

Hill Agriculture

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Introduction

We all are aware of agriculture in the plain or in the flat land, but have you ever thought of agriculture on the hills? Agriculture on the hills is very much contrasting in comparison with agriculture on the plains. Hill Agriculture or hill farming is the cultivation of vegetables and fruits in the upland areas i.e. on the hills.

Advances in Hill Agriculture

In India hill agriculture is mostly performed and is most favourable in the Himalayan region of the country, i.e., in the north-western hill regions where Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Uttaranchal includes. Followed by the north-eastern hill region that includes Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. 34 million people are inhabited to the Himalayan region from which a large percentage acquires of hill farming communities. These people endure predominantly on subsistence farming that is practiced on marginal rangelands and irrigated farmlands. Agriculture economy in the Himalayan region contributes about 45% to the total regional income of these inhabitants. Whereas in the north-eastern Indian Himalayan region 85% of the areas accounts for shifting cultivation also known as JHUM which supports 1.6 million people in the region, mostly the tribal communities.

The Himalayan region is broadly favourable for growing extensive range of fruits and vegetables. The climatic conditions are more suitable for growing some selected fruits like walnut, plums, peach, apple, pineapple and vegetables like radish, tomato, potato, cauliflower, cabbage. Also, some cash crops such as chilly, cardamom, ginger and saffron. The percentage of farming land of fruit crops is excessive in the western Himalayas about 20% in comparison to the eastern and central Himalayan states which is about 5% only.

Production of Cardamom in Sikkim- In Sikkim the tribal mountains community of farming opted for a high value wild spice that is cardamom for commercial purpose and cash income source. The growing of cardamom was started in the forest land by the farmers of



Sikkim. Cardamom has been their high value cash income source crop for decades now that is grown under natural forests and alder tree plantation. 75% of the farmers of north-Sikkim has supplanted agriculture food grain with alder a forestation and cardamom.

Constraints of Hill Agriculture

In terms of moisture stress, poor soil and short growing season, hill agriculture has taken over some constraint's unawareness and unavailability. Apart from this, there are other socio-economic constraints like shortage of labours, small holdings, deficient productivity, lack of marketing and network development, deficient production management and insufficiency of entrepreneurship. All of these factors led to wastage and under-utilization of the foundation of resources in the region.

Crop Land Scarcity and Water Scarcity

The whole Himalayan region are dependent on hill agriculture for livelihood. The land is the source of all the socio-economic activities. The wealth and poverty of the small and marginal farmers is correlated by the size of land holdings they have. The size of land in the Himalayan region is very limited or few in terms of management of food and livelihood. There is a biasedness against hill farming and the marginal land limitations where conservation of forest is prioritized. Farmers of Himalayan region are blamed for the degradation of the hill land as forest conservation is given more priority. So, this is also one major issue of the hill farming in Himalayan region. Another issue is the shortage of irrigation, and erosion of soil from the sloping lands that led to infertility of the soil with degradation of the land. The impact of climate change also is huge on hill agriculture.

Women Empowerment on Hill Agriculture

Women play a very important role in the hilly region as the major and the main producers of food. Women are more aware and experienced in terms of cropping methods due to their high skills from their ancestors. Women have been always less considered as the family backbone, although they perform a variety of activities. In the hilly regions men usually are more focused on their jobs and making money in the urban areas. Women are left alone when their beloved ones are out for work which results in the huge responsibility of farming on them. Therefore, women are a necessity in the farmlands of hill agriculture as the main food producers. The role of women in hill farming needs to be more focused and given more importance.

References

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