

# Marketing of Agricultural Produce: Exploring a unique solution to agriculture crisis in Punjab

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**Abstract-** This paper examines the hitch regarding the marketing of agricultural produce, Commission agents and procurement agencies of the agriculturally developed Punjab by addressing some possible and realistic ways to tackle agriculture crisis, as agriculture in Punjab is going through turbulent time and striving hard for sustainability. Although production, processing and marketing are the 3 pillars of the agricultural economy but marketing of agricultural produce is still evolving in Indian society and facing various challenges. The agriculture crisis in Punjab is very much evident by increase in farmer's suicide.

**Index terms:** Agriculture marketing, Agriculture produces, Commission agents, Procurement agencies

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## I. INTRODUCTION

India is basically an agrarian society where sole dependence has been on agriculture since time immemorial. In the olden days, the agricultural produce was fundamentally bartered by nature where farmers exchanged goods for goods and services. All the marketing work now going on in India owes its origin to the *Royal Commission on Agriculture (1928)*. For some years, the provinces found themselves unable to adopt the recommendations of the Commission, and the Government of India eventually established, as from *1st January, 1935*, the office of the *Agricultural Marketing Advisor*, with a central staff. At the same time the office made grants, up to two lakh rupees per annum, through the Imperial Council of Agricultural Research, to the provinces for the appointment of Assistant Marketing Officers in each province. The provinces provided a Senior Marketing Officer of the status of Deputy-Director of Agriculture to supervise the work. The majority of the Indian States agreed to cooperate by nominating persons to deal with marketing, and all the larger States established a marketing staff at their own expense. All the staffs were appointed and work fully begun throughout the whole of India by *September, 1935*. (Livingstone,1940)

Gradually the scenario changed with the changing times and agriculture produce started selling with an element of commercial value. Trading of agriculture produce started for exchange of money. And from trading to marketing of agricultural produce began through a way of traditional selling. The marketing as a term is broader than traditional trading. And agricultural marketing as a concept is still evolving in Indian society

## *Marketing of Agricultural Produce*

Marketing of Agricultural Produce or *Agricultural Marketing* is the study of all the *activities, agencies and policies* involved in the procurement of farm inputs by the farmer and the movement of agricultural products from the farmer to the consumers. It includes organization of agricultural raw materials supply to processing industries, the assessment of demand for farm inputs and raw materials. Agricultural marketing plays an important role not only in stimulating production and consumption but in accelerating the pace of economic development. (Agarwal,1999)

The term agricultural marketing is composed of two words- agriculture and marketing. Agriculture, in the broadest sense, means activities aimed at the use of natural resources for human welfare i.e. it includes all the primary activities of production. But, generally, it is used for growing and/or raising crops and livestock. Marketing connotes a series of activities involved in moving the goods from the point of production to the point of consumption. It includes all the activities involved in the creation of time, place, form and possession utility.

Agricultural marketing is mainly the buying and selling of agricultural produce. The activities included are Assembling, Grading, Storage, Transportation and Distribution. The agricultural marketing system is a link between the farm and the non-farm sectors. It involves all the aspects of market structure or system, both functional and institutional, based on technical and economic considerations, and includes pre and post-harvest operations, assembling, grading, storage, transportation and distribution. A dynamic and growing agricultural sector requires fertilizers, pesticides, farm equipments, machinery, diesel, electricity and repair services which are produced and supplied by the industry and non-farm enterprises. (Acharya, 2000)

In earlier days when the village economy was more or less self-sufficient the marketing of agricultural products presented no difficulty as the farmer sold his produce to the consumer on a cash or barter basis. Today's agricultural marketing has to undergo a *series of exchanges* or transfers from one person to another before it reaches the consumer. Marketing functions involved in this are assembling, preparation for consumption and distribution. Selling on any agricultural produce depends on some couple of factors like the demand of the product at that time, availability of storage etc. The products may be sold directly in the market or it may be stored locally for the time being. Moreover, it may be sold as it is gathered from the field or it may be cleaned, graded and processed by the farmer or the merchant of the village. Sometime processing is done because consumers want it, or sometimes to conserve the quality of that product. The task of distribution system is to match the supply with the existing demand by whole selling and retailing in various points of different markets like primary, secondary markets. (Deshpande,2009)

