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Socio cultural, economic values and constraints of Saffron in Kashmir valley

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Keywords

cultural values, economy, constraints, Pampore

Abstract

Saffron is an important cash crop and second largest Agri-oriented business activity in Jammu and Kashmir. India in the entire world has a great potential for increasing its productivity, production, quality, and export to other producing and non-producing countries of the world. Presently the state produces about 15-18 tones of saffron (about 99% of national production) which by conservative estimates amount to an exchequer worth Rs. 40 crores. However, the current production and productivity level of saffron (1-2.50 kg/ha) in Jammu & Kashmir is low as compared with the productivity level of other saffron producing countries of the world (5-6 kg/ha). It has been found that cultural values of saffron are directly linked with the economics of the saffron in the region. However, the loopholes in the present scenario need to be tackled with due care from the Govt of Kashmir.

Introduction

Geographically, Pampore is located at 34.02°N 74.93°E, It has an average elevation of 1,574 meters (5,164 feet). The town is situated on the eastern bank of Veth also known as Jhelum and is famous for saffron cultivation. Saffron is the most expensive spice among the spices. Strong sense of cultural identity and in-group cohesion, but with multicultural view is attributed to Kashmiri tradition. Saffron (*crocus sativus*) is playing a significant role in the economy and socio-cultural values of Jammu and Kashmir. The spatio-temporal variations in area and production reveals its nature of being patchy in distribution and limited mainly in Karewas, particularly in south-eastern part of the valley. About 70 per cent of the saffron area and corresponding 70 per cent of total production lies in Pulwama only. Saffron provides about 16 per cent of the total agricultural income. The basic growth retarding factors of the crop are its weak research base, unscientific in all respects: discouraging marketing mechanism and non-interference attitude of the government, lack of irrigation, unavailability of pesticides etc. These factors playing a fundamental role in strengthening the already present prejudicial views, superstitious notions, legends, myths, and the traditional ways of cultivation. Its marketing structure which is totally under the control of private enterprise is quite discouraging. It has been observed that intermediaries, on an average

basis take about 41 per cent of total income from saffron as their commission leaving only 59 per cent to the actual growers. The role of saffron cultivation in socio-economic development becomes more pronounced at the micro level. The acreage under saffron and socio-economic development of households is having a watertight relationship. Majority of farmers are marginal and small farmers in Jammu and Kashmir. Economic setup of growers also playing an important role in its limited extension because the crop is of peculiar nature and almost whole the input expenditure is required at once i.e., at the time of sowing the seeds. So, most of the farmers, especially low-income groups and small farmers are helpless to fulfill their desires of saffron cultivation. India has been the major exporter of Saffron in the world. During the last three decades, world trade in Saffron recorded impressive growth. There is considerable scope for boosting export of Saffron by the producing countries including India. But during the last decade, the country has lest prime position as compared to the past. Our competing countries like Iran could made use of the opportunity.

Currently, India suffers from certain disadvantages in relation to her, competitors. India has been a traditional exporter of Saffron confined by and large to dry Saffron. On the other hand, the newly emerged competitors have been exporting diversified products. Besides, they have cost advantage over India due to high productivity. However, although the competition is increasing, India can look forward to further growth in Saffron export if proper measures are taken. In short, the India Saffron export has a growing challenge ahead. In this matter the government can play an important role in solving these problems by providing loans, seeds on subsidy rates and guidance through the concerned department regarding post harvest and exporting methods to meet the requirements at national and international levels. The investigations have shown that most of the disease can be controlled if proper and scientific methods will be implemented at various stages. Furthermore, rainfall which normalizes the crop and accelerates its blooming is necessary especially at the conditions of drought. So, keeping in view the uncertainty of rains some artificial Measures of rainfall (spray system) should be made possible for assured yearly production. Early winter season and frost is harmful in the flowering period. So, to remove this inconsistency experiments should be conducted for an easily maturing variety.

The objective of the preset study is.

1. To know the present scenario and nature, culture of saffron cultivation in Jammu & Kashmir.
2. To know the socio cultural and socio economics of saffron cultivation in Jammu & Kashmir.

Methodology

Farmers are the unit of observation. From each selected village 10 farmers are randomly selected. Thus, from the 4 saffron growing districts of Jammu and Kashmir 200 farmers has been selected for in depth study.

