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DIFFUSION OF INFORMATION ON RUBBER THROUGH DAILY NEWSPAPERS—A STUDY OF ITS EFFECTIVENESS

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ABSTRACT

The paper deals with the result of a study conducted by taking 60 rubber growers from the Changanacherry Co-operative Marketing Society by applying a random sampling technique. The study attempted to find the extent of adoption of scientific information through the medium of Malayalam newspapers. All the rubber growers interviewed were found to be literates. There were 10 graduates and four post-graduates among them. The study reveals that 59 growers were reading some newspapers every day. The Malayalam dailies patronised by the growers according to importance are: Malayala Manorama, Deepika, Mathrubhumi, Kerala Kaumudi and Deshabhimani. Twelve growers also read English dailies. The growers have assimilated scientific information on the cultivation of rubber through the medium of the agricultural page appearing in the dailies during the last 10 years. However, some deficiency has been noted in the area of diffusion of knowledge namely, in the sphere of processing soil and leaf analysis and tapping. By and large the growers are happy with the role of the Malayalam dailies in the dissemination of scientific information.

INTRODUCTION

About 80 per cent of Keralites are literate and hence efforts are going on to disseminate information on modern techniques of

rubber cultivation through the written medium. A large number of popular scientific articles on rubber cultivation have been published during the last 10 years in the Malayalam dailies. All important newspapers in the State carry a one page feature exclusively on agriculture every week. On a regular basis articles on rubber cultivation and processing have been appearing in that feature. Articles have appeared on such subjects as planting materials, and the method of planting; cover crops, inter-crops, fertiliser application, soil and leaf analysis, diseases and pests, tapping, stimulation, rainguarding and processing. Therefore a study was undertaken to assess the effectiveness of the agricultural page with special reference on rubber.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study covered 60 small rubber growers selected from among 1,500 members of the Changanacherry Rubber Marketing Society, Karukachal in Kottayam district, applying the random sampling technique. The study was restricted to the members of the Co-operative Society since 65 per cent of small rubber growers in Kerala are members of co-operative societies and the societies provide a homogeneous group for such a study.

The small growers were interviewed by investigators using a standard questionnaire prepared to elicit information on the area under rubber and other crops, the level of education, the newspaper reading habits of growers, their preferences in reading news, their awareness of the subjects read, the extent of application of the knowledge acquired through newspapers, their views on the agricultural page and the importance given by the newspapers to agriculture.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Age of interviewed growers

The age distribution of the sample growers is given in Table 1.

Level of education

All the growers interviewed were literates. The most important group consisted of growers who had studied up to SSLC (Table 2).

Table 1. Age distribution of growers

Age group	No. of rubber growers	%
30 years and below	3	5.00
31 to 40 years	12	20.00
41 to 50 years	10	16.67
51 to 60 years	20	33.33
61 to 70 years	11	18.33
71 and above	4	6.67
Total	60	100.00

Table 2. Level of education of the growers

Level of education	No. of growers	per cent
Can read and write	3	5.00
Primary and below	4	6.67
Secondary and below	33	55.00
Above Secondary but below Degree	6	10.00
Degree	10	16.67
Post-graduate degree	4	6.66
Total	60	100.00

All the rubber growers excepting one person was reading newspapers every day. The lone grower discontinued reading newspapers only because of the increase in the monthly subscription rate.

Reading habits

Fifty persons were subscribing to the dailies. There were 22 growers who read two Malayalam dailies; seven growers who read three dailies and one grower who read four Malayalam dailies regularly. In addition, 12 growers read English newspapers as well.

Subjects read

Information was collected on the priorities given by growers to reading various subjects. The subjects were grouped into poli-

tics, cinema, sports and agriculture. Twenty three growers gave first priority to agriculture and 13 growers gave first priority to politics. Eleven growers replied that they were not specific on any particular news and the rest had no comments to offer. The agricultural page has been in print for the last ten years, and 16 growers were aware of it. Fifteen growers knew of it for a period of five to 10 years, and the remaining 28 persons knew of the page for a period of five years. Five growers were keeping important articles for permanent record.

