

CONSTRAINTS FACED BY THE RURAL YOUTH IN TAKING UP AGRICULTURE AS MAIN OCCUPATION IN KERALAM

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ABSTRACT

The present study was undertaken to analyse the constraints faced by rural youth in taking up agriculture as their major occupation in Keralam. An exploratory research design was adopted, and Kannur district of Kerala was selected purposively due to its relatively high rural youth population. A total of 120 rural youth were selected from three villages using simple random sampling. Data were collected using a well-structured interview schedule comprising a list of potential constraints, and the responses were analysed using the Severity Index method to prioritize the constraints. The findings revealed that lack of stable monthly income (Mean = 3.350), financial insecurity (Mean = 3.250), high cost of agricultural inputs (Mean = 3.225), non-availability of cultivable land (Mean = 3.158), and poor coordination among agricultural information providers (Mean = 3.100) were the most severe constraints perceived by rural youth. Moderate constraints included fragmented landholdings, inadequate exposure to improved agricultural technologies, insufficient government financial support, market price fluctuations, and lack of family support. The study concludes that economic, resource-related, institutional, and technological constraints collectively discourage rural youth from pursuing agriculture as a major occupation. Strengthening income security, improving access to productive resources, enhancing extension and institutional support, and promoting youth-oriented agricultural policies are essential for encouraging youth participation and ensuring sustainable agricultural development in Keralam.

KEYWORDS: Rural youth, Agriculture as an occupation, Constraints, Severity Index, Youth participation, Sustainable agriculture

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture has traditionally been the backbone of Keralam's rural economy, contributing significantly to food security, employment, and livelihood generation. However, the sector is witnessing a steady decline in youth participation, posing serious concerns for the future sustainability of farming and agricultural development (Palanisamy et al., 2025). Keralam's agricultural landscape is characterized by fragmented landholdings, increasing labour scarcity, high cost of cultivation, climate variability, and growing dependence on migrant labour, all of which reduce the attractiveness of farming as a primary occupation (Kumar et al., 2024). At the same time, higher educational attainment, expanding opportunities in the service sector, and overseas migration have significantly altered the occupational aspirations of rural youth, encouraging them to pursue non-farm careers (Sreelakshmi et al., 2024). Studies have consistently reported that young people perceive agriculture as a risky, labour-intensive, and economically uncertain occupation due to fluctuating market prices, low profitability, and inadequate institutional support (Ramjiyani et al., 2015; Shanjeevika et al., 2018). As emphasized by Palanisamy et al. (2025), the declining willingness of youth to continue family farming has accelerated the ageing of the farming population, thereby threatening the long-term sustainability and resilience of Indian agriculture.

The constraints discouraging rural youth from taking up agriculture as their major occupation are multidimensional, encompassing economic, social, technical, institutional, and psychological dimensions (Jayapuria & Khare, 2018). Economic constraints such as low and irregular farm income, increasing production costs, inadequate access to institutional credit, and limited land availability have been identified as the foremost barriers influencing occupational decisions among rural youth (Ramjiyani et al., 2015; Nandania et al., 2025). Social factors, including the declining social prestige of farming, parental preference for salaried employment, migration aspirations, and even marriage-related concerns associated with farming as an occupation, further discourage youth from entering agriculture (Kumar et al., 2024; Nandania et al., 2025).

Moreover, inadequate technical guidance, weak extension support, insufficient entrepreneurial training, and climate-related production risks reduce young farmers' confidence in agriculture as a sustainable livelihood option (Shanjeevika et al., 2018; Sreelakshmi et al., 2024). Psychological constraints such as lack of enthusiasm, fear of farming risks, and negative perceptions towards agriculture have also been reported to influence youth participation in farming (Jayapuria & Khare, 2018). Although these constraints have been extensively documented across different regions of India, empirical evidence specific to Keralam remains limited despite its unique socio-economic conditions, high literacy rate, and rapid structural transformation of agriculture. Therefore, a systematic investigation of the constraints faced by rural youth of Keralam is essential for developing evidence based extension strategies, youth-centric policies, and agripreneurship initiatives that can enhance youth participation and ensure the long-term sustainability of the agricultural sector.

