



COMMERCIAL AGRICULTURE IN INDIA

POST HARVEST NEEDS OF
SMALLHOLDER FARMERS

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Commercial Agriculture in India: Post-harvest Needs of Small-holder Farmers

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Preface

With 56 per cent farmers in India depending on favorable monsoons for good crops and not having access to assured irrigation sources, all crops are a gamble and in a production cycle of 5 years, it is assumed that farmers will have two good crop-years, one bad crop-year and two average-crop years and that an average farmer should be able to repay agri-credit dues. With 55 per cent of the country's work-force engaged in agriculture (largely under-employed except during planting and harvesting seasons), the economy is heavily dependent on the primary agricultural sector. With 82 per cent of the farmers being smallholder farmers (average size of land-holding less than 2 hectares), there is a basic fight for survival as they rarely have access to quality inputs, irrigation, credit, agri-marketing infrastructure, insurance and 80 per cent risks are at the production stages while 20 per cent risks are at the marketing stages. With fake seeds, fake fertilisers and fake pesticides flooding the market, the smallholder farmer fights a losing battle for survival with climate changes, cloudbursts and droughts and non-availability of cheap credit and global warming. The smallholder farmer has little access to subsidised credit (@4% for prompt repayment) no access to long-term credit or to equity options and is often at the mercy of money-lenders and agents who manage to siphon off 80% of the profits while the farmer with all risks and back-breaking labor, barely manages to have 20 per cent of the profits. With increasing land salinity, land-fragmentation, loss of ground-water, rising cost of inputs, it is indeed a harsh life for the farmers in India.

The only way out of increasing pauperisation of the farmers, is de-risking strategies and commercial agriculture with emphasis on fisheries, animal husbandry, vegetable cultivation and horticulture. But commercial agriculture involves high-value infrastructure and inputs such as cheap poly-houses, drip irrigation, cheap credit, market access, quality seeds and inputs, reliable transportation and much-improved storage facilities (ware-houses, cold-storages, reefer vans, etc.) which smallholder farmers are unable to afford and hence for all their risks and back-breaking labor, the farmer is unable to break even and is unable to meet the requirements of his family. On his frail shoulders rest the hopes for sustainable farming, crop diversity and food security for the entire country!

New Technologies which help to reduce costs and risks, better access to storages, fair spot markets, commodity exchanges where farmer producer organisations co-exist with traders, cheap credit are all essential for commercialising agriculture. Diversification into fruits and vegetable crop production requires a change in mind-sets, skills, knowledge and practises and even more exposure to risks besides costlier inputs and sufficient credit resources.

For all the production risks, weather risks, market risks the farmer's margins are very thin as the traders' margins are ever-increasing with hardly any risk! This only ensures leaner and starving farmers and their families and fatter agents, adthiyas, money-lenders and traders!

With chemical fertilisers poisoning the soils and groundwater (the tragedy of Punjab) there is need to go in for rain-water harvesting, watershed development and intensive drip irrigation so as to conserve scarce water resources. Agricultural extension services and organic farming practices are like fairy-tales today. Without proper post-harvest facilities, farmers will find it very difficult to enhance their profit margins.

The State APMC Acts and Essential Commodities Act and a host of outmoded Acts need to be consigned into oblivion as soon as is feasible as these have outlived their utility value. More efficient and modern warehouses, cold storages and private mandis are all essential today. For the smallholder farmer, diversification into animal husbandry and fisheries in ponds is an essential need and not an option so as to diversify risks. More Farmer Associations, Farmer Producer Groups and Joint Liability Groups are needed today to offset the pernicious strangle-hold of traders and agents and ensure better margins for themselves. Capital Investment for enhancing land productivity, building up the assets base and diversifying from subsistence farming into commercial farming, is essential if the smallholder farmer is to survive. Climate changes and global warming due to heavy carbon and methane emissions have reduced farm yields and productivity.

