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Agricultural Marketing Reforms in India: A Stakeholder Perception Analysis

Vidhi Jain, Baljinder Kaur Sidana and Jasdev Singh

Department of Economics and Sociology, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, Punjab

Abstract

The paper analysed the perceptions of various stakeholders regarding agricultural marketing reforms in India. Primary data were collected through a simple random sampling technique from 105 stakeholders, including farmers, commission agents, market officials, research workers and Kisan Union leaders from five regulated markets in Punjab. Stakeholders' perceptions were analysed using a three point likert scale and mean score technique. The findings indicated that stakeholders recognised the role of Minimum Support Price, Model APMC Act and e-Nam in improving price assurance, market transparency and market access. However, concerns persisted regarding inadequate infrastructure, delayed digital payments, insufficient technical assistance, increasing private sector domination, unequal bargaining power, ambiguous contracts and inefficient dispute resolution procedures under recent agricultural marketing reform. The study recommended strengthening price assurance, market infrastructure, digital support systems and farmer protection mechanisms to support an inclusive, transparent, and sustainable agricultural marketing system.

Keywords: Agricultural marketing, Marketing reforms, Regulated markets, Stakeholders perceptions

JEL Classification: Q13, Q18, Q13, D78

Introduction

In India about 46 per cent of the workforce is employed in agriculture and allied activities, highlighting the significance of this sector as a means of subsistence for millions of people nationwide and a source of income (NSSO, 2022-23). Debates on why the agricultural sector's growth and efficiency are so unstable and temporary have become more intense since the mid-1990s (Rozelle and Swinnen, 2004). There is general agreement that the nature of incentives provided to farmers, government regulations and policies are the most crucial elements for maintaining the farm sectors growth and efficiency (Bates, 1984). Therefore, this well-established institutional paradigm becomes a prominent researchable issue.

In India, agricultural produce that was largely bartered eventually became products with a certain level of economic worth. The conventional agricultural marketing system was unhealthy due to trader's monopoly, excessive marketing costs, high middleman margins, unapproved deductions of marketing charges, and other irregularities. Modernizing the agricultural sector and resolving long-standing problems including price volatility, ineffective market structures and restricted access to larger markets depend heavily on agricultural marketing reforms in India. The reform initiatives in agricultural marketing started during the era of economic liberalization of 1990s with setting up of different expert groups and committees in this regard. Solid steps in this regard were initiated with the circulation of model act "The State Agricultural Produce Marketing (Development & Regulation) Act 2003". Taking further steps towards liberalization of the agricultural marketing a more liberalized model act "The Agricultural Produce and Livestock Marketing (Promotion & Facilitation) Act 2017" has been brought in. Contrarily, many studies had pointed out that despite different reform initiatives, agriculture marketing system in India continues to face several difficulties, including inadequate post-harvest infrastructure, low-value addition, inadequate grading, packaging and marketing techniques and a dearth of appropriate risk mitigation instruments for primary producers. In addition, the farmers are not receiving fair compensation for their agricultural products due to commissioning a lengthy chain of marketing middlemen and limited marketing systems. The regulations have limited success in ensuring transparent marketing practices, adequate amenities and a growth-friendly environment.

Corresponding author email: jainvidhi70@gmail.com

At this stage of India's development, the crucial question of whether regulated agricultural markets are still relevant or even effective is gaining attention (Purohit, 2013). Therefore, these policy facts that have been implemented by Indian states raise clear concerns about the effectiveness of regulations that have been started in the agricultural marketing sector. In this backdrop, evaluating the effectiveness of various marketing reforms becomes crucial because cropping and consumption patterns are influenced by agriculture produce market regulation. The paper is an attempt to focus on the perceptive of various stakeholders in order of importance about agricultural marketing reforms with main focus to analyse the perception of stakeholders about agricultural marketing reforms in India.

