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Banana marketing challenges during Covid-19

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ABSTRACT

Banana is a low priced but high nutritive value fruit hence it is one of the major horticulture crops in the state of Andhra Pradesh. Different varieties of banana are cultivated in an extent of 1,04,953 hectares across AP state. The yield is estimated to be 62,97,180 tonnes this year. The market has come down from 15000 INR per tonne to 3500 per tonne. What is the possible way out?

Keywords: *Banana, AP, Lockdown*

THE CONTEXT

Banana is a low priced but high nutritive value fruit hence it is one of the major horticulture crops in the state of Andhra Pradesh. Different varieties of banana are cultivated in an extent of 1,04,953 hectares across AP state. The yield is estimated to be 62,97,180 tonnes this year. Kadapa, Anantapur, East and West Godavari districts top the list with the highest areas under cultivation.



This one of the very few plants which has use from the top to bottom and every portion has commercial value. The complete plantain tree with all its fruits, flowers and leaves is used for decorations at marriage and in temple and other occasions. The tender stem, which bears the inflorescence is extracted by removing the leaf sheaths of the harvested pseudostem and used as vegetable. Banana leaves are used as healthy and hygienic eating plates and they are specially collected without shearing and used for any and every occasion. The fruit is easy to digest, free from fat and cholesterol. Banana powder is therefore used as first baby food. It helps in reducing risk of heart diseases when used regularly and is recommended for patients suffering from high blood pressure, arthritis, ulcer, gastroenteritis and kidney disorders. These apart there is a separate commercial market for processed products, such as chips, banana puree, jam, jelly, juice, wine and halwa made from banana. Banana fibre is used to make items like bags, pots and wall hangers, rope paper.

After the announcement of lockdown, most of the retail outlets have also been closed. As a result, there are no takers for banana both in the ripe and raw forms. The countries such as UAE, Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Iran which are the largest

importers of Indian bananas are in different states of lock down and other restrictions. In February 2020 in fact the Ministry of Railways has made Refrigerated reefer container train with 25 rakes planned for the months of April May and June when the railways could also earn Rs 25 lakhs per rake.

It all has had a change of scenario for banana growers in Andhra Pradesh, the COVID-19 pandemic could not have come at a worse time. While the crop is ready for harvesting at farmlands across the state, the dip in demand for plantains and banana due to lockdown have caused severe distress to farmers and traders. An assessment was carried out with farmers who faced the difficulties of Impact during the lockdown.



As if the lockdown was not sufficient during April May 2020 heavy rains, accompanied by strong winds, have damaged banana crop plantations in Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh. The banana growers were already facing a crisis, not being able to sell their produce due to the nationwide lockdown coronavirus. Around 100 acres of banana plantations were damaged in the Anantapur district. According to aninews.in, Kuchivaripalli growers estimate the loss at around Rs.10 mln (€120,000).

Desai Fruits Company, which exported about 15,000 tonnes of Happy Banana brand from Anantapur district had booked 20 rakes of goods container trains to Iran, had to stall it as they have exhausted the cold storage capacity of the local markets.

OBJECTIVES

- To understand the banan cultivating farmers difficulties for marketing during lockdown
- Future of banana market if lockdown continues and places of collective gathering like temples and marriages are banned.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The study includes the four districts with highest land sizes under banana cultivation - East Godavari, West Godavari, Ananthapur and YSR.Kadapa. The study has used simple random sampling method and interviewed 200 farmers.

Table1: Sampling details

District	No.of Villages	No., of Farmers
East Godavari	16	85
Ananthapur	11	18
West Godavari	30	64
YSR Cuddapah	7	33
Total	64	200

The study uses descriptive research design while enquiring during lock down and Un-lockdown levels on select parameters. It included quantitative research technique and used structured survey questionnaire. The study was done with support of Acharya NG Ranga agriculture University. College Rajahmundry. Information was collected on profile of farmers, Issues faced during Lock down for Cultivation, Marketing, Labour engagement and government support measures.

FINDINGS

The study covered Banana cultivation farmers of 4 districts. Average age of farmers interviewed in the study is 42 years. Around one-fourth of farmers have completed diploma or graduate education while 55% have secondary or higher secondary education. Only 14% of farmers are illiterate.