This book is divided into two parts; the first part containing 13 chapters which study the problems of warehouses in great depth in Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Haryana and Odisha. Extensive field studies were conducted and both the strong points and weaknesses were studied so that replication in these states and other states would be able to benefit. The need for smaller warehouses for agricultural produce exclusively and the need to popularise warehouse receipts with the help of banks was acutely felt. In spite of generous central subsidies, the scheme to create agricultural warehouses did not pick up and whether incentives were not adequate or the processes and procedures were too cumbersome, need further study at the grass-roots level. The next five chapters study the Agricultural Marketing scenario in great depth and the APMC Acts appear to have created massive hurdles for the smallholder farmers. These Acts are being done away with and the e-National Agricultural Marketing Portal should be able to help farmers secure better prices. However the market infrastructure in all states need massive funds infusion and creation of better transportation and logistics

networks before these can be utilised by smallholder farmers to secure better margins.

With all these plethora of problems, sustainable farming for smallholder farmers is easily forgotten and in the mad struggle for survival by smallholder farmers and their families the goal of food security is often forgotten. The smallholder farmers need a helping hand by creating more agri-market infrastructure and small warehouses so as to be able to store food grains for some time so as to get better prices after 2-3 months when prices are not likely to be depressed. Also Warehouse Receipts need to be encouraged by registered warehouses and banks so that the farmer is able to get better margins. Finally, the smallholder farmers need a helping hand by creation of better agri-market infrastructure and institutional assistance as and when required.

Dr. K G Karmakar and Dr. G D Bandopadhyay

Contents	Page No.
Preface	I
Part I. Rural Godowns	
Chapter 1. The Need for Rural Godowns	3
1.1. Introduction	4
1.1.1. Progress of Rural Godowns in Andhra Pradesh.....	10
1.1.2. Progress of Rural Godowns in Gujarat	11
1.1.3. Progress of Rural Godowns in Haryana.....	12
1.1.4. Progress of Rural Godown in Karnataka.....	13
1.1.5. Progress of Rural Godown in Odisha.....	15
1.2. Importance of Rural Godowns	15
Chapter 2. Infrastructure Creation: CISS Assessment Study	17
2.1. Rationale for the Study.....	18
2.2. Methodology	18
2.2.1. Selection of States and Districts.....	18
2.2.2. Sample Size by State and District	19
2.2.3. Selection of Godowns by Agencies	20
2.2.4. Selection of Godowns in Andhra Pradesh.....	21
2.2.5. Selection of Godowns in Gujarat	22
2.2.6. Selection of Godowns in Haryana.....	23
2.2.7. Selection of Godowns in Karnataka.....	24
2.2.8. Selection of Godowns in Odisha.....	24
2.2.9. Selection of Farmers	25
2.2.10. Reference Year of the Study	25
2.3. Data Collection.....	25
2.4. Data Analysis	26
2.4.1. Break Even Analysis.....	26
2.4.2. Estimation of FRR and BCR.....	26
2.4.3. Debt Service Coverage Ratio.....	27
2.5. Limitations of the Study	27

Chapter 3. Progress of Rural Godowns in Selected States	29
3.1. Geographical Concentration / Spread	
Units of Rural Godown in Andhra Pradesh	30
3.2. Number and Capacity of Godowns by District	31
3.3. Size of the Units	32
3.3.1. Year Wise Capacity Creation, Subsidy Released etc.	32
3.3.2. Ownership-wise Rural Godowns Sanctioned.....	32
3.3.3. Agency Wise Cumulative Position of Rural Godowns	34
3.3.4. Capacity-wise Godown of Commercial Banks in Patan and Kheda Districts.....	34
3.4. Progress of District Wise Rural Godown in Haryana	35
3.5. Progress of Rural Godown in Karnataka.....	35
3.5.1. District Wise and Capacity Wise Rural Godown in Karnataka	37
3.5.2. Progress of Rural Godowns in Odisha	38
3.6. Status of Completed Rural Godowns in Odisha.....	40
3.7. Status of Rural Godowns Receiving Subsidy in Odisha	41
3.8. Capacity-wise Subsidy Released in Major Districts	41
3.9. Ownership Pattern of Rural Godown Receiving Subsidy	42
Chapter 4. Rural Godowns: Problems and Prospects	43
4.1. Eligibility of the Borrowers.....	44
4.1.1. Location of the Units.....	44
4.1.2. Size of the Units	45
4.2. Loan Security	45
4.2.1. Insurance and Pledge Loan	45
4.2.2. Disbursement of Loan.....	46
4.2.3. Norms for Term Loan	46
4.3. Time Limit for Completion.....	47
4.3.1. Pre-closure of Accounts	47
4.3.2. Adjustment of Subsidy in Borrower's Account.....	47
4.4. Adherence to Technical Specification and Safety Measures.....	47
4.5. General Awareness and Training Program	48