Data Sources and Methodology

To examine the perceptions of various stakeholders about agricultural marketing reforms, a simple random sampling technique was employed for the collection of primary data. The respondents were selected from the primary stakeholders group including farmers, commission agents, market officials, kisan union leaders and research workers. Among the 156 agricultural regulated markets in Punjab, five regulated markets were randomly selected. A total visiting of fifty farmers were randomly selected from the chosen agricultural regulated markets. Based on their active involvement in market operations thirty commission agents were randomly selected from the selected markets. The study also included fifteen market officials who were randomly selected from selected agricultural regulated markets. To understand the collective perceptions of the farming community, five kisan union leaders belonging to different kisan unions out of thirty two recognized farmers unions were also selected. These leaders were selected based on their involvement in advocacy and discussion on agricultural marketing reforms. Additionally, to integrate academic and policy level perceptions, five professors with expertise in agricultural marketing were interviewed. These professors were selected from five distinct academic institutions chosen from 168 colleges, PAU and Gadvasu. A total sample size of 105 stakeholders covering farmers, commission agents, market officials, research workers, and kisan union leaders were selected (Table 1).

Table 1: Distribution of sample stakeholders

Stakeholders	Total number
Farmers	50
Commission agents	30
Market officials	15
Research workers	5
Kisan union leaders	5
Total	105

A three-point Likert scale was used to evaluate the perceptions of various stakeholders about agricultural marketing reforms. This widely used survey tool was applied and stakeholder's views were noted down to give number to each statement as follows:

- 3 for Satisfied
- 2 for Neutral
- 1 for Dissatisfied

The perceptions of each stakeholder was analyzed by calculating the mean score

$$\text{Mean score} = \frac{\text{The total score of each statement}}{\text{Total number of respondents}}$$

Ranks were accorded in descending order according to the mean per cent score obtained.

Results and Discussion

India leads globally in production and consumption of milk and pulses. It is ranked second in rice, wheat, sugarcane, and cotton production (FAO, 2022). To encourage domestic output, the Indian government set annual price guidelines for 23 commodities known as the Minimum Support Price (MSP). The MSP aimed to establish a price floor that supported farmers cultivating crops crucial for food security (Majumdar and Janzen, 2022). The MSP's primary function is to mitigate exploitation by private traders and maintain price stability (Das, 2020). The supporters of the MSP argued that in the absence of federally enforced price floors, farmers who cultivate important crops would have been exposed to highly unstable market prices (Majumdar and Janzen, 2022).

The persual of Table 2 depicted the perceptions of various stakeholders regarding the Minimum Support Price (MSP) during 1966-67. It was found that getting remunerative prices for wheat and paddy was regarded as the most substantial advantage by farmers, market officials, and leaders of kisan unions, with highest rank and mean score of 3.00 respectively. This is because, MSP assured farmers of a guaranteed minimum price for wheat and paddy, reducing the risk of price fluctuations and encouraging investment in crop production (Majumdar and Janzen, 2022). The other aspect, increase in market arrivals of crops covered under MSP was ranked second by farmers and sixth by commission agents with mean score of 2.88 and 2.53 respectively. Similarly, the influence of MSP in augmenting producer income was assessed favourable by commission agents with mean score of 2.97, while research workers ranked it second with mean score of 2.60. The findings demonstrated varying degree of agreement regarding the effectiveness of minimum support price. Additionally, a majority of stakeholders also recognised its role in reducing distress sale, increasing production of crops and facilitating the procurement of agricultural products by marketing agencies. Similar results were witnessed by

Table 2: Perception of various stakeholders about Minimum Support Price (MSP, 1966-67)

N=105

Particulars	Farmers		Commission agents		Market officials		Kisan union leaders		Research workers	
	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank
Helped in getting remunerative prices for wheat and paddy	3.00	I	2.87	III	3.00	I	3.0	I	2.80	I
Helped in increasing market arrival of wheat and paddy	2.88	II	2.53	VI	2.87	II	2.60	III	2.40	III
Helped in procurement of agricultural produce by marketing agencies	2.84	III	2.80	IV	2.33	V	3.0	I	2.20	IV
Helped in increasing income of producer	2.68	IV	2.97	I	2.60	III	2.60	III	2.60	II
Increase in production of crops which were covered under MSP	2.60	V	2.60	V	2.47	IV	3.0	I	2.00	V
Reduced distress sale problem	2.56	VI	2.93	II	2.20	VI	2.80	II	1.80	VI

(Gupta, 2011), Dev and Rao, 2010) and (Sharma, 2017) who found out that the knowledge and consciousness of the MSP improved the negotiating power of producers, thereby enabling them to secure a more favourable price.

