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Constraints faced by the farm youth in chrysanthemum cultivation

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Abstract
Chrysanthemum (*Chrysanthemum indicum*) is a commercially important floricultural crop in India, widely cultivated for its ornamental, religious, and economic value. In Tamil Nadu, particularly in Salem district, chrysanthemum cultivation has seen a steady rise, offering promising livelihood opportunities for rural youth. However, despite its potential, several challenges limit youth participation and profitability in this sector. This study was conducted to identify and analyze the constraints faced by farm youth involved in chrysanthemum cultivation in Salem district. An ex post facto research design was adopted, and three blocks with the highest concentration of chrysanthemum cultivation such as Omalur, Kadayampatti, and Mecheri were purposively selected. Data were collected from 120 youth farmers across 12 villages using a structured interview schedule. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean scores and rankings to prioritize the constraints. The results indicated that high commission charges, low market price for flowers, high input costs, inadequate storage facilities, and limited access to quality planting materials were the most severe challenges faced by the respondents. Additional constraints included lack of organized markets, transportation difficulties, labor scarcity, and limited technical knowledge regarding pest and disease management. The study highlights the need for targeted policy interventions, including the establishment of organized flower markets, capacity building, improved extension services, and input subsidies to enhance the economic viability of chrysanthemum cultivation. Addressing these issues could significantly boost rural youth engagement in floriculture, contributing to agricultural diversification and sustainable rural development.

Keywords: Chrysanthemum, farm youth, floriculture, constraints, rural development, Tamil Nadu

Introduction
Chrysanthemum (*Chrysanthemum indicum*) is one of the most popular and commercially significant flowers grown across India, known for its vibrant colors, long vase life and wide use in religious, decorative, and medicinal purposes. India ranks among the top producers of flowers globally, with floriculture cultivated over 309 thousand hectares and contributing around 2.3 million tonnes of loose flowers and 870 thousand tonnes of cut flowers (National Horticulture Board, 2023) [4]. Among these, chrysanthemum holds a vital share, especially in states like Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, and West Bengal, where it is cultivated both under open and protected conditions. In Tamil Nadu, chrysanthemum cultivation occupies a significant portion of the floriculture sector, particularly in districts such as Dindigul, Krishnagiri, Dharmapuri, Salem and Nilgiris where favorable climatic conditions and market access have encouraged youth participation. The increasing demand for flowers during festivals, weddings, and export opportunities has led to a steady rise in the area and production of chrysanthemum.

In Salem district, chrysanthemum cultivation has gained significant momentum over the past two decades and continues to be a leading floricultural enterprise. By 2009-10, Salem ranked first among Tamil Nadu districts with approximately 804 hectares under chrysanthemum cultivation, reflecting a sustained 175 % increase since 2001-02. More recent data for 2021-22 show that Salem maintained robust production, with 1,272 hectares dedicated to chrysanthemum closely following Dharmapuri (2,362 ha) and Krishnagiri (1,335 ha). Overall, the district boasts a broad 67,800 ha under horticulture encompassing key crops like chrysanthemum, mango, jasmine, and coffee. This consistent expansion underscores Salem's vital role in Tamil Nadu's

floriculture sector, providing both economic opportunity and agricultural diversification for its rural youth.

The constraints faced by farmers in chrysanthemum cultivation are multifaceted, affecting both the productivity and profitability of their operations. Despite the remarkable growth and expansion of chrysanthemum cultivation in Salem district, several constraints continue to hinder its full potential, particularly for rural youth engaged in this enterprise. The objective of the study is to find out the constraints faced by the Farm Youth in Chrysanthemum cultivation.

Materials and Methods

The present study was conducted to assess the constraints encountered by rural youth engaged in chrysanthemum cultivation in Salem district of Tamil Nadu—one of the leading regions for floriculture in the state.

Research Design

An ex post facto research design was employed for this study, as the constraints and related socio-economic variables had already occurred and could not be manipulated by the researcher. This design is suitable for identifying existing challenges and their relationships with the profile characteristics of the respondents.

Locale of the Study

The study was carried out in Salem district, a major hub for chrysanthemum cultivation in Tamil Nadu. Based on secondary data, three blocks namely Omalur, Kadayampatti, and Mecheri with the highest area under chrysanthemum cultivation were purposively selected for detailed investigation.

Sampling Procedure

From each of the three selected blocks, four villages with the largest area under chrysanthemum cultivation were chosen, making a total of 12 villages. From each village, 10 rural youth actively engaged in chrysanthemum farming were selected, resulting in a total sample size of 120 respondents. A snowball sampling technique was used to identify and contact the target group of rural youth, especially those involved in floriculture and facing day-to-day farming challenges.

Data Collection

Data were collected through a structured and pre-tested interview schedule, which included a specific section to assess the constraints faced by the respondents.

Data Analysis

The collected data were coded and subjected to descriptive statistical analysis using frequency, percentage, mean score, and standard deviation. To prioritize the constraints, mean scores were calculated for each item and ranked accordingly. This enabled the identification of the most pressing issues that require policy or extension intervention.

Results and Discussion

The constraints faced by the farm youth in Chrysanthemum cultivation were analyzed and ranked based on their mean score and presented in the Table 1.