4.6. Conditions for Scientific Storage	48
4.6.1. Refinance from NABARD	49
4.6.2. Other Conditions	49
4.6.3. Implementation Aspects	49
4.7. No Interest Chargeable on Subsidy Portion	50
4.7.1. Completion Period	50
4.7.2. Appraisal and Joint Inspection	51
4.7.3. Monitoring Mechanism	51
Chapter 5. Profile Studies of Godowns and Farmers/ Promoters	53
5.1. Agricultural Information—Gujarat vis-à-vis Sample Districts (Patan and Kheda)	54
5.1.1. Demographic Scenario	54
5.1.2. Distribution of Land Holding and Area	55
5.1.3. Rural Infrastructure Scenario	55
5.1.4. Area and Yield of Crops Grown and Stored in Godowns, Patan District of Gujarat	56
5.1.5. Area, Yield of Crops Grown and Stored in Godowns, Kheda District of Gujarat	57
5.2. Profile of the Selected Godowns in Patan and Kheda Districts, Gujarat	57
5.2.1. Rent Structure of Godowns of Gujarat	57
5.2.2. Owned and Hired Commodities in Godowns	58
5.2.3. Inflow and Outflow of Commodities in Patan District, Gujarat	58
5.2.4. Inflows and Outflows of Commodities in the Selected Godowns in Kheda, Gujarat	58
5.3. Profile of the Promoters, Gujarat	59
5.3.1. Socio-economic Back-ground of Promoters and Non-promoters, Gujarat	59
5.3.2. Location, Geographical Area, Land Use Pattern of Bellary and Gulbarga Districts, Karnataka	61

5.3.3. Distance of Sample Rural Godowns from District HQ, APMC Market, Karnataka	61
5.4. Storing of Produce (Own and Others).....	62
5.4.1. Inflow and Outflow Pattern of Storage in Bellary District, Karnataka	63
5.4.2. Inflow and Outflow Pattern of Storage in Gulbarga District, Karnataka	64
5.4.3. Average Rent in Bellary District, Karnataka	64
5.4.4. Average Rent in Gulbarga District, Karnataka	64
5.5. Agricultural Parameters of Odisha vis-à-vis the Sample Districts	65
5.5.1. Rural Infrastructure Scenario	66
5.5.2. Sample Godowns in Selected Districts, Odisha	66
5.5.3. Rent Structure in Selected Districts, Odisha	67
5.5.4. Owned and Hired Commodities in the Godown in selected Districts, Odisha	67
5.5. Inflow and Outflow of Commodities in Ganjam District, Odisha.....	67
5.6. Profile of Sample Farmers.....	68
Chapter 6. Investment Costs of Selected Godowns	69
6.1. Actual Investment Cost, Bank Loan and Subsidy for Selected States	70
6.1.1. Item Wise Break up of Investment Cost in Selected States	70
6.1.2. Capital Cost of Project for the Purpose of Subsidy Assessment.....	71
6.1.3. Financial Details of Bank Loans for Rural Godowns in Andhra Pradesh.....	71
6.1.4. Adequacy of Unit Cost and Bank Loan by Different Size of Godowns	72
6.2. Refinance from NABARD	72
6.3. Total Financial Outlay, Bank Loan and Margin Money in Gujarat	73
6.4. Cost / Time Over-runs and Subsidy Details	74
6.5. Bank Loan and Investment Cost	74

