INFORMATION SOURCE UTILISATION PATTERN AND TRAINING PREFERENCES OF RABBIT FARMERS OF KERALA STATE

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Abstract

A study was undertaken to understand the information source utilization pattern as well as training preferences of farmers. Stratified random sampling with equal allocation was used to select 30 farmers from Thiruvananthapuram, Idukki and Wayanad districts. All the farmers identified in four lower districts viz. Thrissur (20), Kottayam (20), Kannur (14) and Kozhikode (12) were selected. Data were collected using a structured interview schedule through personal interviews. A significant majority of small rabbit farmers in the lower districts obtained information from the local veterinary surgeons while just over half of the small farmers of higher districts obtained information from veterinarians. All the farmers of the higher districts and 91.67 per cent of the small farmers in the lower districts perceived the training to be effective. The State Poverty Eradication Mission premises were the most frequently accessed place of training for small farmers in both the lower and higher districts. However among medium farmers both in the higher as well as lower districts, the Animal Husbandry Department premises was the most frequently accessed place of training.

Key words: *Rabbit farmers, training prefere nces, information sources*

Although backyard rabbit rearing has been practiced in the villages of Kerala for the last few decades, scientific rabbit rearing is a relatively new concept in the state. In recent years there has been a rising awareness about broiler rabbit production as a means of augmenting family income. However, farmers have to have correct knowledge about the various practices involved in order to ensure that this enterprise is profitable. Trainings are an important tool for improving farmer engagement in all facets of animal husbandry.

There have not been any major studies on the training needs and perceived effectiveness of trainings among rabbit farmers of Kerala. Singh and Verma (1997) observed that knowledge was one of the most important components of human behavior because of its role in the covert as well as overt behavior of an individual. Trainings are also venues for extension contact for knowledge dissemination.

Thus it is important to ensure that such situations are effectively used because of the high potential of extension contact and mass media exposure to positively and significantly influence production (Nachimuthu 2002). Exploring avenues to enhance or improve farmer access to animal husbandry information is all the more important in view of the serious dearth of access to animal husbandry information among households in India when compared to agriculture (NSSO, 2003). Keeping in mind these facts an investigation into the information source utilization pattern and the training needs of rabbit farmers of Kerala was undertaken.

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Materials and Methods

A list of rabbit farmers in various districts of the state was prepared in consultation with officials of the Animal Husbandry Department, Veterinary Colleges, Kudumbasree and other associated agencies. From the list, three districts with the highest number of rabbit farmers reported (designated as 'higher districts') *viz.* Thiruvananthapuram, Idukki and Wayanad were selected. Stratified random sampling with equal allocation was used to select 30 farmers from each district so that a total of 90 rabbit farmers were selected from the higher districts. From the districts with lesser number of farmers reported (designated as 'lower districts'), there were no districts with a minimum of 30 farmers, hence all the farmers identified in four lower districts *viz.* Thrissur (20), Kottayam (20) , Kannur (14) and Kozhikode (12) were selected. The selected rabbit units were then grouped into three categories based on the number of breedable female rabbits as small units (1-10 rabbits), medium units (11 to 50 rabbit) and large units (more than 50 rabbits). The number of rabbit units included in the three categories of the two district groups was as shown below.

District group	Category			Total
	Small	Medium	Large	
Lower districts	51	14	1	66
Higher districts	77	11	2	90

Data were collected using a structured interview schedule through personal interviews.