Punjab state is an *agriculture dominated economy*. It is the second largest producer of wheat after Uttar Pradesh. Punjab contributes maximum share to central food grain pool, so it is called *food basket of India*. Food being the first and most important need of human being requires special attention. It is the responsibility of the Government to fulfill the basic needs of the public. State Government of Punjab is trying to achieve this function through different State Food Corporations. The procurement, storage and distribution are the paramount functions of State Food Corporations. Food-grain management strategy of Government of India involves; procurement, proper storage and availability to the public of food-grains. (Mandeep,2015)

The lesson from all of this is quite simple. If the decision has been made to adopt the marketing concept, then consideration has to be given to the implications for each of the participants and the functions performed within the marketing system. Where one or more elements of the system are found to be other than market orientated, then either a change towards the marketing philosophy has to be introduced in those elements or a change in the configuration of the marketing system has to be implemented. The various parties involved in agricultural marketing are:

- Producers (Farmers) (Zamindars)
- Commission Agents (Arhtiya)
- Govt. Officials
- Food Grain Agencies
- Purchasers
- Porters (Palledars).

In light of the foregoing discussion, the present study is designed to meet the following objectives:

1. To examine the problems in marketing of agricultural produce at macro and micro level.
2. To suggest suitable means to mitigate the problems faced by the farmers and commission agents.

The paper is organized in three sections: First, the theoretical background is discussed. Second, the conceptual framework is explained with the proposed set of propositions in the present study. Finally, the conclusion is given.

## II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

***Proposition 1: There is a significant relationship between agriculture crisis and farmers suicide. Agriculture marketing reduces the risk involved in farmer's suicide.***

**Haque (1945)** pointed out while amending The Punjab Agriculture Produce Markets Act, 1939' that the farmers were unmindful even of their own agricultural produces due to their illiteracy and ignorance. They were not worried about making minimum efforts to sell the agricultural produce at a profitable price. Although, they toil during the most inclement weather i.e. winter nights and summer noon's with a view to extract the greatest yield from the soil but they do not pay any attention to the returns, which they were to get from the sale of produces in the markets. Usually, they were having blind faith on the village *bania* or trader in the nearest *mandi* and entrusts his agricultural produce. It was further pointed out that all persons with whom the *zamindar* has to deal were not trading the agricultural produces with honesty but the practices which they use in almost all the markets of the state were detrimental to the interests of *zamindar*.

**Singh, M. (1962)** studied the effect of regulation and market changes as the establishment of regulated markets and regulation of trade has resulted in lowering of market changes and marketing facilities and services available have provided incentives to the producers to produce directly to these markets. It was further found that the regulation has been responsible for better understanding of marketing among the producers, reduced village sales and increased monetary gains of the producer-sellers and has been effective in lowering the margins of middlemen and increasing the farmer's share in the consumer rupee and ultimately resulted in lowering the marketing costs.

**Sharma and Gill (1970)** studied the behaviour of the producer sellers to sell the produce to the specific commission agent and found that so far as the structure of rural markets is concerned, there was predominantly dependence of farmers on village money-lenders and on traders. They observed small farmers sold their produce in

the local market to one commission agent with whom he had long ties in the state. The larger farmers patronized commission agents and the Co-operative marketing society.

**Tyagi (1979)** concluded from his study that the farmers were not provided the better price although imported produce were distributed at prices below the open market prices. It was further revealed that increased physical and economic access to food did not allow the prices received by the farmers to go up even when production stagnated during the period between 1950-51 and 1960-61.

**Venkatarmanan (1980)** reported that market sales by farmers have increased by and large, physical losses during handling, storage and transportation were also reduced. The study further revealed that the process of price discovery in most of the markets was visibly open, market charges have been rationalized and backward and forward linkages of wholesale markets had considerably increased. This all was in the interest of farmers.

**Panday (1983)** indicated that in Bihar, market infrastructure was created with huge investment of resources but this could not have positive effect on the quantity of arrivals in the regulated markets. Even, agricultural produces have decreased up to the extent of 20 to 30 percent. This means regulated markets were not playing positive role for which these were established.

**Proposition 2: There is a significant relationship between agriculture marketing and transfer of appropriate price.**

**Harris (1984)** conducted a study on regulated markets and concluded that these markets have failed to attract producer sellers. All the wholesale markets of Karnataka indicated that these regulated markets were not fulfilling their purpose. The private traders were more benefited instead of farmers. This, not only legitimized transferring agricultural produce but channeling of resources for the operation of these as market places by way of improving infrastructure for markets.

