

## INFORMATION NEEDS AND SOURCES OF INFORMATION OF THE RURAL AGRICULTURISTS

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*To find out the major information source of the rural agriculturists (farmers) a survey was conducted in the district of Burdwan in West Bengal. Findings show that the most important information sources are personal experience, friends, neighbours, relatives, family members, fellow professionals and persons in agricultural offices. Attempts have also been made to identify the day-to-day problems of the rural agriculturists, and the sources of information to solve such problems.*

### INTRODUCTION

Agriculture plays a dominant role in India's economic development. Agricultural production depends very much on the availability of current information regarding the method of cultivation, marketing, preservation, introduction of new technologies, and financial sources. The government has also taken some measures for the development of agriculture in the country.

The study conducted with a sample of rural agriculturists (farmers) of the district of Burdwan in West Bengal attempts to identify (i) the nature and the sources of information required for cultivation, marketing & preservation of agricultural product, as well as (ii) some day-to-day problems and the sources of information to solve such problems.

### METHODOLOGY

258 agriculturists selected from 42 villages of Burdwan district each having a public library from the sample of the study. Villages were chosen randomly from the rural geographical map of the Burdwan district in such a way that all the areas of the map are covered uniformly. Not more than 10 persons have been interviewed from a single village. The data was collected through question-

naire-cum-interview method. A questionnaire was prepared according to the objectives mentioned above and personal door approaches were made for conducting interviews. Sufficient care was taken to interview only that person of the family who was having the overall responsibility for the cultivation, marketing, preservation of the crops and maintainance of tools, etc.

The interviews were conducted to elicit information on the selection of crops to be cultivated for a particular plot, manuring, pesticide application, irrigation, introduction of high yielding varieties, marketing of products, maintainance of tools; and socio-economic attributes like income, educational status, nature of the family, and family-head. Finally, the persons have been asked to mention some of the major problems they have faced during the last one month. Sources of information to solve such problems have also been noted. The problems and the sources of information providing solutions, were then grouped under some general heads.

### SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

In the state of West Bengal there are 17 districts, among which Burdwan district ranks first in terms of agricultural production both in quality and quantity. The district comprises five subdivisions and 2609 villages. There are 2 district libraries, 6 subdivisional towns and 194 rural libraries in the district, 258 agriculturists covered in this survey were from 42 villages of the district.

Table 1 provides some of the characteristics of the rural agriculturists covered in this survey. It can be noticed from Table 1 that cultivation is the main source of income for 66.28% of rural agriculturists. 54.26% of the surveyed agriculturists lived in joint families where as 45.26% lived in single families. The heads of the families were categorised into self and others of which

*Table 1*  
*Sample characteristics*

		No.	%
1. Cultivation is the main source of income	Yes	171	66.28
	No	87	33.72
2. Nature of family	Single	118	45.74
	Joint	140	54.26
3. Family head	Self	111	43.02
	Others	147	56.98
4. Educational attainment	Upto Primary level	74	28.68
	Upto Secondary	106	41.09
	Above Secondary	78	30.23

the self featured 43.02% and others 56.98%. So far as the educational attainment is concerned, about 28% of the agriculturists were educated upto primary level, 41% persons upto secondary level and 30% were above secondary level.

### SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Data were collected to determine the sources of various information of the rural agriculturists, as described earlier. The sources of information were categorized into several needs, like, (i) personal experience, (ii) friends, neighbours, relatives; (iii) family members; (iv) fellow professionals; (v) persons in agricultural offices; (vi) market/shop keeper; (vii) school teachers, doctors, etc; (viii) other service holders; (ix) library; (x) religious persons; (xi) newspapers, books, magazines; (xii) television; (xiii) radio.

Table 2 provides the percentages of various sources of information for specific problems. A close look into Table 2 shows that the most important sources of information are personal experience; friends, neighbours, relatives; family members ; fellow professionals; persons in agricultural offices; and market/shop keeper. It can be noticed from Table 2 that for the selection of crops to be cultivated in a particular plot the

most important information sources are: personal experience (18.99%), family members (17.82%); friends, neighbours, relatives (17.44%); fellow professionals (15.89%); and persons in agricultural offices (12.01%). More than 80% of surveyed agriculturists depend on the above mentioned five sources for information. The most important information providers for the information regarding the methods of manuring and pesticide application are personal experience (15.89%); friends, neighbours, relatives (15.11%); market/shop-keeper (15.11%); and fellow professionals (13.95).

Personal experience; friends, neighbours, relatives; family members; fellow professionals and persons in agricultural offices are the most important information sources regarding the method of irrigation (72.06%); change of the cropping patterns (73.62%); storing & preservation of crops (70.91%); and the sources of finance (66.26%). The most important information sources regarding marketing area and price level are market/shop keeper (17.44%), personal experience (15.89%), friends, neighbours and relatives (15.11%); family members (14.72%) and fellow professionals (14.34%). These five sources taken together provide more than 77% information on marketing area and price level. The other sources of information do not play any significant

