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“Bridging the gap between increasing knowledge and decreasing resources”

Commercialisation of Plant-Based Farm Products and its Impact on Living Standard of Rural Households in Fergana Valley, South-Western Kyrgyzstan

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Abstract

Traditional agricultural markets are an integral part of both rural and urban areas worldwide, particularly to supply local households with basic food. Recent studies point out, however, that to the number of products sold depends on the socio-economic characteristics of both vendors and buyers. Further the commercial potential of the markets differ according to the natural, cultural and economic situation of a particular region. Thus, the aim of our study was to (i) describe the historical and recent development of rural markets in the target area, (ii) document main kinds of food and snacks sold and the main categories of use, and, (iii) identify how commercialisation of these products influences the living standard of the vendors. The study was carried out in Kulundu commune, south-western Kyrgyzstan, where Fergana valley interferes into the country. Data were collected during July 2012 on two rural markets. Products sold on markets were documented and sixteen vendors were interviewed using pre-prepared questionnaires. Results showed that markets offered twenty kinds of local species of vegetables and fruits. All species were of local origin and serve particularly as a food supplements or garnitures for local cuisine. Furthermore, vendors stated that selling their production at local markets is important for ensuring economic security. The target area had several specific socio-economic factors that influenced market situation. Firstly, markets focused on selling agricultural products were closed during the time of communism and they were re-established in mid-1980s during the transformation of Soviet Union's economy. Their importance further increased after the collapse of USSR a few years later. Till the mid-1980s, all food supplies were distributed through a network of small shops and there was no need for specialised rural markets. Additionally, a relatively small amount of crop species were sold regularly on focused markets, which could be explained through the existence of a cross-boundary trade with neighbouring Tajikistan. Actually, traditional rural markets in Kulundu are prosperous, offering food supplements for daily life of local people and contribute significantly to the improvement of livelihood generation of the vendors.

Keywords: Agro-biodiversity, ethnobotany, household economy, market survey