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Kudumbashree farming groups in lockdown blues: study



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THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, APRIL 28, 2020 20:53 IST

UPDATED: APRIL 28, 2020 20:53 IST

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They endure a loss of ₹3.6-crore; 4,042 groups severely affected

Lockdown restrictions have adversely affected Kudumbashree group farming, leading to a loss of ₹3.6 crore, according to a study report.

The report on the losses of Kudumbashree farming groups, the problems they faced, and the consequences has been prepared by Dathan C.S, programme officer in-charge of Kudumbashree's agricultural wing.

The report says the farming groups that overcame two back-to-back floods in the past two years to plant crops this year were unexpectedly hit by the curbs on transportation and markets. As much as 8.64 tonnes of produce such as rice, vegetables, plantain, and tubers that were grown with an eye on Vishu sales could not be harvested owing to the lockdown. This alone has caused an estimated loss of ₹2 crore.

Harvested produce that could not be sold or was sold at very low prices caused losses to the tune of ₹1.67 crore, the report says.

The district where the farming groups experienced maximum loss is Thrissur. While 821 farming groups were affected by the restrictions, cultivation on 277.82 hectares was hit. In Malappuram, 778 groups were facing losses owing to the lockdown.

This year, 48,490 farming groups grew paddy, vegetables, tubers, plantain for the Vishu market. Of these, 31,421 were set to harvest the produce. Of them, 4,042 groups and their cultivation on 1,202 ha were severely affected.

The women's farming groups in Thrissur, Ernakulam, and Kannur districts that grew *kani vellarikya* (golden cucumber) for Vishu too faced severe losses.

Many who farmed lands some distance away were unable to go there and look after the crops, the study report says. Plantain and vegetables were grown in large quantities in districts such as Kollam, Kozhikode, and Thrissur but these could not be harvested owing to lack of labour and harvesting machines.

Due to the lack of storage facilities, farmers were forced to sell the produce at the earliest to prevent spoilage. This resulted in sales at very low prices in most districts.

While most paddy farmers got the support of 'padasekhara committees' or Supplyco for procurement, absence of labour or machines for harvest in Thrissur, Kollam, and Kozhikode districts hurt the groups' prospects.

There are 68,388 farming groups with 3.38 lakh women under the umbrella of Kudumbashree. Together, they farm 50,000 hectares, of which nearly 80% is taken on lease. Most of the groups take loans to meet expenses of leasing land and cultivating crops.