*Table 2*  
*Sources of current information*

	Selection of crops to be cultivated		Manuring & pesticide application		Irrigation		Changing the cropping pattern		Marketing area & price level		Storing & preservation of crops		Maintenance & introduction of new tools		Sources of finance	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Personal experience	49	18.99	41	15.89	38	14.72	39	15.11	41	15.89	40	15.50	39	15.11	34	13.17
Friends, neighbours, relatives	45	17.44	39	15.12	37	14.34	36	13.95	39	15.11	41	15.89	36	13.95	33	12.79
Family members	46	17.83	27	10.47	35	13.56	37	14.34	38	14.72	39	15.11	29	11.24	29	11.24
Fellow professionals	41	15.89	36	13.95	38	14.72	40	15.50	37	14.34	35	13.56	35	15.56	37	14.34
Persons in agricultural offices	31	12.02	25	9.69	38	14.72	38	14.72	19	7.36	28	10.85	38	14.72	38	14.72
Market/Shopkeeper	8	3.10	39	15.12	10	3.87	8	3.10	45	17.44	26	10.07	39	15.11	21	8.13
School teachers, doctors, etc.	7	2.71	6	2.33	8	3.10	6	2.32	6	2.32	7	2.71	8	3.10	18	6.97
Other service holders	15	5.81	18	6.98	18	6.97	22	8.52	12	4.64	16	6.20	16	6.20	24	9.30
Library			1	0.39	5	1.93	2	0.76	1	0.38	2	0.76	1	0.38	1	0.38
Religious persons	1	0.39	1	0.39	2	0.76	1	0.38	1	0.38	2	0.76	1	0.38	1	0.38
Newspapers, books, magazines	3	1.16	5	1.94	6	2.32	7	2.71	5	1.93	6	2.32	5	1.93	4	1.54
T.V.	2	0.78	6	2.33	7	2.71	6	2.32	4	1.54	3	1.16	2	0.76	3	1.16
Radio	8	3.10	11	4.26	13	5.03	14	5.42	10	3.87	11	4.26	7	2.71	10	3.87
Ignorance	2	0.78	3	1.16	3	1.16	2	0.76			2	0.76	2	0.76	5	1.93
Total	258	100.00	258	100.02												

Table 3

*Information needs and resources not related to agricultural production*

	Education & schooling		Health & child care		Rent & tax		Personal relations		Politics etc.		Recreation		Employment of family members		Availability of consumer goods	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Personal experience	19	11.37	21	15.44	16	14.95	19	38.00	16	10.73	9	11.68	16	10.66	16	16.32
Friends, neighbours, relatives	26	15.56	22	16.17	23	21.49	12	24.00	19	12.75	12	15.58	21	14.00	17	17.34
Family members	19	11.37	18	13.23	21	19.62	11	22.00	18	12.08	8	10.38	15	10.00	15	15.30
Fellow professionals	16	9.58	8	5.88	15	14.01	8	16.00	13	8.72	10	12.98	9	6.00	14	14.28
Persons in agricultural offices	2	1.19	-	-	15	14.01	-	-	-	-	-	-	13	8.66	-	-
Market/Shopkeeper	1	0.59	-	-	9	8.41	-	-	8	5.36	-	-	6	4.00	21	21.42
School teachers, doctors, etc.	39	23.35	38	27.94	2	1.86	-	-	16	10.73	-	-	16	10.66	3	3.06
Other service holders	21	12.57	10	7.35	4	3.73	-	-	11	7.38	-	-	10	6.66	8	8.16
Library	15	8.98	7	5.14	-	-	-	-	9	6.04	6	7.79	18	12.00	-	-
Religious persons	4	2.39	6	4.41	-	-	-	-	6	4.02	-	-	-	-	-	-
Newspapers, magazines, books	2	1.19	1	0.73	-	-	-	-	10	6.71	6	7.79	21	14.00	2	2.04
Television	2	1.19	2	1.46	-	-	-	-	10	6.71	11	14.28	3	2.00	1	1.02
Radio	1	0.59	3	2.20	2	1.86	-	-	13	8.72	15	19.48	2	1.33	1	1.02
Total :	167		136		107		50		149		77		150		98	

role for providing information to the rural agriculturists.

*Sources of information for day-to-day problems.*

The respondents were also asked to mention the information providers to solve such problems as are not directly related to agriculture. Every respondent mentioned more than one problem. All the problems have been categorised under the following major heads: (i) education and schooling, (ii) health and child care; (iii) rent and tax; (iv) personal relations; (v) politics etc., (vi) recreation; (vii) employment for family members; (viii) availability of consumer goods. The sources of information have been the twelve groups mentioned previously.

Table 3 provides the major problems and their sources of information for the rural agriculturists. It can be noticed from Table 3 that to solve problems relating to education and schooling, rural agriculturists depend much on the school teachers and doctors (23.35%); friends, neighbours, relative (15.56%); other service holders (12.57%), personal experience (11.37%), and family members (11.37%). The most important information providers for health and child care are school teachers & doctors (27.97%); followed by friends, neighbours, relatives (16.17%) and personal experience (15.44%). Friends, neighbours and relatives (21.49%), family members (19.44%) and personal experience (14.95%) are the most important information sources on rent and tax problems. Regarding politics etc. rural agriculturists received information mostly from friends,

neighbours, relatives (12.75%) followed by family members (12.08%), personal experience (10.73%); and school teachers, doctors (10.73%). Newspapers, magazines (14.00%); friends, neighbours, relatives (14%), school teachers, doctors (10.66%) and personal experience (10.66%) are the most important information sources to solve the problems of employment of family members. A close look into Table 3 shows that in almost all the cases, personal experience; family members; friends, neighbours, relatives; fellow professionals; school teachers and doctors act as the important information sources to solve the major problems of the rural agriculturists. Other information sources play a less significant role in solving their problems.

*Public library consciousness*

When the respondents were asked about their awareness regarding the existence of a public library in their village, it was found that out of 258 respondents, 175 were aware about it, and 193 respondents showed their willingness to receive public library help to solve their problems.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The analysis shows that the rural agriculturists depend much on personal experience; family members; fellow professionals; friends, neighbours, relatives; persons in agricultural offices to solve most of their problems relating agricultural or other problems. The method they employ to gather information are mostly traditional and not library dependent.