Table 2 Profile of farmer’s age group

Age Group	Female	Male	Grand Total	Percentage
20-29	4	29	33	16.5
30-39	9	44	53	26.5
40-49	4	59	63	31.5
50-59	3	29	32	16

60-69		15	15	7.5
70-80		4	4	2
Grand Total	20	180	200	

Table 3 Education profile of Farmers

Education	Female	Male	Total	Percentage
Uneducated	2	26	28	14
Primary (1-7)	7	44	51	25.5
Higher Primary (8-10)	4	48	52	26
Higher Secondary (11-12)	3	33	36	18
Graduation	3	22	25	12.5
Post Graduation	1	7	8	4
Total	20	180	200	

In agriculture Census, the operational holdings are categorised in five size classes as shown below: Marginal: Below 1.00 hectare. Small: 1.00-2.00 h, Semi- Medium: 2.00-4.00 hectare. Medium: 4.00-10.00 hectare. Large: 10.00 hectare and above.

Table 4: farmer category based on land holding

Land holdings	No. farmers	Percentage
Marginal Farmer (< 1hectare)	87	43.5
Small farmer (1-2 hectare)	46	23
Semi Medium farmer(2-4 hectare)	40	20
Medium Farmer (4-10 hectare)	17	8.5
Large farmer (>10 hectare)	10	5

Table 5: Land ownership details in Acre & district wise lease value of land (Rs/Acre)

Land	Acre	District	Min	Max	Average
Owned	606	East Godavari	10000	50000	31568.18
Leased	544	Ananthapur	15000	40000	31250.00
Total	1150	West Godavari	10000	50000	28085.71
		Y.S.R.Cuddapah	15000	50000	28150.00
		Grand Total	10000	50000	29766.36

Farmers reported cultivating 606 acres are their own land and 544 farmers reported they are leased in the land with average cost of lease @ nearly 30,000/- among the all 4 districts

Banana is one of the major horticulture crops in the State. Different varieties of banana are cultivated in an extent of 1,04,953 hectares across the State. The yield is estimated to be 62,97,180 tonnes this year. Kadapa, Ananthapur, East and West Godavari districts top the list with the highest area under cultivation.

Table 6: Cultivating Banana Varieties

Cultivating Banana Varieties	No.of Farmers	%
Bontha	20	10%
Karpura	63	31.5%
Chakrakeli	54	27%
Grand -9	23	11.5%
Amrutapali	32	16%
Raw Banana Curry ripe	8	4%
Total	200	100%

Dominant cultivating variety among 200 farmers 31.5 Farmers were reported cultivating Karpura which is locally demandable and 27% farmers are cultivating Chakrakeli followed by Amrutapali 16% and Grand 9 11.5% varieties

Table 7: COVID19 effect on selling and income of Banana farmers

	Yes	No

Selling Banana during COVID19	2	198
Income Changes During COVID 19	196	4
Labour availability during COVID19 in banana farming	124	76

During lockdown restriction among 200 farers only 2 farmers says they able to sold their banana and 198 farmers (99%) farmers reported they are unable to sold their produce at public markets or export markets
Also 196 farmers are reported changed their income, and interestingly 124 farmers said agriculture labour is available with higher prices

Table 8: Support system to sell Banana during COVID 19

Support	No of Farmers
Government	2
Government & Private	10
Not sold	27
Open Market	65
Open Market & Private	8
Private Organization	86
Grand Total	198*

*2 farmers not responded

The lockdown, from March 24, 2020 midnight till May end, has left the agricultural sector in turmoil as crops of paddy, maize, red jowar, chillies, tomato and horticulture products like banana, watermelon, musk melon, sweet lime, grapes, pomegranate and papaya are ready to be harvested. Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy said farmers would be allowed to complete the harvesting of the crops. However, non-availability of agriculture labourers has hit the farmers hard. Many labourers have gone back to their native States due to the lockdown and those available are demanding higher wages.

“I cultivated banana in five acres. I have been able to harvest the crop in two acres. I am worried about the remaining crop as it is becoming a Herculean task to find labourers, traders, and means to transport the produce,” says Uyyur Sivarama Reddy, another farmer. “I will be incurring a loss of not less than ₹1 lakh per acre, which includes tenancy,” he laments.

