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### Benefits gained by small and marginal farmer members of valley of berries farmers producer company

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#### Abstract

The study focuses on the Valley of Berries Farmer Producer Company (FPC), established in 2021 in Satara district, Maharashtra, to empower small and marginal strawberry growers in Wai, Mahabaleshwar, and Jawali tehsils. The company supports farmers through technical assistance, quality input supply, and improved market linkages. A sample of 150 farmer members was surveyed using a structured interview schedule to assess the benefits gained across technical, economic, marketing, social, and psychological dimensions. The results revealed that 72.67 per cent of the respondents experienced a high level of overall benefits. Significant findings include increased agricultural production, improved income, access to distant markets, reduced exploitation by traders, and enhanced self-esteem and security. The company also played a crucial role in reducing migration and promoting collective action. The study highlights the effectiveness of FPCs in addressing the challenges faced by small and marginal farmers and their potential in promoting rural development.

**Keywords:** Farmer producer company, small and marginal farmers, benefits gained

#### Introduction

Agriculture in India, despite its declining share in GDP, continues to support nearly half of the country's population. Small and marginal farmers, who constitute the majority of the farming community, face numerous challenges such as land fragmentation, limited access to quality inputs and markets, inadequate infrastructure, and low bargaining power. In response to these challenges, the formation of Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs) has emerged as a viable model to empower farmers through collective strength. This study examines the role of Valley of Berries Farmer Producer Company in enhancing the socio-economic status of small and marginal farmers in the Wai, Mahabaleshwar, and Jawali tehsils of Satara district, Maharashtra. Established in the year 2021, Valley of Berries Farmer Producer Company primarily supports Strawberry growers by facilitating the availability of quality planting material, offering technical support, and creating direct market linkages. The company has collaborated with the University of Florida to procure high-quality mother plants and enables farmers to multiply and sell the runners across various regions in India along with sale of various berry fruits.

The Valley of Berries Farmer Producer Company serves as a successful model for empowering small and marginal farmers by enhancing their technical, economic, and market

capacities. This study underscores the potential of FPCs in rural development and small and marginal farmer empowerment.

#### Methodology

The study was conducted in Satara district, Maharashtra, focusing on the Valley of Berries Farmer Producer Company (FPC). This FPC operates primarily across three tehsils: Wai, Mahabaleshwar, and Jawali—regions known for berry farming. The target population for this study consisted of 350 registered farmer members of the Valley of Berries FPC. These members represent small and marginal farmers involved in berries production and marketing activities facilitated by the FPC. A purposive sampling technique was used to select active members of the FPC across the three tehsils. Out of the total 350 members, 150 respondents were selected randomly. A structured interview schedule was developed with the guidance of faculty from the Department of Agricultural Extension Education, College of Agriculture, Pune, to assess these benefits and personal interviews were conducted to collect data. In the present study, the term benefits gained refers to the positive outcomes, advantages, or monetary gains experienced by the small and marginal farmer members of the Valley of Berries Farmer Producer Company. The schedule comprised thirty statements, classified under five categories: technical (5

statements), economical (10), marketing-related (6), social (3), and psychological (6). A two-point continuum was used to record responses, where “Yes” was assigned a score of 1 and “No” a score of 0. Frequency and percentage for each statement were calculated and arranged in descending order to identify the most commonly experienced benefits. Thus, the total score for individual respondents was worked out by adding all the score obtained. The respondents were classified into three categories by using range i.e. the arbitrary method.

## Results and Discussion

Valley of Berries Farmers Producer Company empowers small and marginal farmers by providing better market access, fair pricing, and collective bargaining power. The benefits gained by small and marginal farmer members of Valley of Berries Farmer Producer Company were classified into five categories which are technical, economical, marketing related, social and psychological benefits and data was collected accordingly and result is presented in Table 1 accordingly.