During liberalisation, the agricultural marketing sector faced several challenges such as inadequate market information, insufficient infrastructure, collusion among traders and market officials, lack of transparency, and exploitative practices within traditional markets (Gummagolmath and Darekar, 2021). The Model APMC Act of 2003 was implemented to reform the agricultural marketing framework, enhance efficiency, and provide improved income prospects for farmers by reducing the influence of intermediaries and promoting equitable competition.

The results of table 3 illustrated the opinion of various stakeholders about Model Agricultural Produce Market Committee Act, 2003. It was found that farmers and research workers expressed a favourable perspective on reducing the strong association between traders and market functionaries thereby assigning first rank with mean score of 2.92 and 3.00 respectively. The implementation of an online system aimed at reducing waiting times for farmers was perceived positively by market officials and research workers, both assigning it rank first and second with mean score of 3.00 and 2.80, while kisan union leaders assigned it a fourth rank with a score of 2.20 respectively. This is because online marketing systems facilitate quicker transactions, improve operational efficiency and reduce unnecessary delays in regulated markets (GOI, 2013). Additionally the provision of basic amenities within markets received the lowest rating with the mean score of 1.12 for farmers, 1.50 for commission agents and 1.40 for market officials, ultimately ranking eighth overall indicating that the development and maintenance of essential market infrastructure remained inadequate despite the implementation of marketing reforms (Gummagolmath and Darekar, 2021). The findings indicated that stakeholders appreciated model APMC act for its role in reducing post-harvest losses, increasing exports and providing market information and weighing scale in regulated markets.

The e-Nam was introduced to improve market efficiency, competitiveness, transparency, market diversification, trade expansion and for providing higher net returns, while diminishing transaction costs, reducing monopolistic practices of traders, and market inefficiencies (Bisen and Kumar, 2018). However several factors contributed to the non-participation in the e-tendering process, including insufficient computer literacy, inadequate market infrastructure, and lack of technical support. (Pavithra *et al*., 2018; Reddy and Mehjabeen, 2019)

The results of table 4 represented the views of different stakeholders regarding the e-National Agricultural Market (e-NAM) 2016. The predominant apprehension shared among all stakeholders was lack of confidence about payments, with a mean score of three, which was prioritized foremost

Table 3: Opinion of stakeholders about of model Agricultural Produce Market Committee Act (Model APMC Act, 2003)
N=105

Particulars	Farmers		Commission agents		Market officials		Kisan union leaders		Research workers	
	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank
Helped in reducing strong association between traders and market functionaries	2.92	I	2.60	VI	2.33	VI	2.20	IV	3.00	I
Helped in providing regular market information through SMS	2.84	II	3.00	I	2.87	II	2.20	IV	2.20	V
Ensured availability of weighing scales in the regulated markets	2.72	III	2.97	II	2.60	IV	2.20	IV	2.60	III
Adoption of online system reduced waiting time for farmers	2.66	IV	2.73	V	3.00	I	2.20	IV	2.80	II
Trade liberalisation helped in increasing exports of agricultural commodities	2.64	V	2.90	III	2.67	III	3.00	I	1.40	VII
Reduced post-harvest losses of agricultural produce	2.60	VI	2.83	IV	2.47	V	2.60	III	1.80	VII
Availability of open and covered sheds	1.36	VII	2.17	VII	2.07	VII	2.80	II	2.40	IV
Availability of basic amenities in markets	1.12	VIII	1.50	VIII	1.40	VIII	2.60	III	2.00	VI

by farmers, subsequently followed by commission agents, kisan union leaders, and research workers as uncertainty regarding the security and timely settlement of online payments reduces stakeholders trust in digital marketing platforms (Kumar, 2023). Additional significant concerns included poor guidance and support services, which was ranked second by the majority of stakeholders, with average scores of 2.98 for farmers, 2.93 for commission agents, and 3.00 for kisan union leaders and research workers, all ranking it either as their second or first priority, respectively. This is because inadequate technical guidance and extension support limit stakeholder's ability to effectively use the e-NAM platform (Reddy and Mehjabeen, 2019). Similarly, the risk of losing established commercial connections was also noteworthy, with mean scores fluctuating between 2.33 and 2.94, ranked third by both farmers and research workers. Other challenges raised by stakeholders included difficulty in online payment, physical verification, limited storage infrastructure, uncertainties about prices and complicated sale process. The results indicated that financial dependability, support services, and market logistics constituted the primary concerns for the majority of stakeholders. (Kumar, 2023) noted that trust and transparency in financial transactions, insufficient experience with digital transactions and lack of adequate infrastructural support were the key obstacles to accept online agricultural marketplaces.

