

SOCIOECONOMIC DETERMINANTS OF CROP CHOICE IN VEGETABLE FARMING AT KALPITIYA, SRI LANKA

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More farmers have shifted to vegetable farming from other crops in recent years, cultivating a wide array of vegetables even without assessing the production and marketing in agriculture, creating sustainability issues in the long run. This study aimed to identify key socio-economic determinants of farmers that affect the choice of the vegetable crop. The study adopted exploratory research methods. A sample of 130 vegetable farmers (pumpkin, $n = 14$; beet, $n = 99$; cabbage, $n = 17$) in the Kalpitiya Divisional Secretariat division was selected for the study. A pre-tested, structured questionnaire survey with focus group discussions was used to gather data. Multinomial Logistic Regression (MLR) was employed to elicit the relationship between the choice of crop and selected socio-economic variables: gender, age, education of the farmer, extent, average yield, unit selling price, average fertilizer usage, number of families and hired labour. SWOT analysis was also used to assess the production and marketing risk in vegetable farming. Results indicated, farmers tend to select pumpkin aiming a higher selling price per unit over beet ($p < 0.05$) and cabbage ($p < 0.01$). However, farmers tend to choose beet ($p < 0.05$) and cabbage ($p < 0.01$), aiming for a higher yield prospect over pumpkin. Female farmers ($p < 0.01$) tend to select pumpkin over beet due to easiness in harvesting. Farmgate prices and the average yield are the only deciding factors for selecting a particular vegetable crop. Frequent price volatility was reported for vegetable produce. However, farmers obtained better returns and faster cash recovery from vegetable cultivation. Hence, production and marketing risk was not considered by the farmers. In addition, information asymmetry between producers and markets creates lapses in spatial price linkages. Creating better market linkages with sufficient information could be a possible solution to introduce alternative agriculture activities among farmers to develop sustainable farming practices within the selected community.

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