

Government Intervention in Horticulture Development in Maharashtra: A Study of Alphonso Mango Cultivation in Ratnagiri

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Agriculture in Maharashtra is mainly rainfed, facing scanty and erratic rainfall. Barely 18 per cent of gross cropped area is irrigated. Consequently, low value coarse cereals dominate the cropping pattern. The Government has made concerted efforts to improve the productivity of land by promoting horticulture and implementing the Horticulture Development Programme linked to Employment Guarantee Scheme. Subsidies were given to farmers to cultivate fruit and medicinal crops. A field survey of this scheme with respect to mango crop in Ratnagiri taluka revealed that in the first year of the fruit-bearing stage itself, the beneficiaries earned a positive return which was augmented with the subsidy component. By providing subsidy to small and marginal farmers, the scheme also helped to improve their socio-economic status. The fruit crop has tremendous export potential which can be tapped with opening up of the economy.

I Introduction

Maharashtra is one of the top economic performers with respect to per capita income. The relatively high per capita income in the state conceals the urban-rural contrast and the regional disparities. About 80 per cent districts have per capita income below the state average and in case of many of them below the national average. It is in these districts that agriculture is the main economic activity. Almost 20 out of 34 districts have more than 70 per cent of their workforce in the agricultural sector, while 29 districts have more than 60 per cent of the workforce in it. These percentages are more than the national average. Thus, Maharashtra's economy is predominantly agrarian and barring Mumbai, Thane, Pune and Nagpur, a major portion of the workforce is still dependent on agriculture as its primary source of livelihood. Further, the contribution of agriculture to the State Domestic Product is shrinking rapidly and is at present as low as 13 per cent. This is much below the national average. While agriculture's contribution to the state income in percentage terms had declined, the workforce continues to perpetuate in this sector, indicating limited employment opportunities in other sectors.