The model APLM Act and CF Act were established during 2017-18 to enhance agricultural marketing efficiency and transparency in India. Their primary aim was to improve farmers' price realization through access to multiple markets and the reduction of monopolistic practices. The legislation promoted private markets, direct marketing, and contract farming, facilitating direct sales from farmers to buyers and eliminating intermediaries. These reforms aim to safeguard farmers, mitigate risks, and enhance access to markets, technology, and finance, thereby creating a more organized and efficient agricultural marketing system. However the identified challenges included payment delays, high

Table 4: Stakeholders view regarding e-National Agricultural Market (e-Nam, 2016)

N=105

Particulars	Farmers		Commission agents		Market officials		Kisan union leaders		Research workers	
	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank
Lack of confidence about payments	3.00	I	3.00	I	2.93	I	3.00	I	2.80	II
Poor guidance and support service	2.98	II	2.93	III	2.33	VII	3.00	I	3.00	I
Risk of losing already established commercial connections	2.94	III	2.33	IX	2.67	V	3.00	I	2.80	II
Issue of physical verification	2.90	IV	2.83	VI	2.80	III	3.00	I	2.20	V
Limited storage infrastructure	2.88	V	2.97	II	2.20	VIII	3.00	I	1.80	VI
Collusion among traders	2.84	VI	2.40	VIII	2.07	IX	3.00	I	2.40	IV
Uncertainties about prices	2.80	VII	2.87	V	2.47	VI	2.60	II	2.60	III
Complicated sale process	2.68	VIII	2.90	IV	2.73	IV	2.60	II	2.60	III
Difficulty in online payment	2.64	IX	2.80	VII	2.87	II	3.00	I	2.80	II

marketing costs, weight deductions, no field level technical guidance transportation issues, produce rejection due to quality issues (Agarwal *et al*., 2005; Sivagami *et al*., 2010; kaur and Singla, 2018).

The results of table 5 demonstrated the perspectives of various stakeholders regarding the Model Agricultural Produce and Livestock Marketing (Promotion and Facilitation) Act 2017. It was observed that the dominance of large private corporations within the market was identified as the foremost concern among the majority of stakeholders, with mean scores of 2.98 for farmers, 2.97 for commission agents, and 3.00 for kisan union leaders respectively. Similarly, another significant issue identified was the inappropriate quality parameters restricting selling, which was ranked second by both farmers and kisan union leaders, with mean scores of 2.96 and 2.80, respectively. This may be because strict quality standards often require grading, sorting and post-harvest infrastructure that many smallholders lack, resulting in rejection of produce and reduced market participation (Kaur and Singla, 2018).Overall, the findings revealed that stakeholders predominantly expressed apprehensions regarding the control of large private corporations in the market, the pricing of agricultural commodities, and the resolution of trade disputes. Although these issues were perceived variably by different stakeholders, they collectively highlighted essential aspects of the Model APLM Act.

The results of table 6 revealed the perceptions of various stakeholders regarding the Model Contract Farming and Services Act 2018. It was found that the highest concern identified by the majority of stakeholders was the non-preference for smallholder farmers by contract companies, which received a mean score of 3.00 and was prioritized first by commission agents, kisan union leaders, and research workers, while farmers similarly ranked it first with a mean score of 2.98. This is because contract companies generally prefer larger farmers due to lower transaction costs, assured volumes, and easier monitoring (Singh, 2002; Kaur *et al*., 2021). The absence of expert agency for dispute settlement was deemed the second most pressing issue by a majority of stakeholders, reflecting a mean score of 2.96 for farmers, 2.97 for commission agents, and 3.00 for both kisan union leaders and research workers, underscoring a collective apprehension regarding the absence of a designated body to mediate conflicts. Another significant issue was the inappropriate quality parameters restricting selling, which was ranked third by farmers (mean score of 2.94) and commission agents (mean score of 2.87), respectively. Additional challenges raised by stakeholders included lower prices than previously decided contract prices, biased contracts, deduction in weights of produce, and decision making power in the hands of contractor. These findings illustrated varied yet significant concerns expressed by various stakeholders concerning the Model CF Act, 2018.