To a specific question whether they were reading articles and reports on rubber on the agricultural page, 53 growers replied positively. Out of the 53 growers, 35 read the page regularly and the remaining 18 read occasionally. There were six persons who did not read the agricultural page. There were 41 growers with other agricultural crops as well. Of the 41 growers, 29 had made use of the information from the newspapers related to these crops. Twenty-eight persons had occasion to discuss the subject they read with their friends and five persons had corresponded with the Rubber Board officials/Editors and sought clarification from them.

In addition to the articles and reports, the agricultural page carried advertisements on fertilisers, plant protection chemicals, implements etc. and a question was included in the questionnaire whether the grower also read the advertisements. Twenty-seven persons replied that they looked into the advertisements regularly and another 25 occasionally.

Agricultural page and rubber cultivation

The most important aspect of the study related to the testing of the growers' awareness of the various pieces of scientific information on rubber published in the agricultural page during the last 10 years. The growers were, therefore, asked whether they could recall having read articles or reports on specific subjects on rubber. A question was also included whether they made use of the pieces of information thus collected for their rubber cultivation. The details of replies received from the growers are given in Table 3.

From Table 3 it can be seen that there are some deficiencies in the diffusion of knowledge. Information on processing appears to have reached a few growers only. Similar is the case with leaf

Table 3. Awareness and adoption of scientific information on rubber

Topics	Awareness persons	%	Adopting persons	%
1. Planting materials	43	73	39	66
2. Planting	39	66	25	42
3. Polythene bag plants	38	64	21	36
4. Cover crops	40	68	32	54
5. Inter-crops	39	66	24	41
6. Fertiliser and its application	37	63	34	58
7. Soil and leaf analysis	26	44	6	10
8. Diseases, pests and the treatment	41	69	32	54
9. Tapping	27	46	6	10
10. Stimulants and rainguarding	34	48	4	7
11. Processing	13	22	2	3

and soil analysis and tapping. Tapping and processing, it may be mentioned are areas more often left to the tapper in the small holdings. During the interviews it has been brought out that the tappers are less receptive to new ideas even with the growers' best efforts to infuse the knowledge. This partly explains the deficiency in the adoption of knowledge on tapping and processing. A stimulant is applied to old trees at the end of their economic life. Therefore, there is less scope for applying this piece of information in the plantations. Rainguarding has not been popular with the small growers. This may be due to the additional cost involved in fixing rainguards and also due to the habit of growers to resort to tapping in the afternoon, when the rain is over. Further in the majority of small holdings, the tapper is paid piece rate wages and is not a permanent employee and therefore there is no fixed cost on him necessitating daily employment.

Regularity of publication of agricultural page

A number of growers have replied that they had encouraged their friends to read the agricultural page. There was a direct question whether the regularity of publication of the agricultural page should be increased. Twenty-seven growers replied that the present arrangement of publishing one day in a week would

be sufficient, while 10 growers wanted the page to appear two days a week and the remaining 22 growers expressed no opinion on the subject. Twelve persons wanted the space allotted for articles and news in the agricultural page to be increased, while 32 persons replied that there was no need for increasing the space and 15 had no opinion on the subject. Forty-two growers would like to have photographs published along with articles and reports, while four did not feel that was necessary and 13 did not make any comments. Forty-three growers wanted the newspapers to publish the success stories of growers, while 11 did not give any opinion, and five did not say that it was necessary.

Role of cooperative societies

A majority of growers were of the opinion that the co-operative societies could render much help to promote the dissemination of knowledge by organising study circles, taking copies of relevant pages of articles and circulating them, and also displaying the articles on the notice boards of the societies. One enlightened grower suggested that in future, video tapes on rubber cultivation should be made available to the rubber growers with the advent of the television age. He was of the opinion that a number of prosperous growers and co-operative societies could afford VCRs.

Conclusion

As to the question whether the Malayalam dailies were giving adequate coverage on agricultural news and views and more particularly on rubber, 23 growers replied in the positive and 21 growers replied in the negative, while 15 growers did not make any comments. By and large, the growers were grateful to the Malayalam newspapers for their role in disseminating scientific information on rubber cultivation.

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DISCUSSION

Q : Your study was restricted to members of cooperative societies. Can you extend this study to rubber growers who are not members of cooperative societies?

Ans: Yes, this study can be extended to such growers also.

Q : Since only the growers in Kerala State were interviewed, the results are applicable to that State only. Will it be possible to cover other rubber-growing states?

Ans: Yes, the study will be extended to other states and new areas of rubber plantation.