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FACTORS FOR SHIFTS IN GROUNDNUT ACREAGE

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This study forms a small part of larger enquiry conducted in the groundnut producing tracts[1] of the country with a view to gathering detailed information in regard to groundnut situation for the current season. Of the nine tracts covered by the larger enquiry, only in one tract, *viz.*, Madhya Pradesh, were some additional questions put in order generally to understand some of the structural conditions characterising our agrarian economy and particularly for knowing the reasons behind the introduction of groundnut crop or for significant shifts in its acreage. Those findings of the study in Madhya Pradesh tract which are germane to the topic under discussion are briefly presented here.

The information for the study was gathered through a field survey. Field work was preceded by a training programme for the investigating staff and at the training sessions all possible reasons for shifts in acreage and for the introduction of a crop were discussed. However, this was meant only to enable the investigator to do intelligent probing without introducing any biases of his own; to the farmer, the questions were put straight—unaccompanied by any suggestive list of answers. The answers were taken down practically as given by the farmer and these were coded later.

II

All groundnut producing farmers in the 33 villages chosen in this tract were contacted for purposes of the limited study. The selection was made on the basis of a random sampling design with some elements of purposive selection at the village level. In all, 826 groundnut producing farmers in the selected villages of the tract were contacted; these are practically all the groundnut producing farmers in these villages, as the questionnaire could not be canvassed only to a few due to absence, refusal, or other unavoidable reasons—reasons beyond the

TABLE I

		Number of Farmers	Percentage
(1)	Total number of groundnut producing farmers	826	100.00
(2)	Kept the same acreage as last year	500	60.53
(3)	New farmers	90	10.90
(4)	Increased the acreage substantially	119	14.41
(5)	Decreased the acreage substantially	117	14.16

1. A tract is synonymous with State except in two States which were sub-divided into two and three tracts respectively in the light of agro-climatic and market considerations.

control of the Investigator. Of these farmers, 500 kept the area under groundnut, more or less, at the level of last year's acreage. The number of 'new comers' and those who changed the area substantially[2] are given in Table I.

However, if we exclude the persons whose behaviour is fully accounted for by considerations of crop rotation, *i.e.*, the farmers who grew groundnut this year but not last year because of rotational factors, or who increased/decreased the area under groundnut also under the dictates of crop cycle, we find that the real number of new groundnut farmers and of those who have actually increased/decreased the area under groundnut in the real sense of the term (and not because of crop rotation), is greatly reduced; these figures are presented in Table II.

TABLE II

	Reasons	Number of Farmers	Percentage
(1)	Total number of groundnut producing farmers	826	100.00
(2)	Farmers whose behaviour is actuated only by considerations of crop rotation	178	21.55
(3)	Kept the same acreage as last year	500	60.53
(4)	New farmers	48	5.81
(5)	Increased the acreage substantially	54	6.54
(6)	Decreased the acreage substantially	46	5.57

It is thus seen that only the behaviour of 148 farmers (under categories 4, 5 and 6 in the above table), or about 18 per cent of the total, will give real clues to the understanding of shifts in groundnut acreage. All observations here onwards will, therefore, relate to these 148 farmers who only are the real newcomers or who have actually changed the area under groundnut substantially in the current groundnut season on considerations other than those of crop rotation.

III

It was found that of the 148 farmers who matter for our purpose, 48 or about 32 per cent are new groundnut farmers. The reasons these farmers advanced for taking to groundnut production are stated in Table III.[3]

2. A change of about 20 per cent in acreage was regarded sufficient for classifying it as belonging to the category of 'substantial change'; in cases where acreage under groundnut went beyond 20 acres or so, only a change of about 10 per cent in acreage was regarded as adequate qualification.

3. The factors do not, however, form exclusive categories. Thus, some of the farmers who are growing groundnut on an experimental basis (second factor in Table III) are certainly doing so in the hope of getting relatively better financial returns (first factor in the table); the factor that appeared most predominant in the farmer's way of thinking was noted down as being relevant in the particular case. It need not be added that multiplicity of motivations was clearly noticeable and would be well worth exploring through the use of scaling techniques.