The farm Laws 2020 were introduced to reform India's agriculture marketing system by improving market access and encouraging private investment. These laws aimed to

Table 4: Stakeholders view regarding e-National Agricultural Market (e-Nam, 2016)

N=105

Particulars	Farmers		Commission agents		Market officials		Kisan union leaders		Research workers	
	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank
Lack of confidence about payments	3.00	I	3.00	I	2.93	I	3.00	I	2.80	II
Poor guidance and support service	2.98	II	2.93	III	2.33	VII	3.00	I	3.00	I
Risk of losing already established commercial connections	2.94	III	2.33	IX	2.67	V	3.00	I	2.80	II
Issue of physical verification	2.90	IV	2.83	VI	2.80	III	3.00	I	2.20	V
Limited storage infrastructure	2.88	V	2.97	II	2.20	VIII	3.00	I	1.80	VI
Collusion among traders	2.84	VI	2.40	VIII	2.07	IX	3.00	I	2.40	IV
Uncertainties about prices	2.80	VII	2.87	V	2.47	VI	2.60	II	2.60	III
Complicated sale process	2.68	VIII	2.90	IV	2.73	IV	2.60	II	2.60	III
Difficulty in online payment	2.64	IX	2.80	VII	2.87	II	3.00	I	2.80	II

provide farmers more freedom to sell, ensure fair contracts, and enhance pricing options while reducing investment barriers (Chand, 2020; Beriya, 2021). However, these laws faced widespread protests due to its potential impact concerning farmers' livelihoods and weakening of MSP system (Gopiputtan and Naik, 2020; Gill, 2021). Despite their repeal in 2021, analysing their perspectives remained crucial. Consequently, the study investigated the views of various stakeholders regarding the farm laws 2020. The stakeholder perceptions of each law have been depicted in the subsequent tables.

The persual of table 7 showed the views of various stakeholders regarding the Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020. It was found that fear of losing the Minimum Support Price was perceived as the major concern among farmers and kisan union leaders ranking first with a mean score of 3.00. This is because the Act did not provide a legal guarantee for MSP, creating uncertainty regarding assured price support **(**Sangwan, 2021**)**.The dismantling of the APMC system emerged as the principal apprehension for commission agents with rank first and highest mean score of 2.97. Similarly farmers and market officials also regarded it as profoundly significant concern with mean scores of 2.98 and 2.87, ranking second respectively. This is because stakeholders anticipated that increased private trade outside APMC mandis could weaken the existing regulated marketing system and government procurement (Sangwan, 2021).The eviction of smallholders from agriculture was another foremost issue for kisan union leaders, who assigned it rank first with a mean score of 3.00. Among other stakeholders, this issue retained its prominence, with mean scores situating it within the top four across various concerns**.** Farmers fears that smallholders would find it difficult to compete with large private buyers due to limited bargaining power and resources (Gill, 2021; Singh and Shergill, 2021). Additionally, the perception that the regulation favoured private traders was considered significant by farmers, commission agents, market officials and research workers with the mean scores of 2.80, 2.53, 2.33 and 2.00 respectively. This concern stemmed from the belief that reduced government regulation could increase the role and influence of private market players (Singh and Shergill, 2021; Gill, 2021). The findings revealed that stakeholders prioritized concerns in accordance with their roles within the agricultural marketing sector. Collectively, the results reflected widespread apprehension regarding the implications of the Act on agricultural trade, the security of farmers, and the involvement of private entities within the agricultural sector.

The persual of table 8 explained the opinions of stakeholders on the Farmers (empowerment and protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020. It was analysed that the prominent concern for the majority of stakeholders pertained to the influence of private companies in price determination, with a mean score of 3.00, which was prioritized first by farmers, kisan union leaders, and research workers respectively. This concern is attributed to the absence of any reference to MSP as a benchmark for price

Table 6: Perception of various stakeholders about Model Contract Farming and Services Act (Model CF Act, 2018)