**Table 1:** Distribution of small and marginal farmer members according to benefits gained from the Valley of Berries Farmers Producer Company

Sr. No	Benefits gained from the Valley of Berries Farmers Producer Company	Respondents (n=150)	
		Frequency	Percentage
A.	Technical benefits		
1.	The agricultural production of small and marginal farmers has significantly increased due to the company.	141	94.00
2.	The technology proposed by the company has reduced the hardships of farmers.	139	92.67
3.	The company has enabled small and marginal farmers with limited resources to modernize their farming practices.	135	90.00
4.	The company provides technical information on various agricultural activities.	132	88.00
5.	The field visit organized by the company is helping the farmers to develop a favorable attitude towards improved agricultural technologies.	130	86.67
B.	Economic benefits		
1.	The company is empowering economically disadvantaged farmers.	150	100.00
2.	Due to Valley of Berries Farmer Producer Company, the annual income of farmers is been increasing.	145	96.67
3.	The company successfully solves problems of the members related to production and marketing.	145	96.67
4.	The company enables effective use of resources.	144	96.00
5.	The company helps farmers save money by enabling them to purchase farm inputs in bulk rather than purchasing farm inputs alone.	143	95.33
6.	The company saves costs of labour.	141	94.00
7.	The company provides common infrastructure facilities to members.	135	90.00
8.	By becoming a member of the company, one is assured of purchasing inputs at the right price.	132	88.00
9.	Connecting with fund raising and credit society through the company is helping to stabilize the financial situation of its members.	127	84.67
10.	The company has increased the ability to deal and negotiate with banks, other lending institutions, and insurance agencies.	113	75.33
C.	Marketing related benefits		
1.	The market price information provided by the company is helping farmers determine the price and market location for their produce.	145	96.67
2.	Agricultural produce of the members is gaining access to famous and distant markets, and getting sales and marketing opportunities.	144	96.00
3.	The company has provided the agricultural produce of the members organized marketing services.	141	94.00
4.	The company guarantees the sale of the produce and the right price.	138	92.00
5.	The exploitation of the members of the company by local traders has been reduced.	131	87.33
6.	Farmers members consolidate all of their produce into one place so that one or more merchant/s can purchase the produce at one time.	113	75.33
D.	Social benefits		
1.	The migration rate of members has reduced and employment is been generated by the company.	140	93.33
2.	Due to the company, unity and cooperation among its members is increasing.	127	84.67
3.	Working collectively in the company is fostering a sense of equality amongst members.	122	81.33
E.	Psychological benefits		
1.	The company has reduced the worry of selling produce at a fair price.	145	96.67
2.	The members have guarantee of sale of their production (berries, plants) by the company.	138	92.00
3.	The self-esteem of the members has increased as their economic situation has improved due to the company.	136	90.67
4.	The participation of the members in the company has enabled their economic empowerment.	136	90.67
5.	The company has provided members with stability and security in their farming business.	130	86.67
6.	The members have guarantee of fair price for their produce (berries, plants) by the company.	111	74.00

The table 1 shows the benefits gained by the members of Valley of Berries Farmer Producer Company which have been categorised into technical benefits, economic benefits, marketing benefits, social benefits and psychological benefits.

Technical benefits gained by the members of Valley of Berries Farmer Producer Company includes significant increase in the agricultural production of small and marginal farmers (94.00 per cent). There are 92.67 per cent members who agreed on that their hardships had reduced due to the technology proposed by the Valley of Berries Farmer Producer Company. Ninety per cent of the members stated

that the company enabled them to modernize their farming practices in spite of their limited resources. Eighty eight per cent members got benefited from the technical information on various agricultural activities provided by the company followed by 86.67 per cent members who agreed that the field visit organized by company helped them to develop favorable attitude towards improved agricultural technologies.

Regarding the economic benefits, 100.00 per cent farmers agreed upon that the Valley of Berry Farmer Producer Company is empowering the economically disadvantaged farmers. There were 96.67 per cent farmer members who

confirmed that their annual income had increased due to the company and also solved their production and marketing related problems. Ninety-six per cent of the farmer members confirmed that the company enabled them to use resources effectively. Saving money by purchasing farm inputs in bulk benefitted 95.33 per cent members. Ninety-four per cent of the farmer members said that the company saves the cost on labour. Ninety per cent of the farmer members got benefitted from the common infrastructure facilities. Assurance of purchasing inputs at right price as a member of the company was the benefit gained by 88.00 per cent members. There were 84.67 per cent members who mentioned that connecting with fund raising and credit society through the company has helped stabilize financial situation of its members. The company increasing the ability to deal and negotiate with the banks and insurance agencies was the benefit gained by 75.33 per cent of the members.

