



Tropentag, September 17-19, 2014, Prague, Czech Republic

“Bridging the gap between increasing knowledge and decreasing resources”

Socio-Economic Characterisation of Date Palm (*Phoenix dactylifera* L.) Growers in Pakistan

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Abstract

Further increases in food production for a rapidly growing population is a major policy goal in Pakistan where traditional staples such as rice and wheat have experienced intensification in many but remote drought-ridden areas. Date palm (*Phoenix dactylifera* L.) fruit and its by products may be an option to complement staples due to its nutritional composition: 44–88 % total sugars, 0.2–0.5 % fat, 2.3–5.6 % protein, 0.5–3.9 % pectin, 6.4–11.5 % dietary fibre, salts, minerals and vitamins. Additionally, date palms are well adapted to harsh climatic and soil conditions, provide protection to under crops and may also help to reduce desertification. To fill knowledge gaps about the role of date palm in rural communities, this project aimed at studying the socio-economic impact and conditions of date palm growers across four provinces of Pakistan. To this end during 2012–2013 a total of 170 households (HH) were selected and interviewed with a structured questionnaire using a snowball sampling technique. Most of the HH were headed by male (99.4 %) who were married (74 %) and often illiterate (40 %). Agriculture was the main occupation (56 %) of date palm growers while a few were coupling agriculture with business (17 %), labour work (10 %) and employment (government, 9%; private, 8 %). Date sale contributed > 50 % to total income of 39.4 % HH or for 24 % of HH even 91–100 %. Farmers grew a total of 39 date palm cultivars and had an average of 409+559 date trees. The majority of the respondents sold date palm to commission agents (35 %), contractors (22 %), whole sellers (21 %), directly to consumers (3 %) and hawkers (1 %), whereas 28 % HH were cultivating date palms only for self consumption. Most date palm growers sowed cereals (54 %) followed by fodder (53 %), cotton (35 %), sugarcane (24 %), beans (23 %) and fruits (17 %) in the winter and summer seasons, respectively. Date palm growers had only limited knowledge about high quality date cultivars, farm management, pest and disease control, harvesting and post-harvest practices. Changes in extension and marketing efforts are needed to allow farmers better exploit value chains in date palm thereby reaping higher benefits and secure their often marginal livelihoods.

Keywords: Date palm cultivars, food security, livelihood strategies, nutrition