N=105

Particulars	Farmers		Commission agents		Market officials		Kisan union leaders		Research workers	
	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank
Non preference of small farmers by contract firms	2.98	I	3.00	I	2.27	VIII	3.00	I	2.80	II
No expert agency for dispute settlement	2.96	II	2.97	II	3.00	I	3.00	I	3.00	I
Inappropriate quality parameters restricts selling	2.94	III	2.87	IV	2.87	II	2.80	II	2.60	III
Lower prices than previously decided contract prices	2.92	IV	2.80	VI	2.73	III	3.00	I	2.60	III
Biased contracts	2.86	V	2.83	V	2.40	VII	3.00	I	2.00	V
Deduction in weights of produce	2.84	VI	2.73	VII	2.47	VI	2.60	III	1.80	VI
Decision making power in the hands of contractor	2.82	VII	2.93	III	2.53	V	3.00	I	2.40	IV
Difficulty in understanding hidden points in contracts	2.80	VIII	2.50	VIII	2.60	IV	3.00	I	2.40	IV

Table 7: Stakeholders views regarding Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020

N=105

Particulars	Farmers		Commission agents		Market officials		Kisan union leaders		Research workers	
	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank
Fear of losing Minimum Support Price	3.00	I	2.93	II	2.80	III	3.00	I	2.80	II
Dismantling the APMC system	2.98	II	2.97	I	2.87	II	2.60	II	2.00	V
Encroached upon the rights of farmers	2.96	III	2.63	VII	2.47	VI	2.60	II	2.80	II
Eviction of small holders from agriculture	2.92	IV	2.87	III	2.73	IV	3.00	I	2.60	III
Threat to food security of the country	2.88	V	2.73	V	2.67	V	2.60	II	2.40	IV
Unethical practices followed by private companies	2.86	VI	2.67	VI	3.00	I	3.00	I	3.00	I
Agriculture related business into the hand of few private companies	2.82	VII	2.80	IV	2.20	VIII	2.60	II	2.40	IV
Favourable to private traders	2.80	VIII	2.53	VIII	2.33	VII	2.60	II	2.00	V

Table 8: Opinions of stakeholders about Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020

N=105

Particulars	Farmers		Commission agents		Market officials		Kisan union leaders		Research workers	
	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank
Private companies will dictate prices	3.00	I	2.90	IV	2.87	III	3.00	I	3.00	I
High degree of uncertainties among farmers	2.94	II	2.97	II	3.00	I	3.00	I	2.60	III
Agriculture related business into the hands of few big corporates	2.92	III	2.77	VII	2.93	II	3.00	I	2.80	II
Eviction of farmers from their own land by contractor	2.88	IV	2.80	VI	2.60	VII	2.60	III	2.20	V
Control of big private companies over crop purchase	2.84	V	2.87	V	2.67	VI	2.40	IV	2.40	IV
Manipulation of contract norms	2.82	VI	2.73	VIII	2.73	V	2.80	II	2.80	II
Faulty recovery mechanism of contract company	2.80	VII	2.93	III	2.80	IV	3.00	I	2.40	IV
Debarred independent civil court for dispute settlement	2.76	VIII	3.00	I	2.53	VIII	3.00	I	2.00	VI

determination, allowing greater scope for private negotiation of prices (Sangwan, 2021). The apprehension regarding the substantial uncertainties experienced by farmers was significantly prioritized by market officials and kisan union leaders (mean score 3.00, ranked first), whereas research workers assigned it a third rank with mean score of 2.60. The significant concern identified was the concentration of agricultural business within a limited number of large corporations, which kisan union leaders ranked as the most crucial concern (mean score 3.00), followed by farmers (2.92, ranked third), and research workers (2.80, ranked second) respectively. This is because large firms possess greater financial and market power, potentially limiting opportunities for small producers (Sridevi and Prashanth, 2021). Other challenges raised by stakeholders included the debarred of independent civil courts for the resolution of disputes, eviction of farmers from their land by contractors, control of large private companies over crop purchases, and the manipulation of contract norms. These matters were assigned varying levels of importance by distinct stakeholders, underscoring apprehensions regarding the potential exploitation of farmers and the erosion of their rights. The findings highlighted the prevalent concerns among various stakeholders related to corporate control, uncertainties, contract enforcement, and mechanisms for dispute resolution under the Act.