6.5.1. Investment Cost per Unit and per Ton, Capacity Created etc. in Haryana	75
6.5.2. Size Wise and District Wise Break up of Cost Component	76
6.5.3. Break-up of Cost of Investment among Different Size Groups	77
6.6. Bank Loan and Subsidy.....	77
6.6.1. District Wise Average Cost of Investment and Bank Loan	78
6.6.2. Average Investment Cost per Unit and per MT in Karnataka.....	78
6.6.3. District Wise Variation in Investment Cost and Capacity	79
6.6.4. Size-wise breakup of per MT Investment Cost.....	79
6.6.5. District Wise Breakup of per MT Investment Cost.....	79
6.6.6. Size-wise and District Wise Average Cost of Investment and Bank Loan.....	80
6.6.7. Capacity Wise Total Financial Outlay and Subsidy in Odisha	81
Chapter 7. Economics of Rural Godowns	83
7.1. Gross Income, Annual Maintenance, Operational Costs and Net Income for Selected Godowns-State Wise	85
7.2. Gross Income, Annual Maintenance, Operation Cost and Net Income per MT of Selected Godowns	85
7.3. State Wise Financial Rate of Return of the Selected Godowns by Capacity	85
7.4. Economics of Rural Godowns in Andhra Pradesh	86
7.4.1. Break Even Analysis.....	90
7.5. Economics of the Rural Godowns in Gujarat.....	91
7.5.1. Operation & Maintenance Cost.....	91
7.6. Other Recurring Expenditure	92
7.6.1. Annual Costs and Benefits of the Society Godowns Units	93
7.6.2. District Wise and Size Wise Annual Income, Expenditure and Net Income	94
7.6.3. Break Even Analysis of Rural Godowns.....	95
7.6.4. Measuring Present Worth of Society Godowns	96
7.6.5. Sensitivity Analysis.....	97

7.6.6. Debt Service Coverage Ratio	99
7.7. Economics of Rural Godowns in Haryana	99
7.8. Economics of Rural Godown in Karnataka.....	103
7.9. Economics of Investment of Odisha	108
7.10. Capacity-wise Financial Viability of the Godowns.....	111
7.10.1. Break Even Analysis.....	112
7.11. Economics of OSWC Owned Godowns	113
Chapter 8. Impact of Rural Godown Schemes	115
8.1. Increase in Storage Capacity of Rural Godown for Sample and District as a Whole.....	116
8.1.1. Average Capacity Created and Utilized for Sample Units.....	116
8.1.2. Enhancement of Employment for Sample and District as a Whole	117
8.1.3. Boost in Private Investment for District as a Whole.....	117
8.1.4. Hikes in Farm Income for District as a Whole.....	118
8.2. State Wise Impact: Capacity Created and Utilized for Different States	118
8.3. Employment Generation	123
8.4. Increase in Private Investment	125
8.5. Reduction of Post Harvest Losses	126
8.6. Achievement of the Scheme Objectives.....	128
Chapter 9. Credit Linkages and Related Issues	133
9.1. Procedure for Availing Bank and Subsidy	134
9.2. Credit Linked Assistance	135
9.2.1. Subsidy Received and Released.....	136
9.2.2. Time Lag between Sanction and Disbursement of Bank Loan	136
9.2.3. Interest Rate Charged on Bank Loan	137
9.3. Repayment Period	138
9.3.1. Periodicity of Installments	139
9.3.2. Recovery Performance.....	140
9.3.3. Cost and Time Overrun.....	140

Chapter 10. Warehouse Policy Recommendations	141
10.1. Time Gap in Various Stages of Implementation of the Scheme	142
10.1.1. Awareness of the Bankers about the Operation of the Scheme	142
10.1.2. Adherence to Technical Specifications and Safety Measures	142
10.1.3. Grading, Standardisations and Value Addition of Stored Produce	143
10.1.4. Fixation of Repayment Period	143
10.2. Time Gap between Completion of Godown and Release of Final Subsidy	144
10.2.1. Adjustment of Liquidity	144
10.2.2. Pledge Loan Facility	144
10.2.3. Availability of Infrastructures	144
10.3. Recommendations	145
10.3.1. Reduction of Time Gap at Various Stages of Implementation of Scheme	145
10.3.2. Creation of Awareness regarding Technical Specification and Safety Norms of Godowns among the Bankers	145
10.3.3. Creation of Awareness Level of Promoters and Non Promoters	145
10.3.4. Popularisation of Pledge Loan Facility	145
10.3.5. Collateral Security	146
10.4. Simplification of Documents	146
10.4.1. Cross Checking the Available Documents with the Checklist	146
10.4.2. Necessary Infrastructure	146
10.5. Storage Facility for Small and Marginal Farmers	147
10.6. State Specific Observations	147
Chapter 11. Capital Investment Subsidy Scheme (CISS) / Gramin Bhandaran Yojana (GBY) for Rural Godowns	155
11.1. Background	156
11.2. Objectives	156