**Rangi (1986)** in his Ph. D thesis studied the economic analysis of marketing and processing of rice in Punjab State. It was found that a major proportion of paddy was purchased by rice millers, followed by the FCI and other state Government agencies. Author suggested that the malpractices in marketing should be checked through strong administrative actions.

**Krishnaji (1987)** reported that buffer stocks of food grains played a positive role in stabilizing returns to the farmers in the face of fluctuations in production. This prevented a fall in the prices so that these should not go up to unremunerative levels during the years of bumper production. The second one was to check undue price rise during the years when domestic output declined very sharply.

**Johl (1989)** observed that even the concept of a regulated market carries different meaning for different

states. Whereas in Punjab and Haryana regulation of markets enjoins upon the seller and the buyers to interact and operate under open-bid system in declared market yards and their rights and obligations as well as market fee and other charges are stipulated, most parts of the country the regulated markets create only facilities in terms of market yards, godowns and other infrastructures which were used mainly by the traders, often to the disadvantages of the producer-sellers. Thus, notionally the regulated markets and markets yards exist, but functionally these did not work to the advantage of the producer-sellers. Therefore, the producer-sellers invariably and per force operate in buyer's markets.

**Tyagi (1990)** reported from their study that no doubt the market structure and marketing system is more developed in surplus producing regions yet, the problem of congestion and choking of the markets in these regions has been a common feature in recent years. This situation has arisen as the production of various agricultural produces has increased and the food grains production specifically increased.

**Ahmed (1992)** reported that the availability of infrastructure affects the choice of technology and it reduces the transaction costs and stimulates market operation which produces powerful impetus to production. He also pointed the positive affect of availability of infrastructure on income distribution because low per capita infrastructure limits the access of small and marginal farmers to the market.

**Pursell, et al. (1993)** keeping in view the present policies of agricultural marketing has reported that Agricultural sector was critical for the overall health of the economy and a strategy of economic reforms may not succeed without sustained and broad based agricultural development. Therefore, there was a need to have a fresh look at the agricultural marketing, trade and price policies".

**Bansal (1994)** pointed out that considering such a vast growth potential, development of rural markets should receive a high priority in the plan of development of agricultural marketing in the country. There is an urgent need to prepare State Master Plan for development of rural markets, both at macro and micro levels.

**Singh, M. and Yadav (1995)** concluded from their study that the farmers in the wheat growing areas of the state bring a substantial part of their produce for sale in the market during post harvest months and get a comparatively lower price for their produce. The seasonal variation in arrivals of wheat was more apparent in primary markets than in secondary markets. As much as one third of variation in annual arrivals of wheat was governed by the variation in prices in both the primary and secondary markets. However, wheat arrivals were more sensitive to their ruling prices in secondary markets than that of primary markets.



**Bhalla (1996)** emphasized that Minimum Support Price policy currently followed in the case of wheat, paddy and cotton should be continued in future also. They suggested that contract farming between farmers and exporters or processors could prove beneficial in the case of highly perishable crops. The steps in this regard are required to be taken to ensure the benefits to small and marginal farmers from these arrangements.

**Singh, G. (1996)** concluded from his study that the availability of good marketing infrastructure has helped the agro-processing industry in Gujarat along with location advantage it has in terms of its proximity to terminal markets like Bombay. Co-operative intervention is important to make the markets more efficient. There was need to make existing cooperative structure more competent and to regulate the market operations to curb marketing malpractices. Also, there was need to ensure multiple outlets for the produce in order to avoid dependence of the producers on a single outlet. When there are competing demands for the same produce, there was more efficient functioning of the markets to the benefit of producers, since agro processing depends on regular supply and quality raw materials, the locally linked agencies need to operate for this and work directly with producers.

**Atibudhi (1998)** concluded from his study that there should be strong producer's organization in the form of market committee to protect the interest of the farmers as well as for streamlining better marketing system for any significant increase in producer's share in consumer's rupee. This way marketing efficiency will also increase and the exploitation of farmers by the traders can be minimized by strengthening the market committee. He suggested that government must ensure through the market committee and its marketing department the functioning of these organizations is improved by providing proper marketing facilities, competent staff and strict enforcement of different provisions of Regulated Markets Act.