The results of table 9 depicted the viewpoint of various stakeholders regarding the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020. It was found that price rise of essential commodities was perceived as the major concern among farmers, commission agents, market officials, and kisan union leaders ranking first with mean score of 3.00. This is due to the relaxation of stock limits, which would encourage hoarding and price volatility (Singh and Shergill, 2021). The violation of fair prices to both consumers and producers emerged as the principal apprehension for kisan union leaders and research workers with rank first and mean score of 3.00. Similarly commission agents also regarded it as profoundly significant concern with mean score of 2.83, ranking forth respectively. The dependence of food grains business on vagaries of market forces was another foremost issue, particularly for farmers, kisan union leaders, and commission agents, who ranked it third with mean score of 2.96, 3.00 and 2.87 respectively. This may be because reduced government intervention could increase the influence of market fluctuations on prices (Chand, 2020). Additionally, the monopoly right on hoarding, speculation, and black marketing was identified as the major issue for most stakeholders, particularly commission agents and research workers who ranked it second and fifth with a mean score of 2.93 and 2.20 respectively. This is due to the belief that larger private

Table 9: Perspectives of various stakeholders regarding Essential Commodities (Amendment) act, 2020

N=105

Particulars	Farmers		Commission agents		Market officials		Kisan union leaders		Research workers	
	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank
Price rise of essential commodities	3.00	I	3.00	I	2.93	I	3.00	I	2.80	II
Violation of fair prices to both consumers and producers	2.98	II	2.83	IV	2.87	II	3.00	I	3.00	I
Dependence of food grains business on vagaries of market forces	2.96	III	2.87	III	2.73	III	3.00	I	2.00	VI
Monopoly right on hoarding, speculation and black marketing	2.94	IV	2.93	II	2.67	IV	3.00	I	2.20	V
Risk of food security of country	2.92	V	2.70	VI	2.60	V	3.00	I	2.60	III
Hinders the interest of agriculturist and consumers	2.88	VI	2.80	V	2.33	VI	2.80	II	2.40	IV

players could accumulate stocks and influence market prices (Singh and Shergill, 2021). The other challenges highlighted by stakeholders were risk of food security of country and hinders the interest of agriculturist and consumers. These findings underlined the significant emphasis on pricing issues and market equity among the majority of stakeholders which were in synchronization with the results highlighted by Singh and Shergill, (2021).

The current challenges in the agricultural marketing has been extensively analysed, addressing the diverse concerns that affected both producers and various stakeholders within the agricultural marketing sector. Table 10 represented the perception of various stakeholders about the problems in the agricultural marketing system. It was analysed that the lack of remunerative prices for minor cereals, pulses, and oilseeds had been the prominent concern for majority of stakeholders receiving first rank from kisan union leaders, research workers, farmers and market officials with the mean score of 3.00, 3.00, 2.98 and 2.93 respectively. The apprehension about decrease in purchasing power due to price rise had been significantly prioritized by kisan union leaders and research workers (mean score 3.00, ranked first), followed by farmers (mean score 2.92, ranked second) , commission agents (mean score 2.90, ranked fourth) and market officials (mean score 2.67, ranked fifth). Similarly the unavailability of marketing infrastructure was also the identified concern receiving sixth ranks from farmers and market officials with a mean of 2.72 and 2.60 correspondingly, while commission agents, kisan union leaders and research workers ranked it two, three and five with a mean score of 2.97, 2.60 and 2.20 respectively. The additional challenges revealed by the stakeholders included rising cost of production, non-availability of basic infrastructure in regulated markets and market control of wheat and paddy that stifled crop diversity.

Table 11 showed the recommendations suggested by various stakeholders to improve the agricultural marketing system. It was found that the predominant recommendation across majority of stakeholders was guaranteed MSP for all crops to reduce wheat and paddy monoculture, with a mean score of 3.00 and was ranked first by farmers, market officials, and kisan union leaders respectively. This recommendation stressed the necessity of guaranteeing equitable prices for all crops as a means to promote crop diversification and alleviate the market dominance associated with wheat and paddy cultivation. The other significant suggestion was to include actual land rent without ceiling rates for calculating MSP which was ranked first by kisan union leaders and market official with mean score of 3.00, while farmers ranked it second with a mean score of 2.98 respectively. This recommendation was perceived as a crucial element to render MSP calculations more realistic and reflective of the actual market conditions, particularly concerning land rental valuations. The stakeholders also emphasised for the development of processing and agro based industries which was ranked first by kisan union leaders, third by commission agents and market officials and fourth by farmers with a mean score of 3.00, 2.93, 2.73 and 2.94 respectively. The focus on processing and agro-based industries was regarded as a reasonable approach to diversify agricultural