TABLE III

		Number of Farmers	Percentage
(1)	Relative economic advantage favouring groundnut	11	22.92
(2)	Trying on an experimental basis	12	25.00
(3)	Relative ease in procuring the factors of production for groundnut cultivation, such as land (through purchase, rent, lease or sharing arrangements, etc.), labour (through hiring, etc.) and seed, etc.[4]	20	41.66
(4)	Other factors[5]	5	10.42
		48	100.00

Ease in procuring the factors of production and a desire to experiment with a new crop enterprise emerge as the two most important factors responsible for the introduction of groundnut. While relative ease in procuring the factors of production for groundnut cultivation is certainly an enabling factor and would, *ceteris paribus*, encourage a farmer to have a try at groundnut cultivation, it cannot, all the same, be regarded as a sufficient condition for the adoption of groundnut enterprise; a latent desire on the part of the farmer must certainly have been present to prompt him to take advantage of favourable conditions in respect of resource availability, financial and physical.

IV

The number of farmers who increased the area under groundnut substantially is 54, or about 36 per cent. The reasons for this course of action are presented in Table IV.

TABLE IV

	Reasons	Number of Farmers	Percentage
(1)	Relative economic advantage favouring groundnut	27	50.00
(2)	Relative ease in availability of groundnut seed this year	18	33.33
(3)	Other factors[6]	9	16.67
		54	100.00

Relative economic advantage is the most important factor leading to increase in groundnut acreage; availability of seed comes next in terms of importance.

Forty-six farmers, or about 31 per cent of the total number of farmers, decreased the area under groundnut substantially. The factors responsible for this downward shift in acreage are given in Table V.

4. The factor comprises two elements—improvement in the farmer's *financial* resource situation to enable him to procure the factors of production, and ease in the *physical* resource availability position to make it possible for the farmer to procure the factors of production.

5. Value of groundnut crop as a manurial source for the next crop, etc.

6. Value of groundnut crop as fodder and as a source of manure for the next crop, easy access to funds this year, etc.

TABLE V

		Number of Farmers	Percentage
(1)	Poor yield last year	20	43.48
(2)	Difficulty in availability of the factors of production this year :		
	(*i*) Availability of seed	7	15.22
	(*ii*) Availability of land	1	2.17
	(*iii*) Availability of labour	8	17.39
(3)	Other factors[7]	10	21.74
		46	100.00

Poor yield obtained last year resulted in a decline in the planted acreage this year, and this factor explains the behaviour of the largest number of people reducing the area under groundnut.[8]

V

A fact that attracts attention relates to the role of availability of seed in affecting the area under groundnut. This factor explains a significant part of the additions to groundnut acreage—through groundnut cultivation by new farmers, and increase in acreage of old farmers. Difficulty in seed availability is also noted to be not an insignificant cause leading to decrease in groundnut acreage (Table V). Thus, on the basis of this study, provision of seed and the wherewithal to buy it emerge as an important field of activity for agricultural development and extension agencies.

However, realisation of higher economic return from groundnut cultivation over the competing crop(s), or such an expectation ("relative economic advantage favouring groundnut") explain the largest increase in groundnut acreage—through groundnut cultivation by new farmers, and increase in acreage of old farmers. Due to limitation of time this factor could not be examined in detail. Nevertheless, one point came to surface with slight probing, *viz.*, timely availability of cash from groundnut as against, say, cotton where the farmer has to wait a long time for the realisation of full earnings because harvesting (picking) is spread over time. In the case of short duration groundnut varieties particularly, this point assumes added significance.

The main findings of this study, albeit limited to a few villages in a single tract, lend further support to the notion that farmers in India are, to a considerable extent, motivated by income consideration in adopting 'cash' crops.

7. Partition of farmers' land, shortage of funds this year, low prices last year, etc.

8. Farmer-wise groundnut acreage, this year as well as last year, along with the total size of holding was noted and the analysis may, at a later stage, be pursued to the level of various size groups to unravel the behavioural pattern of farmers with varying size of holding, and/or with different size of groundnut acreage.