Valley of Berries Farmer Producer Company also provided market related benefits from which the most important indicated by 96.67 per cent members was getting market price information which helped determine the price and market location for their produce, followed by 96.00 per cent farmers who gained access for their agricultural produce in renowned and distant markets for sale and marketing opportunities. Valley of Berries Farmer Producer Company provided organized marketing services to the agricultural produce of the members was the benefit gained by 94.00 per cent farmers. Ninety-two per cent farmers acknowledged the benefit of the company guaranteeing sale of the produce for the right price. The benefit that exploitation of the members of the company by the local traders had reduced was expressed by 87.33 per cent of the farmer members. Consolidation of all the produce of the members at one place for one time sale to one or more merchants was the gained benefit as mentioned by 75.33 per cent respondents.

Looking into the social benefits gained due to Valley of Berries Farmer Producer Company, 93.33 per cent farmer members said that migration rate has reduced, 84.67 per cent members said that unity and cooperation among them also improved and 81.33 per cent members mentioned that working collectively in the company has helped to foster the sense of equality among the members.

From amongst the psychological benefits reported, 96.67 per cent members stated that the company had reduced the worry of selling the produce at a fair price. Ninety-two per cent farmer members got psychological benefit of having the guarantee of the company about the sale of their production. Increase in self-esteem due to improved economic situation and economic empowerment, both, due to the company, were two psychological benefits gained by an equal number of respondents (90.67 per cent, each). The psychological benefits, viz.; company providing stability and security in farming business and the guarantee of fair price for their produce were reported by 86.67 and 74.00 per cent of the farmer members, respectively.

Small and marginal farmers have gained several benefits through collective participation in the producer company. These include improved access to quality inputs, enhanced market linkages, capacity-building support, and increased income through reduced dependency on middlemen. The Small and Marginal farmers members are further

categorized on the basis of extent of overall benefits gained by them from the Valley of Berries Farmer Producer Company in three categories which is illustrated in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Overall benefits gained by the small and marginal farmer member

Sr. No.	Overall benefits gained	Respondents (n=150)	
		Frequency	Percentage
1	Low (Up to 23)	9	6.00
2	Medium (24 to 26)	32	23.33
3	High (27 and above)	109	72.67
	Total	150	100.00

Table 2 shows the overall benefits gained by the small and marginal farmers from the Valley of Berries Farmer Producer Company. Results show that 72.67 per cent members have gained high level of benefits followed by 23.33 per cent members who have gained medium level of benefits and only 6.00 per cent members have gained low level of benefits from the Valley of Berries Farmer Produce Company.

The above study concluded that 72.67 per cent the of the small and marginal farmers members had gained the high level of benefits. It might be due to the reason that after becoming a member of this FPC it was helpful for the farmers as the company provided many different types of benefits likes technical, economical, marketing, social and psychological. So, it was helping farmers to solve their problems related to production, marketing and finances. The above result is in line with findings of Trebbin (2014) <sup>[3]</sup>, Sokchea and Culas (2015) <sup>[5]</sup>, Preethi (2015) <sup>[6]</sup>, Bikkina *et al.* (2018) <sup>[8]</sup> and Singh and Vatta (2019) <sup>[11]</sup>.

## Conclusion

The Valley of Berries Farmer Producer Company has helped the small and marginal farmer of the company to increase agricultural production, reduce farming hardships, and promote the modernization of practices even with limited resources. Farmers experienced economic empowerment through increased income, efficient resource use, savings on bulk input purchases, and reduced labour costs. The company also provided strong marketing support by offering market price information, access to distant markets, organized marketing services, and assurance of fair sales. Socially, it contributed to reducing migration, while psychologically, it helped reduce stress related to pricing and boosted farmers' confidence and self-esteem. Overall, the majority of farmers reported high levels of benefits from their association with the company.

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