

Farmer interest group:

Grass root measure of rural development

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A Farmer Interest Group (FIG) is a self-managed, independent group of farmers with a shared goal and interest. The members work together to achieve this goal by pooling their existing resources, gaining better access to other resources and to share in the resulting benefits. Farmer groups have the added bonus of developing social cohesion and confidence building within the community, providing a social focal point for the community.

Key words: Farmer interest group, Rural development, Strategies

FORMATION of FIGs paved way to develop their economic standards, thereby building the self-confidence of farmers. Effective functioning of FIGs may lead to the development of the family and community at large. FIGs have the power to create a socio-economic resolution in the rural areas of our country. FIGs have not only produced tangible assets and improved living conditions of the members' but also helped in changing much of their social outlook and attitudes.

Few studies were taken up on Farmer Interest Group which is a budding concept in terms of rural development and social welfare, no exclusive attempt has been made so far to study the performance of FIGs in specific. Owing to its long implementation period and gaining importance of group approaches, it is apt to study the FIG activities and its performance analysis.

The study was conducted in the guava Farmer Interest Group (FIG) of old-ayakudi village in Dindigul district of Tamil Nadu for understanding the real time strategy-need for effective functioning of FIGs wherever applicable. Hence, almost 10 FIGs were contacted and the data pooled and analysed. Each FIG consists of about 20 alike growers.

Based on the empirical evidences, the following strategies were formulated to promote performance of FIG, which is a mechanism for farmers for avoiding risks, and to ensure a profit or business oriented motive among the members of FIG.

Policy oriented strategies

- The yield loss due to aberrant monsoons was one of the constraints expressed by respondents, which can be overcome by strong crop insurance policy. Relevant policies in this direction should be in place.
- Enormous knowledge and adoption of guava production technologies are needed to compete with the global market, warrants the setting up of exclusive Krishi Vigyan khendra (KVK) in and around old-ayakudi region as the region possess thousands and thousands of guava growers and also the subject matter specialist appointment in KVK will indulge the scientist to identify and solve the problems by research.
- The policy makers shall facilitate the research investments on guava FIGs by funding the researchers who are willing to run their schemes on it.
- Suitable policy measures shall be framed to strengthen the organic guava production by announcing separate schemes and subsidy on it

and also the procedures of acquiring of organic certificates should be made easy to motivate the farmers to take up organic guava production to export level.

- The installation of processing industries and common nursery will be a good livelihood promoting activity which should be a concern while policy making.
- The study indicated that majority of the respondents were jobless for at least 4–6 months in the off-season. Massive employment generation programmes should be framed and implemented to engage the guava farmers. Youth can be motivated to retain in the village itself by taking up self-employment activities like mushroom cultivation. Policies regarding these activities should be speeded up.

Market oriented strategies

- Online Agriportals catering the market information needs should be exclusively set up for guava farmers by the agricultural marketing department of the Dindigul district. This will be helpful to the farmers to sell their produce in any market where good price can be obtained. This can be a part of information canter at village level.
- Framing a special programme for export promotion will please the

guava growers by enhancing their income and self-confidence.

- Creating special markets exclusively for selling organic guava with easy accessibility for all sort of consumers will boost the status of farmers who rely only upon guava business.
- The guava farmers should be educated about grading their produce and its importance in marketing their produce, (through various electronic media) to get the attention of the farmers as the study showed that half of the respondents did not grade their produce.

Administrative strategies

- Intervention of all stakeholders, viz. Horticulture department, Marketing committee and Agricultural marketing department, Researchers in development of guava FIG should be ensured.
- Provision of subsidies for newly released suitable varieties and most needed production and protection technologies should be made quick and to the necessary extent by the officials of concerned department.
- Creation of model farm which is implemented with all the new practices in guava and its processing technologies should be implemented by the government officials in a centralized area where all the guava farmers could get easy accessibility.
- The highly performing varieties should be popularized among the growers in extended manner in order to ensure the holistic development of the region.
- Creation of awareness on guava growers to start value addition unit should be a mandatory duty of the extension personnel of the

marketing department.

- Provision of technical demonstrations and workshops should be conducted then and there to improve hands on experience of the guava growers, and arranging exposure visits of farmers by the horticultural officers will expose the farmers to learn new techniques effectively and practically.
- Providing credit for purchasing farm implements and machineries for horticultural practices on easy terms and conditions on the basis of FIG membership and generating their own resources and also involving the government schemes.

Research oriented strategies

- Researchers should focus on creating new varieties of high quality, similar size, pest and disease resistant ones that shall fetch the maximum price in the market as their look impresses the buyers.
- The varieties which suits for value addition and processing industry i.e., variety suited for juice making, pulp preparation should be found with the help of research.
- Optimal plans through socio economic models could be an effective strategy to facilitate the farmers to effectively utilize the available resources.
- More research on post-harvest management and value addition should be taken up as the study revealed that respondents did not prefer storage due to lack of awareness and unfelt need on value addition.

Guava growers oriented strategy

- Several technical aspects such as pruning, water management practices and nursery management

should be taught on need basis or as requested by the guava growers.

- Due to the group purchase of inputs the bargaining power of the group gets increased and also their transportation cost gets reduced which in turn reduces the price of inputs.
- FIG can be financed in a bigger way to improve the overall economic well-being of the village households.
- Cooperative banks and commercial banks in the study area should identify suitable enterprises and farmers and can credit them substantially.

SUMMARY

A Farmer Interest Group (FIG) is a self-managed, independent group of farmers with a shared goal and interest. The study was conducted in the guava Farmer Interest Group (FIG) of Old-ayakudi village in Dindigul district of Tamil Nadu for understanding the real time strategy-need for effective functioning of FIGs wherever applicable. Hence, almost 10 FIGs were contacted and the data pooled and analysed. Each FIG consists of about 20 alike growers. Based on the empirical evidences, strategies were formulated to promote performance of FIG, which is a mechanism for farmers for avoiding risks, and to ensure a profit or business oriented motive among the members of FIG.

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