

THE REASONS FOR 'CROP HOLIDAY' BY FARMERS & REMEDIAL MEASURES FOR PROFITABILITY OF PADDY CROP

M.S.V.K.V.PRASAD¹, PROF.G.JAGADESH KUMAR², M.LAKSHMI NARAYANA³

¹ Asst.Professor, Dept. of S&H, Swarnandhra Engineering College, Narsapur, Andhra Pradesh, INDIA,

² Professor, Swarnandhra Engineering College, Narsapur, Andhra Pradesh, INDIA, jkguduri@gmail.com

³ Asst.Professor, Swarnandhra Engineering College, Narsapur, Andhra Pradesh, INDIA, lachi_malladi@yahoo.co.in

Abstract

Some farmers of "Rice bowl" of India (Andhra Pradesh) are gone on 'Crop Holiday' means not harvesting any crop during the agricultural period of the year. In this paper the reasons behind declaration of crop holiday by some sectors of the farmers voluntarily of East and West Godavari districts of Andhra Pradesh state (INDIA) are discussed and the necessary measures to prevent reoccurrence of this type of situations are discussed. Some suitable methods for improvement of paddy crop profitability are also suggested with direct contact with farmer and also with eminent persons of the region.

Index Terms: crop holiday, paddy, Andhra Pradesh

1. INTRODUCTION

India has the largest paddy output in the world and is also the second largest exporter of rice in the world. Paddy fields are a common sight throughout India, be they be northern Gangetic plains or southern peninsular plateaus. Paddy is cultivated at least twice a year in most parts of India, the two seasons being known as 'Rabi' and 'Kharif' respectively. The paddy cultivation plays a major role in socio-cultural life of rural India. Festivals such as "Sankranthi" in Andhra Pradesh celebrates harvest of Paddy. Andhra Pradesh is historically known as the "Rice Bowl of India", Andhra Pradesh stands 6th in area, 3rd in production, and 2nd in productivity and contributes nearly 12% of the national rice production. Andhra farmers grow rice annually in an area of 3.98 M Ha in 22 districts.

2. PRODUCTION OF PADDY (RICE)

Rice is grown under a wide variety of conditions in India as well as in Andhra Pradesh. Rice is the only cereal that can stand water submergence. For hundreds of years, natural selection pressures such as drought, submergence, flooding, and nutrient and biotic stresses led to a great diversity in rice ecosystems. With construction of dams and after the Green Revolution, rice became predominantly a canal-irrigated crop. Traditional Tank systems were totally neglected. Gradually

farmers even in rain fed areas started cultivating rice under tube well irrigation. This has led to exhaustion of the ground water and several cascading ecological and economic problems. An acre of rice production in ponding conditions requires about 6 million liters of water which translates to 5000 liters of water for each kilogram of rice production. This shows the burden on the scarce natural resource 'water'. Though paddy is a self pollinated crop and has wide variation, research scientists focused on developing hybrids - as a high-end technology by public sector research and to retain control over the seed by the private companies forcing the farmers to buy seed every year.

During the year 2011-12 in Andhra Pradesh, Paddy production in the Kharif season was 112.64 Lakh MT and in the Rabi season was 103.64 Lakh MT, totaling to 216.28 Lakh MT. East & West Godavari districts alone contributed 61.05 Lakh MT. The Fig-1 shows Area, production and yield of rice in Andhra Pradesh year-wise for the last 10 years.

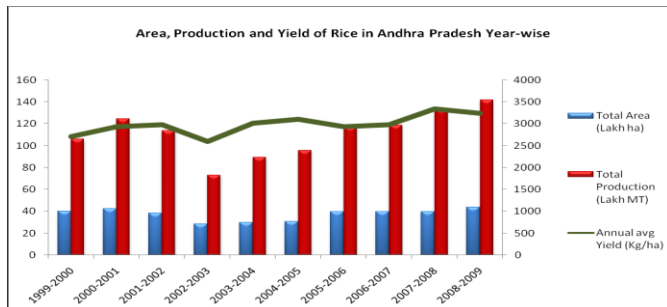


Figure 1: Area, Production and Yield of Rice in Andhra Pradesh for last few years

In view of the declaration of 'Crop Holiday' by some farmers of East and West Godavari, I visited some villages of the two districts and directly interacted with farmers and find the reasons, remedial measures. Some sections of the area where farmers declared 'Crop Holiday' is shown in below figure-2.

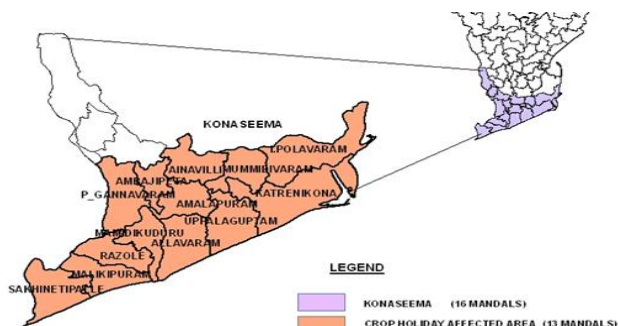


Figure 2: Some portion of 'crop Holiday' declared mandals

3 THE REASONS CITED BY FARMERS FOR DECLARING A CROP HOLIDAY

Following are some of the reasons cited by farmers for declaring Crop Holiday; the data was collected by direct interaction with farmers by visiting some villages.

