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Title: Linking Land-constrained Farmers to Markets: A Study in West Bengal in India

While growth of agriculture sector has the potential to facilitate poverty reduction and inclusive growth, presence of large number of land-constrained farmers is a key challenge for the same, particularly in the developing countries like India. It is generally suggested that farmers’ engagement in high value horticulture sector can help in overcoming such constraint. Apart from diversifying livelihoods in the line of non-farm activities, cultivation of high value horticultural crops can increase farmers’ income and make it stable. However, the existing imperfections and possibility of elite captures primarily due to weak institutions in both input and output markets pose constraints to rationalization of costs and realization of appropriate prices of horticultural produce. In this perspective, the present paper attempts to examine if land-constrained farmers can realize the best possible prices for horticultural crops in the existing market structure in the Indian state of West Bengal that has high concentration of land-constrained farmers. The paper also aims at understanding other structural aspects that play crucial role in this regard. The paper is based on insights from existing literature, quantitative analysis of secondary data collected from government sources and qualitative analysis of data and information gathered through focus group discussions in different inter-linked markets. It is found that even when the farmers have access to markets and related information, they generally fail to realize the optimum price primarily due to the declining intra-day trends of prices of perishable crops, uncoordinated imports of produce from other states by traders in times of rising local prices, strategized intra-day delay in revealing demand by some buyers, lack of storage facilities in the markets and presence of scattered weekly markets leading to speculative behavior among some traders or middlemen. The existing literature has overlooked these aspects in case of the land-constrained farmers and the existing measures like cooperative formation, certification programme, direct public markets, value chain development, etc. have not been so effective for them. The findings of the present paper, therefore, open up new avenues for policy and institutional interventions towards creating a less risky and more inclusive market structure for the land-constrained farmers.