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# CONSTRAINTS FACED BY FARMERS IN PRODUCTION AND MARKETING OF COCONUT IN KOLLAM DISTRICT OF KERALA

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## ABSTRACT

*The study examines the production and marketing constraints faced by coconut farmers in Kollam district of Kerala. Primary data were collected from 110 farmers using a multistage sampling technique covering various farm sizes. The findings revealed that labour shortage, water scarcity, and pest and disease infestations were the most pressing production-related challenges, particularly impacting marginal and smallholders. In terms of marketing, farmers faced significant hurdles such as price volatility, lack of organized market facilities, and exploitation by middlemen, which reduced their share in consumer prices. These challenges limit profitability and discourage continued investment in coconut cultivation. The study highlights the need for targeted interventions, including mechanization support, timely credit availability, improved extension services, and the promotion of farmer collectives to ensure sustainable and profitable coconut farming in the region.*

***Keywords: Labour shortage, Price volatility, Middlemen, Multistage sampling.***

## INTRODUCTION

Coconut (Cocos nucifera L.) is a major plantation crop cultivated across tropical regions of the world and holds immense socio-economic and cultural significance in India. Often referred to as the "tree of life" or Kalpavriksha, every part of the coconut palm - nut, husk, shell, leaves, trunk, and root has commercial value. The nut provides food, drink, oil, fiber, and medicinal ingredients, while its by-products support industries such as coir, copra, desiccated coconut, activated carbon, and handicrafts. Its adaptability to coastal and humid climates makes it ideal for cultivation in Kerala, where it is deeply interwoven with rural livelihoods. Kerala was historically the leading coconut-producing state in India and continues to rank among the top producers despite declining trends in productivity. In Kollam district, coconut is extensively grown across agro-ecological zones, providing a major source of income

and employment to thousands of smallholder farming families.

However, in recent years, the coconut sector in Kollam has faced several production and marketing constraints that threaten its sustainability. Key production challenges include acute labour shortages, rising input costs, irregular rainfall, and pest and disease outbreaks, all of which reduce productivity and increase vulnerability, particularly for marginal and small-scale farmers. On the marketing front, farmers struggle with price volatility, lack of organized market infrastructure, inadequate storage and transport facilities, and exploitation by middlemen, which lower their share in the final consumer price. These issues are compounded by limited access to extension services, credit, and modern farm technologies. Despite its resilience and potential, the coconut sector remains under stress. Therefore, the present study was undertaken to identify and analyze the major production and marketing constraints faced by coconut farmers in Kollam district of Kerala, with the goal of informing interventions that can strengthen the economic viability of coconut cultivation in the region.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted in Kollam district of Kerala, a major coconut-producing region known for its significant area under coconut cultivation. To capture a representative view of the production and marketing constraints faced by farmers, a multistage sampling technique was employed. In the first stage, Kottarakkara block was purposively selected due to its prominence in coconut cultivation. In the second stage, seven villages were randomly chosen from the block. In the final stage, a sample of 110 coconut farmers was selected through proportionate random sampling based on farm size categories, including marginal, small, semi-medium, medium, and large holdings.

Primary data were collected through a well-structured and pre-tested interview schedule using the survey method during the agricultural year 2024–25. The data collected included information on socio-economic characteristics, input use, cost of cultivation, marketing practices, and constraints faced in production and marketing. For analysis, descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, and ranking were used to identify and prioritize the major constraints. In addition, the Garrett ranking technique was applied to rank the severity of constraints as perceived by farmers. The findings from this analysis helped in drawing practical suggestions and policy recommendations for improving the economic viability of coconut cultivation in the region.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A survey was conducted to find out the constraints faced by the respondents in production and marketing of coconut in the study area. The details are given below in the following tables:

*Table 1: Constraints faced by the respondents in production of coconut.*

| S. No. | Production constraints | Garrett Score | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | Unavailability of labour | 75.2 | I |
| **2** | Water scarcity | 70.8 | II |
| **3** | Pest and disease incidence | 66.3 | III |
| **4** | High labour wage rate | 61.9 | IV |
| **5** | Lack of timely availability of fertilizers | 57.6 | V |
| **6** | Unavailability of credit | 53.4 | VI |
| **7** | High cost of seedlings | 48.9 | VII |
| **8** | Unawareness about Government schemes | 42.7 | VIII |
| **9** | Lack of technical knowhow | 35.1 | IX |
| **10** | Unawareness about varieties | 26.8 | X |