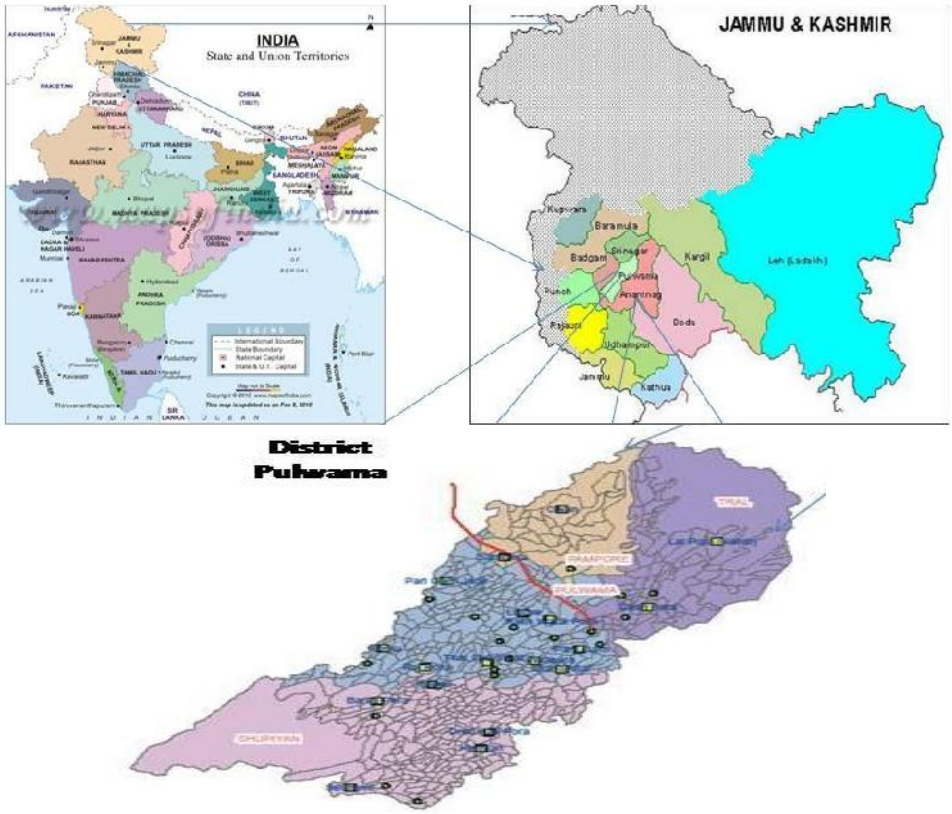
Data Collection:

Two different sets of data have been used for the study, by nature which is primary and secondary. Those are classified in the form of time series as well as cross section. Secondary data was collected from the source of journals, government publications, published and unpublished articles etc. Secondary data was collected for the last 12 years (1996-2008) from the reliable secondary sources. For collection of primary data, a multi structured and multi dimensional interview schedule was administered to the 200 farmers to get the information regarding their agricultural activities.

Data Processing -

Data collected are both quantitative as well as qualitative. The quantitative data has been interpreted with the statistical tools, methods where and when needed and qualitative data has been tabulated in the form of degree of achievement like low, medium, and high and has

been statistically analyzed for test of significance. Finally, the collected data was processed and analyzed with the help of various statistical tools viz, tabular analysis growth rate regressions analysis and t- test. These tools helped us to interpret the results and to derive conclusion and suggestions.



Map of study area

Results and Discussion

Although the average yield per hectare of Saffron in Pulwama is lower than that of other saffron producing districts, there is further scope for increasing it. Yield can be increased by the timely supply of disease-free seed to farmers. The government should undertake the responsibility of distribution of healthy seeds through Panchayat level, Krishi Bhawan. Productivity increase is needed not only to increase the output but also to improve the cost competitiveness and profitability. Since there is only limited scope for increasing area under Saffron in Jammu and Kashmir as a mono crop, the existing potentialities of cultivating Saffron as an intercrop in Almonds, may also be exploited to the maximum possible extent. In Saffron cultivation, emphasis should, therefore, be placed on both productivity increase and area expansion. To protect cultivators from incurring loss the Government should announce a support price for Saffron. There should be a balance between demand and supply. For efficient marketing, it should be ensured that market does not suffer due to short or excess supply. When supply exceeds demand, the state and central level cooperative organizations should enter the market and purchase the surplus. Side by side with crop research, marketing research may be taken up so that enough data are available to the policy makers to fix prices and formulate development policies.