Table 1: Constraints faced by the Farm Youth in Chrysanthemum cultivation

S. No	Constraints faced	Mean score	Rank
1	High Commission Charges	02.76	I
2	Low Price of Flower In Market	02.62	II
3	High Cost of Fertilizers and Other Inputs	02.61	III
4	Inadequate Storage Facilities	02.51	IV
5	High Cost of Planting Materials	02.43	V
6	Lack of Organized Market	02.42	VI
7	Availability of Quality Planting Material	02.41	VII
8	Transportation	02.39	VIII
9	High Wage Rate	02.32	IX
10	Labour Scarcity Problems	02.16	X
11	Lack of Technical Knowledge About Pest and Diseases and Its Control	01.86	XI
12	Problem of Irrigation	01.80	XII

High Commission Charges (Mean Score: 2.76, Rank I)

This emerged as the most severe constraint. Most farmers are compelled to sell their produce through intermediaries or commission agents who charge exorbitant fees, reducing the net income of the growers. This reflects the lack of direct market linkages and poor bargaining power of the farmers. The findings align with Vihari (2018) [11] and Gowda and Kiran Kumar (2018) [3] who emphasized the exploitative nature of middlemen in flower marketing chains.

Low Price of Flower in Market (Mean Score: 2.62, Rank II)

Fluctuating and often low prices in the flower markets, particularly during peak supply seasons, make income unstable. This discourages youth from considering floriculture a reliable income source and underscores the need for price stabilization mechanisms or minimum support price (MSP) systems.

High Cost of Fertilizers and Other Inputs (Mean Score: 2.61, Rank III)

The high cost of cultivation, especially for fertilizers, pesticides, and other inputs, significantly impacts the profitability of small and marginal youth farmers. These costs are difficult to absorb, particularly for those with limited financial resources. Similar to the input cost concerns raised by the respondents Sharath (2018) [9] noted that high fertilizer and input costs were key deterrents for youth in high-value crop farming

Inadequate Storage Facilities (Mean Score: 2.51, Rank IV)

Chrysanthemum being a perishable crop requires proper post-harvest handling. Inadequate or lack of cold storage or temporary storage leads to post-harvest losses, forcing distress sales.

High Cost of Planting Materials (Mean Score: 2.43, Rank V)

Quality planting materials are costly and not easily accessible to many youth farmers. This increases their input burden and sometimes forces them to compromise on quality, affecting yield and income.

Lack of Organized Market (Mean Score: 2.42, Rank VI)

The absence of regulated or organized markets results in dependency on unregulated middlemen, price volatility, and

exploitation. This limits the marketing efficiency and profit margins for young cultivators. The lack of organized markets and storage facilities has been cited as a barrier to profitability in floriculture by Preethi *et al*. (2014) [8], particularly for perishable flowers like chrysanthemum.

Availability of Quality Planting Material (Mean Score: 2.41, Rank VII)

Despite demand, consistent access to disease-free, high-yielding varieties remains a challenge. This constraint limits the productivity and sustainability of their cultivation practices. According to Chinchmalatpure *et al*. (2019) [2], youth farmers often struggle with access to quality planting material and technical know-how, reflecting the medium to high importance assigned to these issues in the current study.

Transportation (Mean Score: 2.39, Rank VIII)

Poor transport infrastructure or lack of affordable and timely transportation affects the timely delivery of flowers to markets, leading to spoilage and reduced returns.

High Wage Rate (Mean Score: 2.32, Rank IX)

Labor wages have been increasing, especially post-COVID-19, placing a financial burden on farmers who rely on hired labor during peak periods such as harvesting and packaging.

Labour Scarcity Problems (Mean Score: 2.16, Rank X)

In addition to high wages, the availability of skilled labor is another concern. Migration and lack of interest among local youth in agricultural labor have contributed to labor shortages. The issue of labor scarcity and rising wage rates has been widely documented post-COVID-19, with Pakhmode *et al.* (2018) [6] reporting similar patterns among flower growers in Maharashtra.

Lack of Technical Knowledge About Pest and Diseases and Its Control (Mean Score: 1.86, Rank XI)

While this is ranked lower, it still presents a problem, especially as pest and disease infestations can significantly reduce flower quality and yield. Limited access to technical guidance from extension personnel or training programs exacerbates this issue.

Problem of Irrigation (Mean Score: 1.80, Rank XII)

Though comparatively less severe, irrigation constraints like insufficient water availability, erratic rainfall, and lack of efficient irrigation systems still impact productivity in some villages, particularly during dry spells. Water scarcity and irrigation problems, though rated lower in severity, are still recognized as limiting factors in horticulture by the National Horticulture Board (2023) [5].

Conclusion

Chrysanthemum cultivation has emerged as a promising floricultural enterprise in Tamil Nadu, particularly in Salem district, offering substantial opportunities for income generation and rural youth employment. However, this study has revealed a range of critical constraints that hinder the effective participation and profitability of farm youth in this sector. Chief among these are high commission charges, low market prices, high input costs, inadequate storage infrastructure, and the unavailability of quality planting material. These issues reflect systemic challenges in marketing, input accessibility, and post-harvest management, which disproportionately affect young farmers with limited resources and bargaining power.

The findings underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions by policymakers, extension agencies, and cooperative institutions to support youth-led floriculture ventures. Strategies such as establishing organized flower markets, reducing middlemen dependency, facilitating direct marketing channels, subsidizing quality inputs, and strengthening extension services could significantly alleviate the constraints identified. Moreover, capacity-building programs focusing on technical knowledge, pest and disease management, and irrigation efficiency are vital to enhancing productivity and sustainability.

Addressing these constraints holistically can not only improve the economic viability of chrysanthemum cultivation but also attract and retain rural youth in agriculture. Given the growing demand for flowers and the potential for value addition, empowering young chrysanthemum growers can contribute meaningfully to rural development and the broader goal of agricultural diversification. Future research should explore innovative models and policy frameworks to create an enabling ecosystem for youth engagement in floriculture across other regions as well.

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