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**Stated market preferences of dairy producers in the presence of a dairy cooperative:
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Stated market preferences of dairy producers in the presence of a dairy cooperative: Insights from an exploratory visit to the rural-urban interface of Bengaluru, India

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Abstract

An exploratory visit to the rural-urban interface of Bengaluru city revealed that dairy producers with larger herd size and potentially stable income preferred to sell to the cooperative whereas those producers with minuscule herd size (upto two cattle) stated a preference to sell to urban customers in the private market. Sales in the private market were uncertain due to volatile demand but they fetched a higher price than the cooperative per transaction. Given that producers in the latter category were highly cash strapped and needed cash for fulfilling their transaction demand, the stated preferences can be attributed to liquidity concerns on part of the producers. This sets a hypothesis for quantitative research on income stability as a determinant of market choice by dairy producers. This paper provides the linkages between such observed market preferences and the understanding of the producers' and consumers' resilience in terms of food security as well as an understanding of the ethical principles of social embeddedness and moral economy in the context of the production system.

1. Introduction

The presence of a market is a popular policy implication of several studies on dairy development and farmers' incomes in developing countries (van der Lee et al., 2020). Given that the output is milk which is a perishable product, proper marketing channels have to be established for supporting the smallholder dairy production in developing countries (Duncan et al., 2013). The development of cooperatives is one approach which has been adopted to provide a market and improve the livelihoods of smallholder dairy farmers in such countries (Staal et al., 1997; Chagwiza et al., 2016). There are success stories of dairy cooperative movements which have been instrumental in institutionalizing milk marketing channels and providing an organized systemic structure to dairying in countries such as India. The southern state of Karnataka in India houses the second largest cooperative setup for dairying in India.

The Karnataka Cooperative Milk Producers' Federation Ltd. (KMF) is the responsible institution for administration and management of the dairy cooperative sector in the state of Karnataka. Apart from the cooperative setup for milk procurement which provides a market to dairy producers in Karnataka, there exists demand for milk from private urban households and private dairies in the peri-urban areas of a large megacity of the state such as Bengaluru.

This paper describes the observed market choice of dairy producers for milk supply, input demand (feed and veterinary services) between the cooperative sector and the private sector. Furthermore, it states the observed association between the market choice and herd size of the dairy farm.

2. Methods and Data

The findings of this study are from field notes based on field observation and received responses from the different nodal entities of the milk value chain in Bengaluru district during an exploratory visit conducted in December 2021 for the comprehensive knowledge of its functioning. Rural, urban, and peri-urban areas which were in the vicinity of the northern as well as southern areas of Bengaluru city were explored. Snowball sampling was used to select milk producers and privately-owned dairies. Dairy Cooperative Societies (DCS) were visited to witness milk procurement by milk producers from member villages. The description of processing and marketing of milk collected at the DCS was obtained from Bangalore Milk Union Limited (BAMUL) and Tumkur Milk Union Limited (TUMUL).

3. The Rural-Urban Interface of Bengaluru

Bengaluru is the capital city of the state of Karnataka in southern India. A market network for various agricultural, floricultural, and textile products established in 1537 CE is from where the city can trace its origin (Purushothaman & Patil, 2017). At present, it is a megacity which serves as a prominent example of rapid and extensive urbanisation. The neo-urban areas of the city comprise of public & private industries and educational institutions which have given rise to the emergence of cosmopolitan lifestyles (Purushothaman & Patil, 2017). However, in the periphery (Rural-Urban Interface (RUI)), farming and dairying are carried out by cultivators and producers who themselves form a heterogeneous group in terms of income level. During travel from the city towards the rural areas during field trips, farmers engaged in horticultural production and earning significantly high income from it, dairy producers with large herd size and stable income, as well as dairy producers involved in subsistence production with a herd size as low as one or two cows were visited.

Dairy producers engaged in milk production in the RUI of Bengaluru operated at a small production scale by global standards in terms of herd size and milk output. According to Douphrate et al. (2013), the average herd size in United States was 246 (in 2007), 40.3 in Germany, 41 in France, and 69.4 in United Kingdom. In contrast, the average herd size in India was 2. The range of the herd size of dairy farms visited in the RUI was one to seven cows and the range of total daily milk production on the farms was between five litres and one hundred and twenty litres. The main inputs for milk production comprised of concentrate feed, fodder (green and dry), and veterinary services.

4. The system of milk procurement and marketing in Bengaluru

The output and input markets related to milk production in Bengaluru consists of two sectors: The cooperative sector and the private sector. The private sector can furthermore be classified into urban households residing in private housing in the vicinity of the dairy farm, private dealers, and private dairies.

4.1 The cooperative sector

The KMF is the governing institution at the highest rung of the state dairy cooperative hierarchy. At a lower administrative rung are milk unions which cover all districts of the state. These milk unions carried out the processing and marketing of milk which has been procured by the District Cooperative Societies (DCS) which operated a milk collection center where the dairy producers sell the milk produced. There were approximately 2500 DCS in the state with one DCS for every ten villages.

