agriculture sector is enhancing farming productivity in a number of ways. Providing information on weather trends, best practice in farming, timely access to market information helps farmer make correct decisions about what crops to plants and where to sell their product and buy inputs.

India is an agriculture based country with farming and related activities constituting to a huge chunk of the GDP and employment. According to Malhan & Rao (2007), the Indian agriculture sector provides employment to about 65% of the labour force, accounts for 27% of the GDP and contributes 21% of total exports

and provides raw material to several industries. Therefore information is a powerful tool in addressing the agricultural needs and if it is used properly it could be change nations economic.

Background of the Study. The study is carried out in Yeola tahasil (sub-district) is located to the east of Nasik district of Maharashtra State of India. A brief description of the demographic information of the state, district and tahasil (sub-district) provides the background and context of the study.

Maharashtra:

Maharashtra is the third largest state regarding the geographical area and second largest state in respect of population in India. The state is famous for Industrial sector and Mumbai, its capital which is also known as financial capital of India. It is located in the northern centre part of India, surrounded by the Arabian sea in the west, Gujarat and the Union territory of Dadra & Nagar Haveli to the northwest, Madhya Pradesh to the northeast, Chhattisgarh to the east, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh to the south, and Goa to the southwest. The unique feature of the state is a series of crowning plateau which is lying between the Arabian Sea and the Sahayadri range, Konkan is narrow coastal lowland and Satpura hills along the northern border and Bhamragad-Chiroli-Gaikhuri ranges on the eastern border. Maharashtra state is comprise 35 districts which are grouped into six divisions for administrative purpose. As per the 2011 census, Maharashtra has a population of 112,372,972 registering a population density of 365 per sq. kms. Out of the total population males constitute 58.3 millions and females constitute 54.0 millions.

Nasik District-

It is fourth largest and industrialized district in the Maharashtra. It has holy cities of the Hindu tradition. As per census 2011 Nasik had population of 6,109,052 of which male and female were 3,164,261 and 2,944,791 respectively. Agriculture is the main occupation of the people in the district with about 74 % of the population depending on it. It also accounts for the major share of their economic activity. Nashik is the famous for the production of grapes. Nasik is a Asia's leading market for onions and tomatoes.

Yeola: Yeola tahasil the drought prone area of the Nashik district located at the South-Eastern part of District. It is one of the parts of Deccan plateau. According

to census 2001, the population of the Yeola urban and rural area is 235000; out of the total population 192000 are living in the rural area and 43000 living in urban area. Agricultural is the main occupation of majority of the people and the main crop are wheat, onion, cotton, maize, and vegetables. Moreover it is known for the birth place of the revolutionary leader Taty Tope.

Keeping the above facts in the view, a survey was conducted on rural farmer information needs and which sourced widely used by the farmer for satisfying of their information needs.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The major objectives of the study are

1. To find the information needs of the rural farmers.
2. To find the nature and types of information required by the farmers.
3. To find the source of information used by the farmers.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

The information need of the rural areas have been analyzed by different types of studies. Beside, gender wise (male or female) information needs of farmers community was also carried by different investigator. These studies show that the needs of the farmers are different according to the state of developments of the concerned rural areas. Information need are also vary from village to village, for e.g. farmers of the wheat production area are required the information about market rate, transport facilities etc. Some studies are found. Saravan R. et al (2008) carried the study on information pattern and information need of the tribal farmers in Arunachal Pradesh indicate that most of the farmers need information on various topics such as pest management, disease management. Tologbonse D, et al. (2008) carried the study of information need of rice farmers community in Niger state disclosed that majority of farmers (89.9%) need information about the crop production. Meitei & Devi (2009) conducted the study of farmer's community in Manipur (India) to find the information need of the rural farmer's community in Manipur state. This study shows that majority of farmers did not access to information for their activities. Further they emphasis that ICT based agricultural information support systems should be develop. Byamugisha et al. (2009)

conducted study on information seeking and use of urban farmers in Uganda found that the information needs of the urban farmers in study area seemed to be as varied as the farming activities and also appeared to vary from one urban farmer to another. Achugbue & Anie (2011) carried the study in Delta State, Nigeria on Rural Female farmer's information need and importance of ICT in delivering information needs of female farmers. Babu et al. (2011) carried the study on farmers' information needs and search behaviors in Tamil Nadu found that the major constraints to information access for the farmers is poor availability, poor reliability, lack of awareness of information sources available among farmers and untimely provision of information. Akanda & Roknuzzaman Md (2012) surveyed agricultural information literacy of 160 farmers in the northern region of Bangladesh. The survey shows that farmers need information for various purposes of agricultural activities, and they use different sources and media for access to such information.