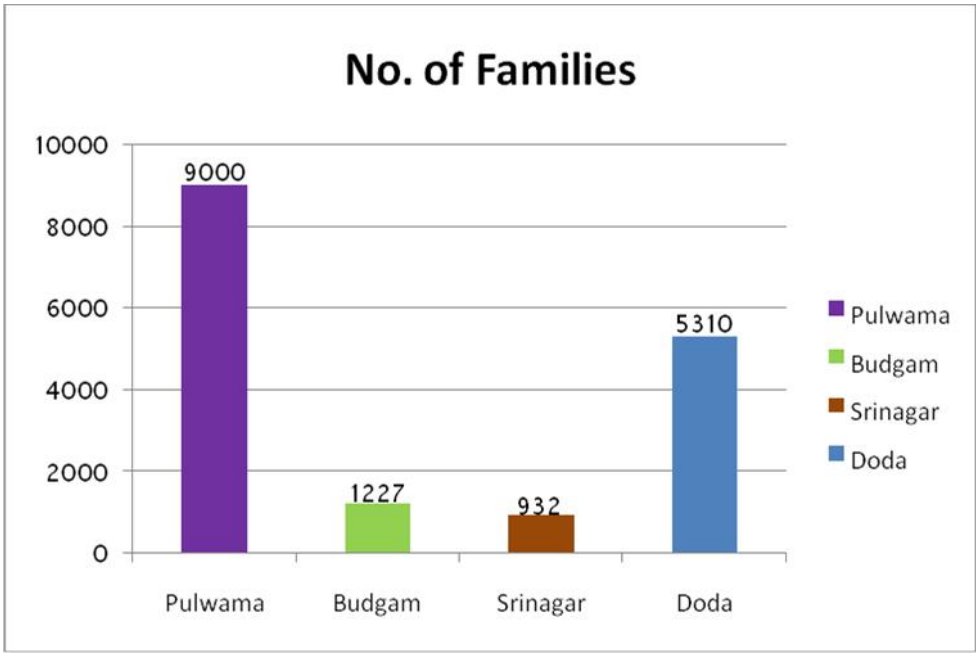


Fig 1: Number of Families Engaged in Saffron and Holding Size in Jammu and Kashmir

Technological up gradation of processing is very much essential to improve the quality of dry Saffron. Saffron is a food item and considerable importance is attached by importing countries to hygiene art of the produce. Traditional method of processing will result in loss of flavor and quality. Scientific drying facilities should be made available by the Spice Board especially in major producing districts like Pulwama; Budgam for producing clean and good quality product retaining the original flavor. This would encourage buyer's confidence, help the fanners to get better price for the commodity and would result in increased export. Adequate International Marketing Information System Should be developed to help formulate strategy to develop exports. Attention should be paid to the diversification of the export products and markets. Steps may be taken to introduce Saffron in syrup and Saffron candy in the export market. For this purpose, suitable Saffron varieties should be identified and up to date scientific processing techniques may be imparted to the manufactures. Extension agencies located in the Saffron producing areas should be more alert in diagnosis and suggesting timely and suitable remedies to the growers for their field problems. Most of the Saffron cultivators are not aware of the new varieties released recently by the research centers. Technical know how that is scientific training and information about the saffron production. Should be made available fanners to enhance production without time lag. Irrigation is of vital importance for cultivation of saffron crop. In fact, irrigation fauns the datum line for sustained successful agriculture. The major source of irrigation in Jammu and Kashmir for saffron fields is rain. Untimely rains and draughts are the basic reason for low production and productivity of this crop. But government can provide sprinkled pumps and dig wells in the fields of saffron in Jammu and Kashmir. Government should adopt the policy of low interest rate for providing sprinkle pumps and other necessary items for the proper irrigation system to saffron fields. If irrigation will be provided at the certain stage to the saffron fields no doubt production and productivity will enhance.

Therefore, priority should be given towards the irrigation facilities for saffron fields. Availability of quality seed corms can be increased and streamlined through seed villages. Seed corm farmers be identified in villages and encouraged to adopt strict seed certification enforcement to ensure availability of quality corms at reasonable rates. Incentives to such farmers need to provide through state government for production of

quality seed corms. To improve domestic marketing and promote exports, with the objective of providing remunerative returns to fanners on a sustainable basis, the saffron growing areas, should be declared as international export zone.