- Late release of canal water
- Minimum Support Price (MSP) not covering the actual cost of production
- Non-enforcement of existing MSP
- High cost of cultivation on account of high cost of labour and inputs
- Non-availability of labour in peak season of agricultural operation on account of National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS)
- Non availability of the Credit and quality inputs in time
- Ineffective procurement
- Insufficient storage space
- Poor drainage maintenance

-Apprehensions about AP Land licensed cultivator's ordinance-2011

-Delayed settlements of crop insurance

Some other reasons observed for declaring Crop Holiday are discussed below.

3.1 COST OF CULTIVATION

The production cost of paddy per quintal as estimated by the Department of Agriculture (based on the methodology of Commission for Agriculture Costs & Prices- CACP) and the MSP declared during the last three years are as follows.

The cost of cultivation in East and West Godavari region is Rs 1583/- per quintal because of the higher labour cost and higher use of inputs etc.

Year	Grade	Cost of Production (Rs./qtl.)	MSP proposed (*) by Agrl. Dept (Rs./qtl.)	MSP fixed by GOI (Rs./qtl.)
2008-09	Common	921	1382	900+50 (Bonus)
	Grade-A	963	1445	930+50 (Bonus)
2009-10	Common	1038	1557	950+50 (Bonus)
	Grade-A	1093	1640	980+50 (Bonus)
2010-11	Common	1092	1646	1000
	Grade-A	1121	1682	1030
2011-12	Common	1270	1905	1080
	Grade-A	1355	2033	1110

(*) Based on the recommendations of the National Farmers' Commission

3.2 AVAILABILITY OF LABOUR:

Shortage of labour is also a major issue in this area. In all the mandals put together, Kharif paddy is taken up in about 81,211 ha. During the transplantation period, within a short span of 15 days, large numbers of labour are required. During the earlier years, there was migration of labour from other districts like Srikakulam, Vizianagaram etc. In the recent years, however, this has reduced substantially on account of an increase in other opportunities like National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), food for work etc. Normally, when faced with a labour shortage, farmers switch to less labour intensive horticulture crops. This alternative, unfortunately, is not available in these regions, paddy is the only option. Shortage of labour has not yet been tackled by the modernization of mechanization in a sufficient scale in transplanting and harvesting. Transplanters and combined harvesters which are very popular in other parts of Andhra Pradesh are also not suitable for use in the heavy loamy and clay soils of this region.

3.3 THE TENANCY SYSTEM:

An informal tenancy system is common in this area and covers nearly 50% – 60% of the sown area. In view of the prevailing high cost of cultivation, the number of bags of paddy given as rent to the owners has reduced in recent years. The prevailing rate is reported as 10 bags in Kharif and 15 bags in Rabi. The lessee faces additional problems such as the non-availability of credit and inputs including seed, fertilizer etc., as well as access to the prevailing MSP making paddy cultivation very un-remunerative. Thus, in the prevailing situation, neither the owner nor the lessee is happy with farming. Govt. of Andhra Pradesh recently piloted the passage of a legislation to address the needs of tenant farmers through an Ordinance “A.P. Land Licensed Cultivation Ordinance 2011” (No. 17 dated: 08-06-2011) which entitles the lessee to an “input and loan eligibility card”. The owner farmers have certain apprehensions about the implications of this initiative, resulting in strained relations between owner and tenant.

3.4 DRAINAGE SYSTEM:

The drainage system comprises major and minor drains maintained by the Irrigation Department, and revenue drains maintained by the farmers themselves. All the drains constitute an integrated system and malfunction in one of the drains, hamper the efficiency of the whole system resulting in the submergence of crops.

3.5 WATER RELEASE IN CANALS:

In the earlier days (i.e. prior to 1995) canal waters used to be released every year by the 25th of May thus enabling the farmers to complete transplantation by the third week of June. As a result, the crop used to attain enough height to withstand submergence caused by heavy rains in July and August. The crop was also normally harvested much before the onset of the cyclone season namely November/December. Of late, water is being released only in the second or third week of June resulting in delayed transplantation (extending to July) and delayed harvest (extending to November/December). This has led to submergence of the crop (following rains in August/September and cyclones in November/December) and a consequent fall in the productivity as well as the quality of the paddy. Delayed transplantation of the Kharif crop also delays the operations of Rabi and summer pulse crops, leading once again to delay in the closure of the canal beyond March.

3.6 SOME MORE REASONS ARE LISTED BELOW

Farmers in this area lost most of the kharif 2010 crop on account of the ‘Jal’ Cyclone. The response of the public procurement system could not adequately meet the demand for purchasing dis-coloured paddy of Kharif, 2010. Even the Minimum Support Price (MSP) was not given to formers.