METHODOLOGY:

The survey method was used to conduct the study and questionnaire was used as a data collection tool for the fulfilling the objectives of the study. The stratified random sampling technique was used for the spot selection of farmers. the data collected through questionnaire, observation and informal interviews was thoroughly organized and tabulated using simple statistical method, tables and percentage. The table and graphs were generated using MS-Excel-2007. The questionnaire was prepared in Marathi language for respondents could easily understand the items mentioned in questionnaire. Total 180 questionnaires were distributed randomly to the farmers. The investigators collected only 175 questionnaires from the respondents. This constitutes 97 % of the i.e. 175/180 of the total response. It is important to note that some of the respondents could neither read nor write even in Marathi language which is chief language of the state.

SCOPE & LIMITATION:

The scope of the present study is limited to the farmers of Yeola tahsil and whose main occupation is agricultural. The study was involving only male farmer's community and therefore it is not projectable of the entire population of the region Further the information collected was based on a small numbers (n=175) of

farmers. Hence the result cannot apply to the entire population of the tahasil and all farmers of the Maharashtra State.

DATA ANALYSIS:

Table 1

<i>Sr. No</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>Language Know</i> <i>Marathi</i> <i>Hindi</i> <i>English</i>	<i>175</i> <i>53</i> <i>23</i>	<i>100.00</i> <i>30.29</i> <i>13.15</i>
<i>2</i>	<i>Age in Years</i> <i>20-30</i> <i>31-40</i> <i>41-50</i> <i>50 & above</i>	<i>18</i> <i>59</i> <i>63</i> <i>35</i>	<i>10.29</i> <i>33.72</i> <i>36.00</i> <i>20.00</i>
<i>3</i>	<i>Education Status</i> <i>Illiterate</i> <i>Secondary Education</i> <i>Graduation & P.G.</i> <i>Other</i>	<i>33</i> <i>103</i> <i>18</i> <i>22</i>	<i>18.81</i> <i>58.86</i> <i>10.28</i> <i>12.57</i>

Table 1 shows that the all respondents are knowing Marathi language because it is native language while 30.29% are knowing Hindi Language whereas 23 respondents are knowing English Language. The highest percentage (36.00) belonging the age group 41-50 years followed by the age groups of 31-40 (33.72%). Under educational status, maximum numbers of persons i.e. (58.86%) are attained up to the higher secondary school, 12.57% are pass out diplomas, polytechnic, while 10.28 % are graduate and only 18.81% person are found illiterate in the study.

Use of Mobile Phones by Farmers:

Table No 2

Sr. No.	Age	No of Respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	138	78.84
2	No	37	21.14

The result shows that the majority of the farmers (78.84%) are using mobile phone for communication and other purpose. It is good sign that most of the farmers of the rural area are now use or familiar with the mobile device.

Information Needs by Farmer:

Table 3

Sr No	Type of Response	No. of Response	Percentage
1	Daily	71	40.58
2	Sometimes	83	47.43
3	Never	22	0.12

As for the distribution of respondents with respect of information need is concerned, majority (40.58%) of the farmers need daily information, while (47.43%) farmers need information sometimes. Only 0.12 % farmers are stated that they do not need information for agriculture activities.

The above results are more or less similar to those of Metitei and Devi (2009), who concluded from a study in Manipur state, India that most of the farmers seek daily information (46.17%) followed by sometimes (38.18%)

Areas of Information Needs of the Farmers:

Table 4

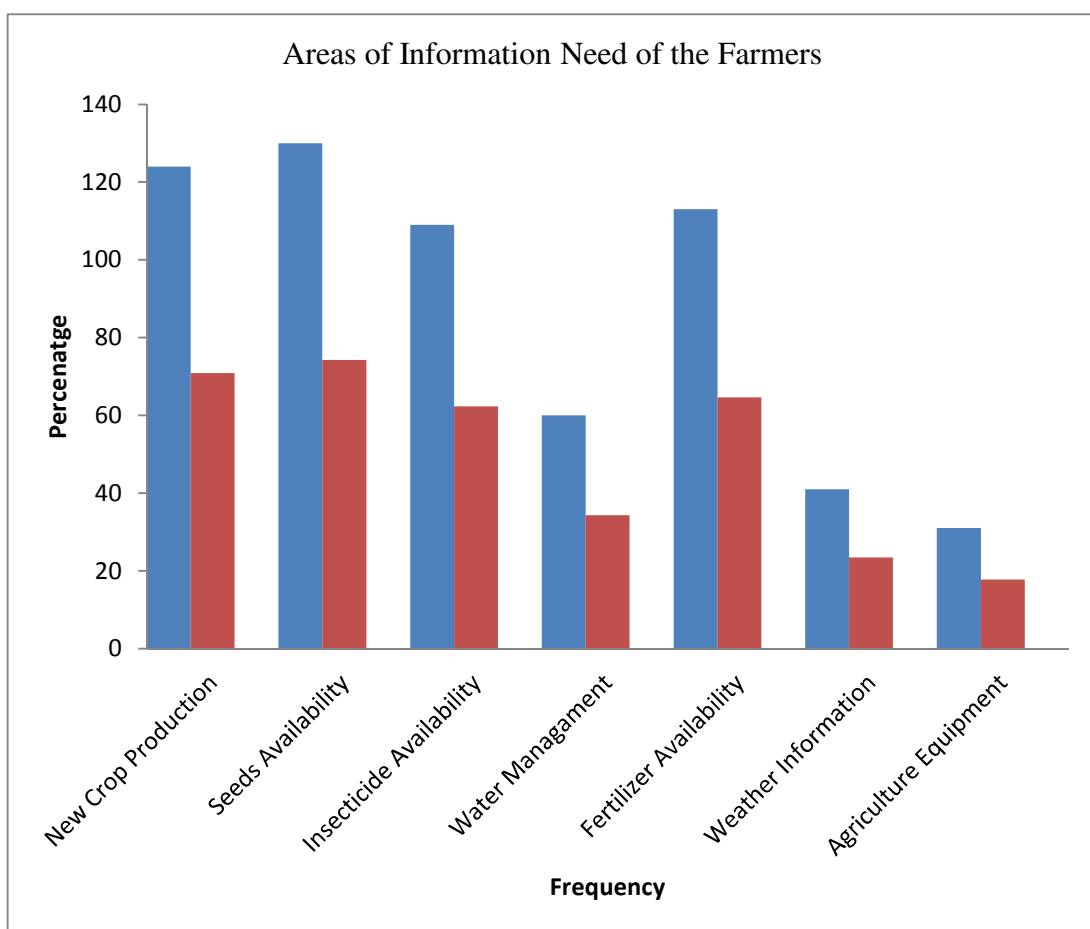
Sr No	Item	Frequency	Percentage
1	New crop production	124	70.86
2	Seeds availability	130	74.29
3	Insecticide availability	109	62.29
4	Water Management	60	34.28
5	Fertilizer availability	113	64.58
6	Weather Information	41	23.43
7	New Agriculture equipments.	31	17.72

(Percentage is more than 100 because multiple choice questions.)

The investigator asked to the respondent the areas of information which require for day to day activity. As evident from above table, majority of the farmers need information on availability of seeds (74.29%) crop production (70.86%) and insecticide availability (62.29%) followed by fertilizer availability (64.58%). Others areas that were mentioned by farmers include water management (34.28%), weather information (23.43%) and agricultural equipments (17.72%)

The results to some extent agrees with the finding of Metitei and Devi (2009) and Achugube &Anie (2011) that male and female farmers required information on crop production, seeds & fertilizers availability.

Figure 1.



Information Needs of the Farmers regarding the farming activities.

Table 5

Sr No	Item	Frequency	Percentage
1	Market information of Agricultural production	136	77.72
2	Bank Credit Information	83	47.43
3	Transport Facilities	94	53.72
4	Government Scheme	115	65.72
5	Animal Husbandry	32	18.28
6	Crop Insurance	63	36.00
7	Irrigation	34	19.43
8	Medicinal Plants	15	8.58
9	Milk Production	51	29.15

(Percentage is more than 100 because multiple choice questions)

Table 5 reveals that 77.72% farmers require market information of agriculture production and 65.72 % farmers need information about Government Scheme such as subsidies, import & export policy of agriculture production. Further, 47.83 % farmers need information about Bank credit facilities. Others areas that were mentioned by farmers include transport facilities (53.72%), water management (34.28%), weather information (23.43%) and agricultural equipments (17.72%)

Source of Information used by Farmers:

