

PRESS RELEASE

Impact of COVID-19 Lockdown on Agricultural Production, Livelihoods and Food Security in India: Release of Baseline Findings

Wednesday, 20 May 2020

The Centre for Sustainable Agriculture (CSA, Hyderabad), Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI, New Delhi), and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health (Boston) recently completed a telephone survey of 1,429 agricultural households across 12 states and 200 districts in India. The study was conducted between 3 May and 15 May, and the same households will be surveyed 1 month and 2 months from now. The 12 states included were as follows: Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal. Most farmers reported harvesting wheat in the past month (60%), followed by vegetables (16%), pulses, rice, and maize.

The aim of the study was to evaluate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, including especially the lockdown, on agricultural production, livelihoods, food security, and diet diversity, as well as awareness and receipt of government support during this challenging time.

Baseline results will be presented in a webinar streamed via [Facebook Live](#) on Wednesday, 20 May, at 6:30 AM EDT. The webinar will be recorded.

A detailed pre-print of the study will also be made available on Social Science Research Network (SSRN).

Those interested in receiving updates regarding the survey can register [here](#).

Key findings:

- 10% of farmers could not harvest their crop in the past month and 60% of those who did harvest reported a yield loss. Many reported that this was because of lockdown-related issues such as low market price or inability to access their land due to travel restrictions. Several farmers also reported severe weather and water scarcity/lack of irrigation, which are persistent challenges in the agricultural sector and will need to be addressed as the slower-burning climate crisis continues in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- About 1 in 4 farmers reported storing their crops instead of selling them due to the lockdown and 12% of farmers were still trying to sell their crops. Small/marginal farmers were significantly less likely to be able to sell their crops as compared to large farmers.
- 56% of farmers reported that the lockdown has impacted their ability to prepare for the upcoming sowing season. In particular, 50% of these said that they were concerned about being able to afford inputs, particularly seeds and fertilizer, and 38% were concerned about labor shortages.

- 79% of households with wage-workers witnessed a decline in wages in the past month, and the decline was staggering: on average, 76% lower compared to this time last year.
- Just 28% of respondents had an income from livestock in the past month, down from 38% in January/February.
- Landless farmers were 10 times more likely to skip a meal and small/marginal farmers nearly 3 times more likely as compared to large farmers. But a majority also reported receiving extra food rations from the government, which has likely prevented more severe food insecurity. In our sample, diet diversity has not yet been severely affected: more than 75% of all farmers regardless of size reported consuming grains, pulses, and vegetables in the past week and more than 50% reported consuming dairy and potatoes.

Dr. Lindsay Jaacks, Assistant Professor of Global Health, who led the study from the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, said, “These findings provide an early glimpse of the issues faced by farmers across India and offer an opportunity to prevent a worsening of food insecurity, especially for the landless, small and marginal farmers who are most vulnerable.”

Priority recommendations based on these findings are: (1) uninterrupted and universal coverage of the PDS to avoid acute food insecurity, (2) support to market and sell crops, and (3) ensure access to and affordability of agricultural inputs as well as credit to the rural poor. Divya Veluguri, Project Manager at Harvard, said, “Farmers are risk-taking entrepreneurs and the significant decline in income from agriculture and allied activities, including wage-labor and livestock, has put them in a precarious position. Addressing this crisis requires both short-term support and long-term risk management.”