Membership in the state cooperative for selling milk and procuring feed was the norm for dairy producers in the state¹. Daily milk produced was sold by these producers to the cooperative at the DCS and was based on a testing procedure for fat content. Furthermore, the milk collected was transported to the respective milk union where the milk was pasteurized, graded, and packaged according to the fat. On the other hand, feed was manufactured by the KMF in factory units and was sold to the milk unions which supplied it to the DCS. Dairy producers could purchase the feed at the DCS. Figure 1 presents the flowchart of milk and feed across the nodal entities of the cooperative sector.

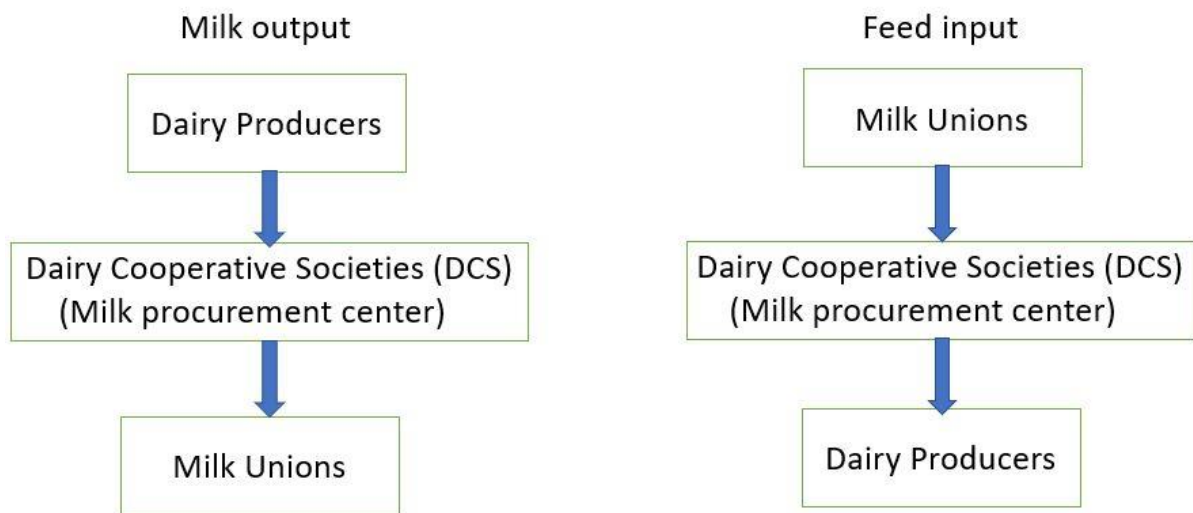


Figure 1: Flowchart of milk and feed across the nodes of the cooperative sector in Karnataka, India

The payment by the cooperative to dairy producers for daily milk sold was made once in a month.

4.2 The private sector

There were three main points of sale available to dairy producers when they chose to sell milk produced in the private market: Urban private households, private dealers, and private dairies. The option of selling in the private market was largely available only to the dairy producers in the RUI of Bengaluru and was no longer available as one increased the distance from the city towards the rural areas. There were cases of dairy producers engaged in long term contracts for supplying milk to households in private apartments which were close to the dairy farm. Producers also had the option to sell to private dealers when the distance to the DCS milk collection center was prohibitive in terms of transporting it. There were cases of private dairies which coexisted and exhibited potential to

¹ There were few cases of non-membership by dairy producers but they were uncommon exceptions.

compete against the state cooperative in procuring milk from dairy producers. Such dairies had carved a niche for themselves in the production of specialty products such as cheese, icecream, and organic milk.

5. Results and discussion

Dairy production in the RUI of Bengaluru opens up the choice set of buyers across the cooperative and private markets for milk. Direct interaction with dairy producers in this region revealed a preference for the private market, particularly by producers operating on a small-scale and small herd size. In the RUI, the cooperative is a fallback in the case of a decrease in demand in the private market. One of the main drivers of this choice is that the price received by selling to private customers was higher than that offered by the cooperative. Sale in the private market also facilitated the possibility of price discrimination based on distance to be covered for the delivery. Sale by producers with minuscule herd size (upto two cows) was driven by transaction demand for money. Some producers preferred to call a private vet for better quality in terms of quick arrival to the farm and convenience.

The fact that there was stated preference for the private market for milk sale and demand for veterinary service is contrary to: (i) the new institutional economics approach which justifies the existence of cooperatives on the ground that members acknowledge is an improvement in their marketing position (Zheng et al., 2012). Antia-Obong et al. (2021) explained the role of transaction costs from new institutional economics in how they affect the producer's decision to engage in a market. Using a mixed-methods approach on smallholder poultry production in Nigeria, they found that availability, accessibility, and adequacy of the components which constitute transaction costs determined whether they engaged in the market as well as the degree of engagement. For policy, they recommended better transport arrangements and community schemes in which regular veterinary tasks could be performed, (ii) contrary to the theory of risk which is perceived in the private market. According to Zheng et al. (2012), producers' attitude towards risk is one of the major determinants of how they perceive cooperatives and their decision on becoming a member, and (iii) Kumar & Parappurathu (2018) found that sale to cooperative is irrespective of the scale of operation. Jitmun et al. (2020) found a quadratic relationship between market choice and herd size, wherein, membership in Dairy Cooperatives (DCs) increased with herd size but beyond a certain threshold of herd size, the market choice shifted to the private market.