Table : 6

Sr. No	Item	Frequency	Percentage
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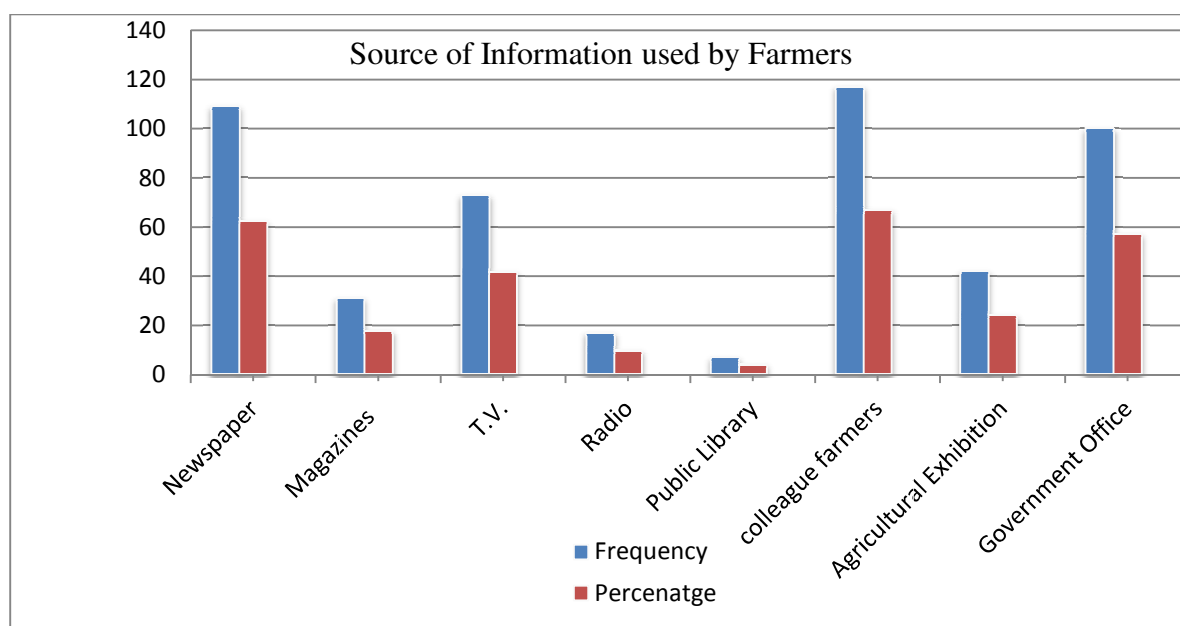
1	Newspaper	109	62.29
2	Magazines	31	17.72
3	T.V.	73	41.72
4	Radio	17	9.71
5	Public Library	7	4.00
6	Other farmers or colleague farmers	117	66.86
7	Agricultural Exhibition	42	24.00
8	Government Office	100	57.15

Percentage is more than 100 because multiple choice questions.

Table 6 shows that majority of the farmer's rely on their colleague for obtaining the information while second important channel of information is the newspaper 62.29% followed by Government office 57.15% for accessing the information to the daily farming activity.

There are parallels between the results of previous studies, such as those by Metitei and Devi (2009), Babu et. al (2011) and Akanda & Rognizzamanu (2012) this investigation shows the main source for acquiring information of the farmers is colleague farmer & newspapers.

Figure.2



Discussion

The investigator found that most of the farmers of the rural areas in the state are require information relating to their agriculture activity. Newspapers , fellow farmers and government offices were the major sources of information to farmers in general and a few farmers also sought information from others sources like television, magazines, agricultural exhibition etc. It was found that 80% farmers have mobiles phone and most the farmers reported that they were used mobile phones for some agricultural activity. Governments offices and market agencies have started to send daily information through the SMS to the farmers regarding the price of commodity, weathers forecasts, fertilizers, general news item etc. It was seems mobiles phones have started making impact on the agricultural activity in rural areas. The finding further revealed that majority (41.72%) of the farmers used television for listening agricultural news because it is widely accessible to rural areas. Newspapers are considered the most important communication channels in rural areas because it has easily available and publish in local language. Many newspapers published in Marathi language have been published weekly supplement on farm mechanization, crop protection and disease , horticulture, animal husbandry, food processing, expert advice and new innovations in agriculture etc. Agrowon a daily newspaper published in Marathi languages provides the comprehensive information on the agricultural activity. Many farmers subscribed this newspaper for obtaining information.

Since the area is drought prone area and average rainfall occurs only 45 to 52 cms yearly but investigator found that the there is less awareness about water management techniques among the farmers. Only 34.28% farmers required the information about water management techniques. Government of India has taken many initiatives for adoption and absorption of information technologies for agriculture information communication. Both the central and state government are now working towards the development of ICT infrastructure in all the rural areas in Maharashtra so as to help the rural farmers' access agricultural information for optimal farm production. However it is found that local offices of the governments in rural area are not well equipped with up to date of information and communication gadgets, such as computers & communication facilities, internet facilities, local area and wide area networks, telephones lines in rural areas. Most

of the farmers are not familiar with the ICT based tools such as computer, internet application.

CONCLUSIONS:

This study has provided a first look at the potential of information in affecting the agricultural sector as a whole. The study has reported there is growing awareness importance of information and its use among the farming community. Farmers must be able to get information delivered to them at a time and place of their choosing and it will be beneficial to farmer's to realize productivity gains from the adoption of new farming practices and actions to mitigate crop losses. K Sarada has rightly emphasis back in 1999 that there is need of the hour to set up the Community Information Centers (CIS) as nodal point for all information services for the benefit of society.

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