11.3. Salient Features	156
11.3.1. Eligible Organisations.....	156
11.3.2. Location	157
11.3.3. Size.....	157
11.3.4. Conditions for Scientific Storage	157
11.3.5. Credit Linked Assistance	158
11.3.6. Pledge Loan Facility	158
11.3.7. Training.....	158
11.3.8. Implementation Period.....	159
11.3.9. Nodal Agency	159
11.3.10. Target	159
11.3.11. Insurance	159
11.3.12. Subsidy.....	159
11.3.13. Release of Subsidy	160
11.3.14. Adjustment of Subsidy in Borrower's Account.....	160
11.3.15. No Interest Chargeable on Subsidy Portion	161
11.4. Institutional Lending	161
11.5. Pattern of Assistance	162
11.5.1. For Projects for Which Subsidy Routed through NABARD	162
11.5.2. Mode of Release.....	162
11.5.3. For Projects for Which Subsidy Routed through NCDC	163
11.5.4. Mode of Release.....	163
11.6. Pledge Loan.....	164
11.7. Time Limit for Completion	164
11.8. Refinance Assistance from NABARD	164
11.9. Publicity and Trading.....	165
11.10. Other Conditions	165
11.11. Procedures to be Followed for Sanctioning of Project and Release of Subsidy	165
11.12. Monitoring.....	167

Chapter 12. Warehouse Logistics for Agricultural Revival	169
12.1. Introduction	170
12.2. Warehouse Requirements	171
12.2.1. Need for Licensed Warehousing	172
12.2.2. Existing Warehouse Receipt System	172
12.2.3. Objectives and Expected Benefits	172
12.3. Credit Requirements	173
12.3.1. Ongoing Schemes of GoI for Creating Storage Space	173
12.4. Conclusions	177
Chapter 13. Warehouses to Enhance Smallholder Farmer Margins	179
13.1. Need for Improved/ Quality Logistics and Warehouses	180
13.1.1. The Logistics Industry	181
13.1.2. Need for Licensed Warehouses	182
13.1.3. Urgent Need for Warehouse Expansion	183
13.2. Existing Warehouse Receipt System	183
13.2.1. Objectives and Expected Benefits	184
13.2.2. Impact on Agri Business	184
13.3. Challenges	185
13.4. Credit Requirements	186
13.5. The Way Forward	186
Part II. Agri-Marketing Reforms	
Chapter 14. Agricultural Marketing Infrastructure and Reforms	191
14.1. Constraints of Present Markets	194
14.2. Need for Urgent Reforms	195
14.2.1. Implementation of Agricultural Marketing Reforms	197
14.2.2. Infrastructure Requirement	198
14.3. Storage Infrastructure	199
14.4. Marketing Research & Information Network	201
14.4.1. Price Related Information	202
14.4.2. Market Related Information	202
14.4.3. Links	202