The presence of a dairy cooperative serves to provide a market for dairy producers and ensures regular procurement and income for the milk produced. However, the presence of alternate marketing channels such as private customers, private dealers, and private dairies for dairy producers has implications for the study of food security: First, on the part of dairy producers (especially, smallholders), it improved their access to markets with quick cash in return. The sale of milk in the private sector was of raw and unprocessed milk, which fetched a higher price per unit sold than sale in the cooperative. Cabell & Oelofse (2012) enlist indicators of resilience of agroecological systems out of which the RUI of Bengaluru exhibited three: "Appropriately connected", "Globally autonomous and locally interdependent", and "reasonably profitable". "Appropriately connected" can be associated with transactions at the farm level with multiple stakeholders engaged in the production and marketing of milk in the concerned area. "Globally autonomous and locally interdependent" can be associated with less emphasis on the formal market for milk and more dependence on local relationships involving producers and consumers. "Reasonably profitable" can be associated with the fact that producers were able to sustain their livelihoods (although it was subsistence for smallholders) with minimum income. Second, on the part of urban customers who purchased raw milk from dairy

producers, it led to an increase in the quantity of milk available at their disposal. They had also stated their preference for direct raw milk by dairy producers over processed milk of the cooperative because of its use in preparing *ghee* (clarified butter) at home.

Nichols et al. (2022) studied the importance of local food systems in the United States during the Covid-19 pandemic. With the disruption of global food supply systems, the demand for local food increased and it benefitted producers who directly sold to consumers, thereby improving their resilience. They discussed the importance of “social embeddedness” which implied that the sales and purchases were motivated through social reliance and trust. In the case of the RUI of Bengaluru, there was evidence of price discrimination on the part of the producers who stated that they charged lower prices to old customers who had been purchasing from them since a relatively longer period as compared to new customers. Field observation also found evidence of acceptance of irregular payments from private customers by the producers. However, one producer reported that during the pandemic, all private customers ceased to purchase milk from that producer and the only option left was to sell milk to the cooperative. This finding in the RUI of Bengaluru is against the notion of resilience during the Covid-19 pandemic which was observed by Nichols et al. (2022) in the United States. This implies high heterogeneity among dairy producers, especially in developing countries, to the extent that individual experiences of dairy producers should be considered in the study of food security in agricultural markets.

Bryant & Garnham (2014) conceptualized “moral economy” wherein, transactions prioritize wellbeing and emotion and go beyond the utilitarian perspective. During interaction with several urban customers in the field, it was stated that they perceived raw milk which was directly purchased as fresh and was deemed as healthy for infants in their household. Informal exchange arrangements between the producers, private dealers, and private households for such sales and purchases provide a case for connecting moral economy to the functioning of dairy markets in the RUI which hosts highly heterogeneous and diverse production systems.

Producers who own a smaller number of cattle prefer to sell milk in the private market whereas producers with larger herd size can easily maintain stable income from selling milk to the cooperative and choose to sell so. Preference for the private market for veterinary services was also observed owing to quality differences in service provision. This observed pattern also sets a hypothesis for quantitative research on the role of stability of income and transactionary demand for money in determining the market choice by dairy producers.

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Die Wurzeln der **Fakultät für Agrarwissenschaften** reichen in das 19. Jahrhundert zurück. Mit Ausgang des Wintersemesters 1951/52 wurde sie als siebente Fakultät an der Georg-August-Universität durch Ausgliederung bereits existierender landwirtschaftlicher Disziplinen aus der Mathematisch-Naturwissenschaftlichen Fakultät etabliert.

1969/70 wurde durch Zusammenschluss mehrerer bis dahin selbständiger Institute das **Institut für Agrarökonomie** gegründet. Im Jahr 2006 wurden das Institut für Agrarökonomie und das Institut für Rurale Entwicklung zum heutigen **Department für Agrarökonomie und Rurale Entwicklung** zusammengeführt.

Das Department für Agrarökonomie und Rurale Entwicklung besteht aus insgesamt neun Lehrstühlen zu den folgenden Themenschwerpunkten:

- Agrarpolitik
- Betriebswirtschaftslehre des Agribusiness
- Internationale Agrarökonomie
- Landwirtschaftliche Betriebslehre
- Landwirtschaftliche Marktlehre
- Marketing für Lebensmittel und Agrarprodukte
- Soziologie Ländlicher Räume
- Umwelt- und Ressourcenökonomik
- Welternährung und rurale Entwicklung

In der Lehre ist das Department für Agrarökonomie und Rurale Entwicklung führend für die Studienrichtung Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaften des Landbaus sowie maßgeblich eingebunden in die Studienrichtungen Agribusiness und Ressourcenmanagement. Das Forschungsspektrum des Departments ist breit gefächert. Schwerpunkte liegen sowohl in der Grundlagenforschung als auch in angewandten Forschungsbereichen. Das Department bildet heute eine schlagkräftige Einheit mit international beachteten Forschungsleistungen.

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