After the lockdown, the FPOs were not picking up the harvest from the fields on the pretext that the retail outlets such as Reliance, Big Basket, Cash and Carry, and super bazaars had either closed their operations or scaled them down. This in turn hit the supply chain and the traders were not willing to purchase from the farmers.

Transport charges during COVID -19, 22 farmers responded as they paid 25-50% extra to normal prices, 166 farmers are not even tried for transport the banana to local markets or export to other locations.

Table 9: transportation charges for selling your Banana crop in COVID19

Percentage of Increase charges	Farmers
1. 10 -20%	6
2. 25-50%	22
3. > 50%	3
Same as before	4

Table 10: Changes in wage rates per person during COVID19

Rupees	No of farmers	Percentage
50	96	48%
100	46	23%
150	3	1.5%
200	19	9.5%
No Change	36	18%

Farmers want workers/laborers to be allowed to take up agricultural operations at least till noon so they can sell the produce in the local market. Labour charges also increased up to 200/- per day per person. 48% of the farmers are reported they paid 50/- extra per person per day and 23% farmers paid 100/- extra per day

Table 11: Profit / loss from selling your banana crop during the corona period - per acre

Loss in Rs	No of farmers	Percentage
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20000-29999	10	5.05
30000-39999	7	3.54
40000-49999	12	6.06
50000-59999	36	18.18
60000-69999	7	3.54
70000-79999	66	33.33
80000-89999	20	10.10
100000-109999	29	14.65
150000-159999	8	4.04
200000-209999	2	1.01
2990000-3000000	1	0.51

*2 farmers declared no profit no loss 43% of the farmers are reported they lost rupees 70,000 to 90,000/- during this season. The price of a tonne of banana, was between ₹13,000 and ₹14,500 in February 2020, During March to July it is below ₹8,000. It would be non-remunerative for farmers if the average price of banana falls below ₹6,000 a tonne. Infected as of today, 1st August 2020 the local markets are offering ₹3,500 a tonne. The minimum support price for banana is Rs 2,800 to Rs 3,000 per ton

Farmer’s availed financial assistance from government during COVID19:

Among 200 farmers 40 farmers are received the government support in the form of Raitu Bharosa Scheme for input cost support, average amount received rupees 15,000/- each farmer as reported 160 farmers are not received as reported

Table 12: Farmers willing ness for Banana cropping again?

	Yes	No
Farmers interest in cultivating Banana crop again	162	34
Farmers received minimum costs in previous Banana	34	162

*4 Farmers not responded

Farmers never afraid to cultivate even they faced thousands of challenges, among 200 farmers 162 farmers were responded they will continue the crop again, till they not get the input cost in last season.

According to a survey, AP farmers use Rs 2,500 crore from private moneylenders and un-organized chit fund/mutually cooperative societies etc. This year, even the private lenders don’t have money as the flow of funds is hit due to lockdown.

Table13: Source of money for crops expenses

Source	No of Farmers
Banks	64
Money Lenders	74
Banks & Money Lenders	52
Not required Loan	10

RETAILERS OUTSIDE TEMPLES

In Andhra Pradesh banana associated with all traditional both auspicious and otherwise. After UGADI festival marriage season starts from April, and peaks the next 3 months. A minimum of 1,22,000 Marriages in each district (East Godavari, West Godavari, Kadapa and Ananthapur) happen. Apart from Function halls, own residences people organize their marriages in Temples like Annavaram – East Godavari Satyadeva temple and many other temples of Ananthapur Krishna and West Godavari.

In all these Lock down months all temples are closed to public. Else 5-6 Banana sellers outside each temple sell at least 5-8 tonne bananas and in bigger temples temples 1-2 tonne are sold on daily basis.

CONCLUSION

The banana flower, the raw banana and stem are used as vegetables, the leaf is used for packing, serving food and making plates, the fibre from the stem is used to weave sarees the fruit peels apart from being a cattle feed has a good demand from bakeries, finally the complete tree as a whole is used for decorations and after all yield extracted the waste is converted into compost.

All these market stakeholders cannot be compensated. Even insurance will not be able to help much. Therefore all farmers may make fertilizer/compost out of all the rotting plants and fruits and temporarily pick up earnings from this last material. This is the only product which has long shelf-life and the farmers will be able to sell it to all other crop growers post lockdown. Otherwise fibre and other products are not so much income fetching.

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