14.4.4. Users.....	202
14.4.5. Technical Support	203
14.4.6. Financial Outlay	203
Annexure 14.1. State-wise number of wholesale, primary and regulated markets in India 2006	204
Annexure 14.2. APMC Act Reforms	205
Chapter 15. Marketing of Agricultural Commodities in Buldhana	207
15.1. Back Drop	208
15.2. Introducing Buldhana District.....	209
15.3. Maharashtra Agricultural Competitiveness Project (MACP).....	210
15.3.1. PDO / MACP Objectives	211
15.3.2. Component A: Intensification and Diversification of Market-led Production.....	212
15.3.3. Component B: Improving Farmer Access to Markets.....	212
15.3.4. Objectives of Marketing Strategy Supplement (MSS).....	213
15.4. Challenges Faced by the Farmer	213
15.4.1. Challenges Faced	215
15.5. Challenges Faced by APMC Heads	216
15.6. Challenges Faced by Traders and Commission Agents	217
15.7. Conclusion.....	223
Chapter 16. Report of the Task Force on Agri-marketing Reforms	225
16.1. Introduction	226
16.2. Expert Committee on Agricultural Marketing	226
16.3. Inter-ministerial Task Force on Marketing Reforms.....	227
16.3.1. Legal Reforms	228
16.3.2. Promotion of Agricultural Markets' in Private/Cooperative Sector	228
16.4. Direct Marketing	229
16.5. Contract Farming.....	230
16.6. Other Infrastructure	233
16.6.1. Rationalisation of Market Fees	234
16.6.2. Essential Commodities Act, 1955	234

16.6.3. Pledge Financing & Marketing Credit	236
16.6.4. Negotiable Warehousing Receipt System	237
16.6.5. Price Support Policy	243
16.6.6. Information Technology in Agricultural Marketing	245
16.7. Marketing Extension, Training and Research	247
16.7.1. Market Infrastructure Development	249
16.7.2. Implementation Plan	252
Chapter 17. Commodity Derivatives Markets	
and Smallholder Farmers	267
17.1. Introduction	268
17.2. The New National Commodity Exchange	268
17.2.1. Strengthening and Expanding the Scope of Commodity Derivative Trading	269
17.2.2. Impact of Futures Trading on Commodity Prices	269
17.3. Turmeric (Haldi)	270
17.3.1. Turmeric: a Spice, Medicine and a Cosmetic	271
17.3.2. Cultivation of Turmeric	271
17.3.3. Aroma & Flavor	272
17.3.4. Indian Scenario	273
17.4. Study Details	273
17.5. Selection of Districts and Farmers	274
17.6. Collection and Analysis of Data	274
17.6.1. Socio-economic Profile of Sample Farmers	274
17.6.2. Occupation of the Family	276
17.6.3. Cropping Pattern	276
17.7. Input Requirements for Turmeric in Nanded and Sangli	277
17.7.1. Use of Technology	278
17.7.2. Availability and Use of Godowns / Warehouses	280
17.7.3. Bank Credit	281
17.8. Awareness about Futures Markets	282
17.8.1. Price Information and Price Realisation	282

17.8.2. Sowing Decision	283
17.8.3. Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) — Arrival and Price of Crops	285
17.8.4. Inadequate Bank Loans	286
17.8.5. Sangli--APMC	287
17.9. Conclusions	288
Chapter 18. Agricultural Marketing and the e-NAM Portal	289
18.1. Introduction	290
18.2. License Raj in Agriculture Market	290
18.3. Benefits of e-NAM	291
18.4. Challenges	292
18.5. Perspectives	294
REFERENCES	296
About the Authors	297

Part I: Rural Godowns

Chapter 1. The Need for Rural Godowns

Chapter 2. Infrastructure Creation: CISS Assessment Study

Chapter 3. Progress of Rural Godowns in Selected States

Chapter 4. Rural Godowns: Problems and Prospects

Chapter 5. Profile Studies of Godowns and Farmers/Promoters

Chapter 6. Investment Costs of Selected Godowns

Chapter 7. Economics of Rural Godowns

Chapter 8. Impact of Rural Godown Schemes

Chapter 9. Credit Linkages and Related Issues

Chapter 10. Warehouse Policy Recommendations

Chapter 11. Capital Investment Subsidy Scheme (CISS) / Gramin
Bhandaran Yojana (GBY) for Rural Godowns

Chapter 12. Warehouse Logistics for Agricultural Revival

Chapter 13. Warehouses to Enhance Smallholder Farmer Margins

Part II: Agri-marketing Reforms

Chapter 14. Agricultural Marketing Infrastructure and Reforms

Chapter 15. Marketing of Agricultural Commodities in Buldhana

Chapter 16. Report of the Task Force on Agri-marketing Reforms

Chapter 17. Commodity Derivatives Markets and Smallholder Farmers

Chapter 18. Agricultural Marketing and the e-NAM Portal

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