Most of the paddy is purchased through rice millers, who buy it from farmers and deliver the levy to the FCI in the ratio of 75:25. That is, 75% of rice milled is handed over to FCI and balance 25% is sold in the open market. There are, however, many restrictions in selling the 25% also; only 50% of this rice can be sold outside the State, and that, after obtaining requisite permits from the Department of Civil Supplies. Though the Civil Supplies Corporation buys paddy through the centers opened by Self Help Groups, the Groups are not very effective in this area, not being properly equipped or trained.

Milling capacity in the District is more what is required for processing the local production. It is common practice for the millers to buy paddy from the nearby States of Chattisgarh, Orissa etc., mill and deliver the rice to FCI towards the levy obligation. In years of good production, estimates of which are, unfortunately, not sufficiently accurate, this practice has the potential to lead to a crash in prices in local markets and to force the farmers to resort distress sales.

There is also, clearly, a shortage of storage facilities in this area, the available space being only 17500 MT. According to the information collected from Food Corporation of India, against the target of 100 lakh MT. the procurement was only 86 lakh MT. as on 08.04.2012.

4. REMEDIAL MEASURES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR PROFITABILITY OF PADDY PRODUCTION:-

Remedial Measures suggested:

- Closure of canals by 15th April and release of water by 15th May of every year.
- Undertaking of repairs to irrigation canals, drainage channels and outfall sluices.
- Provision of a remunerative price in accordance with the National Commission on farmers to paddy as the present MSP does not cover the cost of production.

- As, NREGS is affecting the agricultural operations as the labour are engaged by this programme. NREGS programme should be linked up with agricultural operations like transplantation, weeding, harvesting etc., will solve the problems of farmers.
- FCI/State procurement agencies to procure Paddy produce on the lines of States of Chattisgarh and Punjab and export policy to be announced early i.e., before March.
- Supply of subsidized (at 70%) subsidy suitable machines for cultivation to all categories of farmers.
- Additional bonus per quintal Paddy is to be announced by the State Government.
- Ensuring availability of quality inputs like fertilizer/pesticides/seed in time.
- The period of the crop loan should be the crop year and not the financial year.

4.1 MINIMUM SUPPORT PRICE:

The Agriculture Department's estimated that the cost of production per quintal for the year 2011-12 for Paddy common variety would be Rs.1270/- and for Grade 'A' Rs.1355/-. The MSPs announced by the Government of India was only Rs.1080/- and Rs.1110/-respectively. The cost of producing one quintal of Paddy is much more in this area. The National Commission on Farmers recommended fixation of the Minimum Support Price at 50% above the actual cost of production per quintal. The State Government also recommended for fixation of MSP at Rs.1905/- for common and Rs. 2033/- for grade 'A' paddy for the year 2011-12. The National Commission also recommends that "The State Government will have to undertake reforms speedily in order to provide more options to the farmers for selling their produce, allowing the private sector, including Co-operatives, to develop markets, direct sales to consumer and remove bottlenecks." If the export of rice is opened up, the exporter will get the price prevailing in the international market of the comparable variety of rice.

4.2 SCALE OF FINANCE:

Financial institutions need to increase in the scale of finance of Paddy from existing to Rs. 17,500/-keeping in view the increased cost of cultivation. As soon as the harvesting is completed, Government should take pro-active action to open procurement centers, providing alternate market channels.

The Civil Supplies Corporation needs to expand the range of actors to beyond Self Help Groups. It should pro-actively intervene whenever the MSP is not being realized by the farmers. State Agencies such as A.P MARKFED can

perhaps also be involved. 'Rythu Mithra' Groups/Farmer Groups should be trained adequately to take up procurement. The capacity for storing Paddy can also be enhanced through investments in the Public/Private Partnership mode. While facilities are needed for at least 50% of the production. State Government should ensure that godowns are created at Agricultural Market Committee (AMC) so that poor farmers can store their produce and avail bank loan pledging their stored produce. This can largely prevent distress sales. Recently, Govt. Andhra Pradesh announced construction of new godowns to the capacity of 25 lakh MTs. This shall be completed on priority.

CONCLUSIONS: Finally we can conclude that by adopting some of the above said suggestions we can see happiness in the faces of the farmers and there will be sufficient production of paddy (rice) in Andhra Pradesh.

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BIOGRAPHIES



Author-1 Author is working as Assistant Professor and is research scholar at Dept.of Environmental Sciences-Andhra University-Vishakapatnam, India



Author-2 Author is working as Principal and is actively involved in research in different disciplines of engineering and science.



Author-3 Author is working as Assistant professor and shows keen interest in programming languages.

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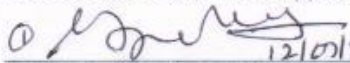
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Author(s):

M.S.V.K.V. PRASAD, PROF. EN. JAENADESH KUMAR,
M. LAKSHMI NARAYANA, SWARNANDHRA ENGINEERING COLLEGE,
NARSAPUR, ANDHRA PRADESH, INDIA

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M.S.V.K.V. PRASAD

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