Table 10: Perception of various stakeholders about problems in current agricultural marketing system

N=105

Particulars	Farmers		Commission agents		Market officials		Kisan union leaders		Research workers	
	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank
Lack of remunerative prices for minor cereals, pulses and oilseeds	2.98	I	2.93	III	2.93	I	3.00	I	3.00	I
Decrease in purchasing power due to price rise	2.92	II	2.90	IV	2.67	V	3.00	I	2.80	II
Rising cost of production	2.88	III	2.53	VI	2.73	IV	3.00	I	1.80	VI
Non availability of basic infrastructure in regulated markets	2.76	IV	3.00	I	2.80	II	2.80	II	2.20	IV
Market control of wheat and paddy stifle crop diversity	2.74	V	2.83	V	2.87	III	3.00	I	2.60	III
Unavailability of marketing infrastructure	2.72	VI	2.97	II	2.60	VI	2.60	III	2.00	V

revenue, reducing post-harvest losses, and enhancing the value of raw agricultural produce. The other recommendation suggested by stakeholders included emphasis on value chain marketing, proper monitoring system to manage market funds and formulation of crop specific development plans for districts by the states.

Conclusions and Policy Implications

The study found that agricultural marketing reforms in India have improved market efficiency, transparency and farmers access to markets. However several challenges continued to restrict their effective implementation. Stakeholders acknowledged Minimum Support Price

Table 11: Suggestions suggested by various stakeholders to improve agricultural marketing system

N=105

Particulars	Farmers		Commission agents		Market officials		Kisan union leaders		Research workers	
	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank
Guaranteed MSP for all crops could reduce wheat and paddy monoculture	3.00	I	2.77	IV	3.00	I	3.00	I	2.20	V
Focusing towards value chain marketing	2.62	VI	2.67	VI	2.67	IV	3.00	I	2.20	V
Include actual land rent without ceiling rates for calculating MSP	2.98	II	2.70	V	2.87	II	3.00	I	2.40	IV
Emphasis on processing and agro based industries	2.94	IV	2.90	III	2.73	III	3.00	I	2.60	III
Proper monitoring system to manage market funds	2.96	III	3.00	I	1.08	VI	2.60	II	2.80	II
States should formulate crop specific development plans for districts	2.82	V	2.93	II	2.53	V	3.00	I	3.00	I

(MSP) system as a crucial tool for guaranteeing fair prices, lowering distress sales and offering production incentives, but concerns regarding limited coverage and reliance on wheat and paddy procurement, highlighted the need for a more comprehensive price support framework. Similarly reforms such as Model APMC Act and e-NAM increased market transparency, decreased information gaps, and promoted competitive marketing, yet poor infrastructure, lack of digital expertise, delayed payments, and lack of technical assistance were major concerns. The study also revealed that stakeholders raised concerns about growing involvement of private companies, unequal bargaining power, quality-based restrictions, contractual uncertainties and inadequate dispute resolution mechanisms under the Model APLM Act, the Contract Farming Act, and farm laws 2020. These concerns highlighted that market liberalization should be supported by robust regulatory safeguards that ensure the protection of small and marginal farmers.

The study suggested the necessity of strengthening price assurance mechanisms by expanding efficient support systems to pulses, oilseeds, and other diverse crops to encourage crop diversity and enhance farm income stability. Higher investment in market infrastructure such as storage facilities, grading, transportation and processing facilities is needed to lower post-harvest losses and increase farmers' involvement in value chains. Digital marketing platforms like e-NAM should be strengthened through improved digital literacy, technical assistance, and dependable payment methods. Contract farming and private market participation should be governed by clear contractual agreements, reasonable pricing policies, and easily accessible dispute resolution procedures to provide fair benefits for farmers. Additionally farmers' negotiating power can be increased and market exploitation can be decreased by promoting Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) and collective marketing strategies. Therefore, by taking stakeholder viewpoints into account and guaranteeing an inclusive, transparent and sustainable agricultural marketing system, future agricultural marketing policies should concentrate on striking a balance between market efficiency and farmer protection.

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