Results and discussion

Sources of information of rabbit farmers

Analysis of results indicated that a significant majority (88.3%) of small rabbit farmers in the lower districts obtained information and advice about their enterprises from the local veterinary surgeons. The figures were much lower for small farmers of higher districts where just over half of them obtained information from veterinarians. This could be due to the fact that the rabbit rearing regions of these districts were predominantly hilly areas where the terrain and logistics affected the availability of veterinarians. A disturbing result was the fact that nearly one third (36.4%) of small farmers of higher districts had no source of advice for any problems that could arise during the course of their enterprise. This finding points to the need for measures to strengthen information linkages among smallholders in the higher districts. Nearly all the medium rabbit farmers in the lower districts obtained advice from the local veterinarian, while one had no source of advice. Jayesh and George (2007) also observed that the veterinarian was the most preferred source of information for 89 per cent of dairy farmers studied. Jordan and Fourdraine (1993) studied information sources used by farmers operating the top milk producing herd in the United States as identified by the Dairy Herd Improvement Association. They found that veterinarians were the most highly rated and frequently used source of information. Jensen *et al.* (2009) also observed that the local veterinarian was the most commonly approached source of animal or herd health information among farmers of Tennessee.

Trainings received

Nearly half of the small rabbit farmers in the lower districts had not received any training and the same was true for nearly two thirds of the small farmers in the higher districts. Similar findings were observed among the medium rabbit farmers of both the zones. Jayesh and George (2007) observed that just one fourth of dairy farmers of Wayanad district reported that they had attended a training programme. It was also evident that the lone large farmer in the lower districts had not received any training. Periodic training and learning new skills is a prerequisite to any entrepreneurial venture. The findings of this study emphasized the need for more efforts in this direction.

Perceived training effectiveness

Out of the 24 small farmers in the lower districts who had received training, 22 farmers (91.67%) perceived the training attended as effective. Similar findings were observed among all the rabbit farmers of the higher districts as well.

Places of training

The State Poverty Eradication Mission sponsored Kudumbasree was the most frequently accessed place of training for small farmers in both the lower and higher districts. However among medium farmers both in the higher as well as lower districts, the Animal Husbandry Department was the most frequently accessed place of training. Al – Shadiadeh

Table 1. Distribution of respondents based on information sources utilization pattern

District Category	Category of farmers	Source of information					
		Veterinary Surgeon		Neighbours		None	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
Lower districts	Small n =51	45	88.3	1	1.96	5	9.8
	Medium n =14	13	92.9	0	0	1	7.1
	Large n =1	1	100	0	0	0	0
Higher districts	Small n=77	43	55.8	6	7.8	28	36.4
	Medium n =11	6	54.6	1	9.1	4	36.3
	Large n =2	2	100	0	0	0	0

Table 2. Distribution of respondents based on trainings received

District Category	Category of farmers	Trained		Not trained	
		f	%	f	%
Lower districts	Small n =51	24	47.1	27	52.9
	Medium n =14	7	50	7	50
	Large n =1	0	0	1	100
Higher districts	Small n=77	29	37.7	48	62.3
	Medium n =11	5	45.5	6	54.5
	Large n =2	1	50	1	50

(2007) observed that most of the farmers in the semi arid areas of Jordan preferred meeting the extension workers on their farms as first choice followed by their homes while meetings in the extension offices were the least preferred choice.

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Table 3. Distribution of respondents based on perceived effectiveness of training

	Category of farmers	Perceived training effectiveness			
		Effective		Not effective	
		f	%	f	%
Lower districts	Small n =24	22	91.7	2	8.3
	Medium n =7	6	85.7	1	14.3
	Large n =0	0	0	0	0
Higher districts	Small n=29	27	93.1	2	6.9
	Medium n =5	5	100	0	0
	Large n =1	1	100	0	0

Table 4. Distribution of respondents based on access to places of training

	Category of farmers	Places of training											
		AHD		NGO		Kudumbasree		Panchayat		Other		KAU	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Lower districts	Small n =24	5	20.8	0	0	18	75	1	4.2	0	0	0	0
	Medium n =7	4	57.1	0	0	2	28.6	0	0	0	0	1	14.3
	Large n =0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Higher districts	Small n =29	7	24.0	0	0	19	65.5	1	3.5	1	3.5	1	3.5
	Medium n =5	3	60	0	0	2	40	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Large n =1	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

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