The data given in table 1, represents the production-related constraints affecting coconut farmers in Kollam district, as identified through the Garrett Ranking Technique. Foremost among these was the unavailability of labour, which emerged as the most pressing challenge with a Garrett score of 75.2. Labour scarcity is particularly acute during peak periods like harvesting, severely impacting timely operations and increasing dependence on hired workers. This was followed by water scarcity (70.8), reflecting the vulnerability of coconut farming to erratic rainfall and inadequate irrigation facilities. Pest and disease incidences, such as rhinoceros beetle attacks and root wilt disease, were also a major concern (66.3), leading to considerable yield losses. The high wage rate of labour (61.9) compounded the labour issue, making operations costlier, especially for marginal and small farmers. Lack of timely availability of fertilizers (57.6) further constrained input use efficiency and crop health. Financial constraints such as the unavailability of credit (53.4) and the high cost of quality seedlings (48.9) limited reinvestment and adoption of improved practices. Institutional barriers, including unawareness about government schemes (42.7), lack of technical know-how (35.1), and limited knowledge about high-yielding coconut varieties (26.8), were also noted, indicating a gap in extension services and information dissemination. These findings underscore the urgent need for integrated support in the form of labour

assistance, input delivery systems, technical training, and institutional credit to improve the sustainability and productivity of coconut cultivation in the region.

***Table 2: Constraints faced by the respondents in marketing of coconut.***

| **S.** No. | **Marketing constraints** | **Garrett Score** | **Rank** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | Fluctuating market prices | 70.1 | I |
| **2** | Lack of organized marketing channels | 66.5 | II |
| **3** | Price exploitation by middlemen | 63.1 | III |
| **4** | Delayed payments from buyers | 59.82 | IV |
| **5** | High transportation costs | 56.31 | V |
| **6** | Lack of storage facilities | 52.6 | VI |
| **7** | Absence of local processing units | 48.3 | VII |
| **8** | Lack of grading and standardization | 43.23 | VIII |
| **9** | Limited access to market information | 34.8 | IX |
| **10** | Poor road and transport infrastructure | 26.9 | X |

The data given in table 2, represents the marketing-related constraints faced by coconut farmers in Kollam district, assessed using the Garrett Ranking Technique. The most prominent issue was fluctuating market prices, receiving the highest Garrett score of 70.1, which severely impacted income stability and made price forecasting difficult for farmers. This was followed by the lack of organized marketing channels (66.5), compelling many farmers to depend on informal and inefficient systems for selling their produce. Price exploitation by middlemen ranked third (63.1), reflecting the absence of effective producer collectives or direct market linkages, which significantly reduced the farmer's share in the consumer rupee. Delayed payments from buyers (59.82) emerged as another major concern, disrupting the liquidity and financial planning of farm households. The burden of high transportation costs (56.31), especially for farmers in interior areas, along with the lack of adequate storage facilities (52.6), limited farmers' ability to hold produce for better prices. Absence of local processing units (48.3) and lack of grading and standardization practices (43.23) further hindered efforts to add value or access quality-sensitive markets. Lower-ranked constraints such as limited access to timely market information (34.8) and poor road and transport infrastructure (26.9) still contributed to market inefficiencies and restricted outreach. These findings underscore the need to strengthen marketing infrastructure, improve price transparency, establish farmer collectives, and enhance access to value addition and processing facilities to improve the overall marketing efficiency and income realization from coconut cultivation in the region.

## CONCLUSION

The study, based on primary data collected from 110 coconut farmers in Kottarakara taluk of Kollam district, Kerala, highlights the multifaceted challenges that constrain the sustainability and profitability of coconut cultivation in the region. On the production side, farmers reported critical issues such as labour unavailability, water scarcity, pest and disease outbreaks, and rising input costs, which severely hamper productivity especially for marginal and small-scale farmers with limited access to resources and technical support. On the marketing front, the major constraints identified were price fluctuations, lack of organized marketing channels, middlemen exploitation, and delayed payments, all of which erode farmer income and market confidence. Additional challenges such as high transportation costs, absence of processing facilities, and limited market information further restrict profitability. To address these issues, a comprehensive strategy is needed that combines strengthening rural infrastructure, improving access to institutional credit and inputs, enhancing technical know-how, and promoting collective marketing through Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs). There is also a need to improve local-level storage and processing infrastructure to reduce post-harvest losses and add value at the farm gate. With targeted policy interventions and institutional support, coconut cultivation in Kollam district particularly in regions like Kottarakara can become more resilient, economically viable, and attractive for the farming community in the years ahead.

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