**Selvaraj et al (1998)** studied and assessed the farmers' perception and functioning of regulated markets. The study revealed that most of the farmers were not aware of the functioning of regulated markets and the results of awareness model indicated that educational status of the farmers was found to be an important factor. This factor influenced the farmers' awareness about the regulated markets. Hence, it was suggested that efforts to be taken to disseminate the benefits of the regulated markets among all the farmers through publicity and propaganda activities so that he may be educated on this.

**Varghese, Sharma and Gupta (1998)** reported that by ensuring correct weightment, fair dealings, prompt payments and open auction of the produce has been the main idea behind market regulation in the State of Rajasthan. The

study further brought out that the commercial grading ensures consumer satisfaction on one side and ensures remunerative prices to the producers on the other side. The supply of information on wholesale prices, market arrivals etc. were also taken up through various sources of the media as a part of market intelligence.

**Chahal and Dhawan (1999)** concluded that positive price policy of a few commodities (e.g. wheat and rice) consequently increased the income and capital formation in the agricultural sector. A favorable agricultural price policy along with the evolution of high yielding varieties of crops particularly of wheat and paddy has helped to achieve self-sufficiency in foodgrains production. Thus, it could be inferred safely that agricultural pricing policy has played a positive role in eliminating the hunger from the country.

**Chhina and Chahal (1999)** concluded from their study that the grain market of Khanna was selected to represent the state during 1992-93 and study revealed that 92.20 percent of wheat was sold through the regulated markets whereas 1.90 per cent was sold to the consumers directly. The rest of the produce (5.90 per cent) was sold through irregular channels. Therefore, it can be said that regulated markets are playing a great role in the marketing of food grains.

**Raju (1999)** concluded from his study that the market arrivals as compared to percentage of production is very low in case of food crops (rice, jowar, bajra) whereas commercial crops (groundnut, and chilli) as most part of the foodgrains produced is used for domestic consumption. The domestic consumption and retentions for home consumption are low in case of Commercial crops. The study revealed that production trend is on higher side but arrivals of selected commodities was less as more progress is very much essential for improving the market arrivals. There was large gap between the promises made while setting up of regulated markets and the actual performance shown. The interviews held with the officials of the Marketing Department revealed that considerable time lag is indispensable to bridge this gap, as majority of the farmers are still illiterate besides having many social and economic constraints. Therefore, it can be inferred that regulated markets are not fully used for sale of agricultural produces.

**Rajagopal (2000)** reported that in order to regulate marketing system of agricultural produces, more emphasis has been laid on ensuring the accuracy in prices, weightment, standardization and packing. It was further revealed from the study that besides these regulations, the health and hygiene of the consumers has also been considered in formulating the regulations. However, the regulation of agricultural marketing has been the state subject and thus reflecting heterogeneity in implementation. Ultimately it was suggested

that it was important to consider a uniform pattern for implementation of the marketing acts/rules/orders.

**Rao (2002)** reported from his study that some changes in the interest of agricultural marketing. The structural issues as marketing should be solved if farmers were to shift from food crops to cash crops and moreover private sector investments be encouraged in the agricultural sector which was not to the expected levels. Commodity Boards should be formed to take up issues such as production, processing and marketing and offer a range of services.

**Singh (2004)** concluded from his study that agriculture marketing system needs a fresh look. There existed many internal barriers and those must go. He realized that re-examination of those aspects of policies which prevent a direct interaction between farmers and agro-industries. He suggested that single market across the country will be beneficial for both manufactured and agricultural produce with encouragement of agro-industry linkages. Since agriculture sector is important sector therefore it must receive the priority attention, as it deserves. Agriculture research, training and extension require much greater attention.