METHODOLOGY

An Exploratory research design was followed in this study to analyse the constraints faced by rural youth in taking up agriculture as main occupation. Kannur district was selected purposively due to the high percentage of rural youth. A total of 120 respondents from three villages were selected based on simple random sampling. A well structured interview schedule was developed with a list of constraints and the data were collected from the respondents. Constraints were ranked using Severity Index method.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Constraints faced by the rural youth in taking up agriculture as main occupation

S. No.	Constraints	Average	Rounded Average Value	Rank
	Lack of stable monthly income	3.35	3.35	1
	Financial insecurity	3.25	3.25	2
	The high cost of agricultural inputs	3.225	3.225	3
	Non availability of cultivable land	3.158333	3.158	4
	Poor coordination among information providers (extension, media, NGOs)	3.1	3.1	5
	Fragmented and small landholdings	3.083333	3.083	6
	The inadequate exposure to improved agricultural technologies	3.066667	3.067	7
	Insufficient government financial supports	3.058333	3.058	8
	Fluctuations in market prices	2.941667	2.942	9
	Lack of family support	2.941667	2.942	9
	The difficulty in accessing land, seeds, planting materials	2.908333	2.908	11
	Poor soil fertility in certain areas	2.908333	2.908	11
	Lack of adequate credit facilities	2.833333	2.833	13
	Limited technical knowledge about the modern farming practices	2.833333	2.833	13
	Low returns on investments	2.816667	2.817	15

The results (Table 1) indicated that lack of stable monthly income was perceived as the most severe constraint (Mean = 3.350; Rank I), followed by financial insecurity (Mean = 3.250; Rank II) and high cost of agricultural inputs (Mean = 3.225; Rank III). Non-availability of cultivable land (Mean = 3.158; Rank IV) and poor coordination among information providers (Mean = 3.100; Rank V) were also identified as major constraints. These findings suggest that income instability, economic uncertainty, increasing production costs, limited access to productive land and inadequate information support are the primary barriers discouraging youth from choosing agriculture as their major occupation. Similar findings were reported by Nandania et al. (2025), who identified low and irregular income, limited land availability and inadequate institutional support as the major constraints affecting youth participation in agriculture. Likewise, Shanjeevika et al. (2018) observed that low income generation, difficulty in accessing financial resources and inadequate technical support significantly discouraged rural youth from engaging in farming.

Among the moderately perceived constraints, fragmented and small landholdings (Mean = 3.083; Rank VI), inadequate exposure to improved agricultural technologies (Mean = 3.067; Rank VII) and insufficient government financial support (Mean = 3.058; Rank VIII) were prominent. Fluctuations in market prices and lack of family support jointly occupied Rank IX (Mean = 2.942). These findings indicate that structural limitations, limited technological exposure, inadequate policy support and market uncertainty further reduce the attractiveness of agriculture among rural youth. Palanisamy et al. (2025) similarly reported that economic, technological, infrastructural and policy-related factors collectively influence

youth participation in family farming, while Kumar et al. (2024) highlighted that fragmented landholdings, market volatility and declining social support contribute to youth migration away from agriculture.

The relatively lower-ranked constraints included difficulty in accessing land, seeds and planting materials and poor soil fertility (Mean = 2.908; Rank XI), followed by lack of adequate credit facilities and limited technical knowledge of modern farming practices (Mean = 2.833; Rank XIII). Low returns on investment received the lowest mean score (Mean = 2.817; Rank XV), although it remained an important perceived constraint. These findings imply that while resource accessibility, institutional credit and technical competence are important, they are secondary to income- and resource-related concerns in influencing occupational decisions. Similar observations were made by Ramjiyani et al. (2015), who identified inadequate access to credit, production resources and institutional services as major barriers to youth engagement in agriculture. Sreelakshmi et al. (2024) further emphasized that strengthening technical capacity, improving institutional support and ensuring better access to productive resources are essential for enhancing rural youths' participation in agriculture.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that rural youth in Keralam encounter multiple interrelated constraints in adopting agriculture as their major occupation, with economic constraints emerging as the most influential barriers. Income instability, financial insecurity, rising input costs, and limited access to cultivable land were identified as the foremost factors discouraging youth participation in farming. In addition, structural, institutional, technological, and social constraints collectively reduce the attractiveness of agriculture as a sustainable livelihood option. These findings highlight that improving youth participation in agriculture requires interventions beyond financial assistance alone. Strengthening market stability, facilitating access to productive resources, enhancing institutional credit, promoting modern agricultural technologies, and improving the effectiveness of agricultural extension services are equally important. Family and community support should also be strengthened to improve the social acceptance of farming among rural youth. A coordinated approach involving government agencies, extension organizations, educational institutions, and the private sector is therefore essential to create a favourable ecosystem for youth engagement in agriculture. Such interventions will not only encourage generational renewal in farming but also contribute to sustainable agricultural development, rural livelihood security, and long-term food security in Keralam.

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