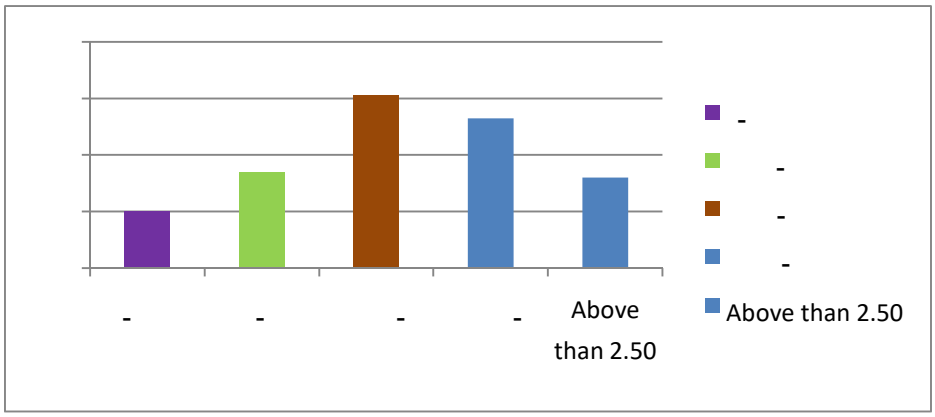


Fig 2: Average productivity of saffron per hectare in Jammu and Kashmir

This will go a long way in helping production and postproduction aspects of saffron in Jammu and Kashmir State.

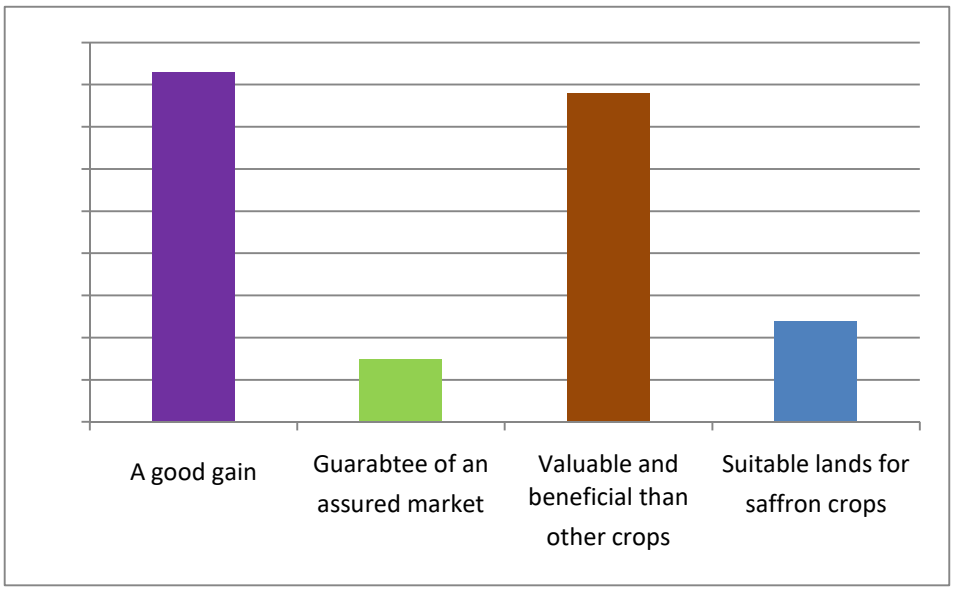


Fig 3: Reason for growing saffron in Jammu and Kashmir.

Because of continuous use, the saffron soils along the Karewas have exhausted and are deficient in nutrients and organic matter-content resulting in decrease in the productivity. To increase the productivity, the fertility of these soils should be increased by adopting integrated nutrient management practices. The balanced use of chemical fertilizers alone will not be able to sustain high productivity due to emergence of the deficiency of secondary and micronutrients. The status of the nutrients especially micronutrients of saffron soils need to be characterized before adopting combined use of fertilizers, organic manures and bio-fertilizers. Combined use of these nutrient sources has proved superior to the use of each component separately.

Weir rotten farmyard manure at the rate of 15- 20 quintals per hectare with 40 kg N, 50 kg P205 and 30 kg 1(20 per hectare through chemical fertilizers should be used for saffron soils. Devise proper methods of inter cropping saffron with rabbi pulses and almonds to cover risk and gain additional income during initial years of establishment.

Conclusion

To achieve the desired goal on a desired speed some centrally located villages should be selected especially from non growing regions and provided with demonstration plots of saffron under the proper guidance of the concerned department and it is from these model centers that the peripheries will get tempted to improve the situation. In addition to it village level workers and some selected Conscious farmers should be given training for all saffron growing districts regarding all aspects of saffron production which in turn will prove resource persons for common masses.

It is obvious from the foregoing results that Jammu and Kashmir State has much potential for development but what is missing is the proper identification of resources, and their misuse or under utilization. The socio-cultural values should be deeply preserved to conserve the heritage of saffron in the district. The role of the planning is supportive and essential in the extension of saffron. Saffron is really a boosting factor of Pulwama economy and economic status of growers.

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