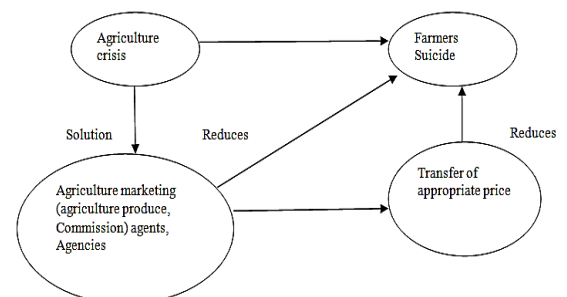
**Srivastava (2006)** pointed out that some specific states and moreover big farmers seen to reap more benefits. For instance, Kerala farmers are being denied chances of attaining the true benefits of the MSP while big farmers of Punjab, Haryana and West UP practicing wheat paddy rotation and moreover paddy farmers of Andhra Pradesh are having great benefits. FCI also blamed that they have shown vested interests while procuring. On the fixation of MSP linkages, he clearly explained that MSP should cover at least the operational expenses plus the cost of family labour, and remuneration for the managerial job performed by the farmer with some profit margin. He also pointed out that due to the vested interests, ultimate consumer price does not reach the growers and moreover role of commission agents in major producing States is not proper and lining the pockets of intermediaries. In the support of this he mentioned that “in a recent study conducted by Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad (IIMA), on ‘Wheat Marketing and its Efficiency in India’, it was revealed that the estimated average total marketing cost of wheat is found to be of the order of Rs. 266 per quintal, and in this transport has the largest share of 40per cent, commission and taxes make up 25per cent, and wastage another 15per cent. The study shows that when comparing the consumer farmer price spread, the marketing costs account for 74per cent of the spread, leaving 26per cent for margins. It further brought out the fact that the farmers receive on an average only 66per cent of what the consumer pays and the rest goes to margin players who do not add any significant value to the produce”.

**Srivastava (2007)** explained that as per Agricultural Produce Market Committees Act (APMC), farmers cannot sell directly to consumers and they have to sell their produce only through APMC traders. Literally, farmers cannot ask for a particular price rather it is the buyer who can do so. He apprised that some of the states have amended their Act but some are yet to amend the law as per the recommendation of the Union Government. Basically, allowing private sector participation in direct purchases of farm produce is required to be enacted which is yet to be looked into by various states.

**Arabi (2008)** examined the micro dimensions of food security problems in India and suggested that minimum support price should remain at a level that protects the farmer against risk of losing money due to collapse of the price of the product. He suggested that stabilization of cereals prices should continue to be one of the important objectives of food policy which can be achieved through the operation of a buffer stock combined. The price was controlled with timely intervention by the FCI in domestic markets and a liberal import-export policy for food grains. Ultimately, it was suggested that MSP should not exceed the sum of variable cost and family wages, at least as long as cereals stocks with FCI exceed the recommended buffer stock.

**Raghuvanshi (2009)** examined facilities needed for agricultural marketing to ensure that agriculture marketing reaps the desired results. The study brought out that the farmers must be provided certain basic facilities such as proper facilities for storing their goods so that they hold their produces to get better prices during off season. Cheap transport facilities must be provided to enable him to take surplus produce to the Mandi rather than dispose it of in the village. Information regarding ruling prices in mandis must be provided to them. There was need to minimize number of intermediaries so that the middleman’s profits are reduced and farmer’s returns may be increased.

Based upon the existing literature, a conceptual model is drawn (fig. A) delineating the proposed relationships.



**Fig. A**

### III. NEED FOR STUDY

Agricultural Marketing is most important not only for the performance of various marketing functions and for expansion of the size of market but also for transfer of appropriate price signals leading to improved marketing efficiency. Major studies have been conducted on agriculture and farmers in Punjab but no comprehensive study has been conducted on marketing of agricultural produce, Commission agents, Agencies which is of main concern in today's time. There are around 26,000 Commission Agents in Punjab and 12 Lac Farmers. Each Commission agent deal with 20 to 200 farmers as per their business. It is an emerging problem in today's time. Review of literature has suggested there is research gap related to agricultural marketing. It is said that "Production, Processing and Marketing" are the 3 pillars of the agricultural economy. With the developments that are taking place in recent years, agriculture in India is becoming more and more market oriented. (Mandeep, 2015).

### IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study proposes to make use of both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data will be collected from the selected farmers, commission agents and food agencies' through a well-defined structured questionnaire, aimed to analyze the marketing of agricultural produce (mainly wheat and paddy) and the role of commission agents in Punjab.

The information will be collected regarding farmers, production, regulated markets, storage capacity of procurement agencies and financial institutions (commercial and cooperative banks) from the various sources of Statistical Abstract of Punjab, Economic Survey of Punjab, various government reports, journals and periodicals.

### V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Agricultural marketing plays an important role not only in stimulating production and consumption, but in accelerating the pace of economic development. Optimization of resource use, Output management, Increase in farm incomes, Adoption, Spread of new technology, Widening of markets, Employment, Addition to national income are some of the significant components of Agricultural Marketing. Marketing process brings a new varieties, qualities and beneficial goods to consumers and therefore, marketing acts as a line between production and consumption. Scientific, systematic marketing stabilizes the price level

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