

PERCEPTION OF FARMERS ABOUT PROFITABILITY OF VEGETABLE GARDENING ENTERPRISE IN AHIAZU MBAISE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF IMO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed perception of farmers about profitability of vegetable gardening enterprise in Ahiazu Mbaise local government area of Imo state, Nigeria. A structured questionnaire was administered to 60 randomly selected farmers in the study area. Data collected were analysed using frequencies, percentages and mean scores. Results showed that majority of the respondents (70%) were married, with mean age of 37 years. About 78% of the farmers had secondary education. The mean farm size was 9 plots. Most of the respondents (67%) perceived that vegetable gardening was profitable. The average monthly amount spent was N765 while an average revenue of N1200 was realized from vegetable production in the area. The average profit was N435, which is very low. It was recommended among others that farmers should form co-operative societies to enable them acquire enough land for gardening. Government should provide appropriate materials and technologies that will help to reduce the labour involved in the production of vegetables.

Key words: farmers, profitability, vegetable gardening enterprise

INTRODUCTION

In many rural households vegetable gardens are common as these sustains the family in most cases since vegetables form parts of their daily diet. Waaijenberg (1996) stated that people grow fruit and vegetables in their own vegetable gardens because it assures them good food at low cost, it is also a source of revenue. Vegetables act as stop gap to poverty among the teeming population. Ajayi, and Banmeke (2005) were of the opinion that since the vast majority of the poor in Africa depend on agriculture, increasing food production is among the principal means of combating poverty and malnutrition in Africa. Akinmo (1983) stressed that one of the major constraints facing Nigeria is her inability to feed her rapidly expanding population. Oyenuga (1976) summed it up by saying that the vast majority of Nigerians are not only improperly fed, but they are also underfed. In a comprehensive food balance sheet prepared by Olayide (1988), it was shown that 63.6 gms of crude proteins and 2470kcalories were required per head and also in 1990, an average Nigerian consumed about 58.83gms of crude protein and about 2,083k calories per day. IITA (1989) noted that increased vegetable production improves family diets and also increases incomes. It was observed that greater proportion of vegetables are grown in home gardens and lowland fadama areas.

According to Knoth and Derson (1976) increased production and more general use of vegetables appear to be the way out for providing a balanced diet for the people. This is because at any season of the year, there is at least one type of vegetables or the other available in the market and this is a factor that contributes to the good health of the populace in general that may not have access to other expensive sources of minerals and vitamin gotten from vegetables. Nwaogwugwu et al (2008) noted that fruits and vegetable products are essential food items sought after in diets in various part of Nigeria. The supply and availability of majority of fruit and vegetable products are controlled by seasonal variations. For example during rainy season (on-season), rainfall normally helps in the growth and maturity of vegetables i.e. there is no scarcity of water during this season and the soil is

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normally wet and this encourages the activities of micro-organisms in the soil and thereby help in the growth and rapid increase of vegetables during the season. Likewise during dry season (off-season), vegetables are normally scarce i.e. they are not always available to be compared with rainy season, this is because of the hard nature of the soil, lack of water in the soil which may result to irrigation.

In spite of the importance of vegetables to the whole nation, it is not yet clear how much of these vegetables are available to the people and what makes vegetable or unavailable. The broad objectives of the study are to examine the factors that influence vegetable production as a profitable enterprise to farmers. The specific objectives include: to identify the socio-economic characteristics of the vegetable farmers; to identify the various methods of vegetable cultivation available to the farmers; to identify factors that hinder the production of vegetables; to examine the profitability of vegetable gardening as a business enterprise.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Ahiazu Mbaise local government area of Imo State, Nigeria. The population of Ahiazu Mbaise local government area is about 96,170 (census 2006). It has a land area of about 87.179 square kilometres. There are (17) seventeen communities in Ahiazu Mbaise local government area. It is bounded in the north by Ehime Mbano local government, in the south by Aboh Mbaise local government, in the east by Obowo local government area and in the west by Mbaitolu local government area. The people of Ahiazu Mbaise are predominantly small scale farmers and traders. But a high proportion of vegetable farmers comes from Umunomo, Umuchezie, and Okponkume. They grow vegetables such as green (*Amaranthus spp*), waterleaf (*Talinum triangulare*), Fluted pumpkin (*Telferia occidentalis*), pepper among others. Three communities were randomly selected from the study area, 20 respondents from each of the 3 communities were then selected, making up a total of 60 respondents. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. Descriptive statistical tools were used for data analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

From table 1, majority of the farmers (55%) fall within the age bracket of 31-40 years with mean age of 37 years. This implies that the farmers who engage in vegetable production are relatively young. About 66.6% of the farmers have between 6 and 15 years of experience. Findings revealed that majority of the farmers (63.33%) are males, while 36.66% are females. This implies that majority of the farmers that are into vegetables production are males. From the table it was observed that 70% of the farmers in the study area are married, suggesting that most of the farmers are married.

Table 1: Socio-Economic Characteristics of respondents

Age (years)	Frequency	Percentage
21-30	13	21.66
31-40	33	55.00
41-50	8	13.33
51 and above	6	10.00
Farming experience in Years		
1-5	11	18.33
6-10	20	33.33
11-15	20	33.33
16 and above	60	6.66
Gender		

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Male	38	63.3
Female	32	36.7
Marital status		
Married	42	70.00
Single	13	21.7
Divorced	5	8.33
Educational level		
No Formal Education	2	3.33
Primary Education	11	18.33
Secondary Education	24	40.00
Tertiary Education	23	38.33
Number of plots		
1-5	19	31.66
6-10	22	36.66
11-15	12	20.00
16 and above	7	11.66
Occupation		
Trading	4	6.66
Farming	52	86.66
Others	4	6.66
Method of land acquisition		
Rent/lease	12	20.00
Inheritance	32	53.33
Communal ownership	16	26.66
Household size		
0-3	10	16.66
4-6	27	45.00
7-9	19	31.66
10 and above	4	6.66
Amount (N)		
100 - 500	2	3.33
600 - 900	15	25.00
1000 - 1400	27	45.00
1500 and above	16	26.66
Sources of labour		
Family	25	41.66
Hired	12	20.00
Family and Hired	23	38.33
Vegetables		
Fluted Pumpkin	21	35.00
Waterleaf	19	31.66
Okro	7	11.66
Others	13	21.66
Cropping System		
Mixed cropping	36	60.00
Rotational cropping	15	25.00
Mono cropping	9	15.00
Degree of Success		
Highly Successful	19	31.66
Moderately Successful	40	66.66

Less Successful	1	1.66
Average amount realized (N)	1, 200.00	
Average amount spent (N)	765.00	
Profit	435.00	

From table 1, a great number of the farmers had formal education which is advantageous to farmers in adopting improved farming practices. Findings of the study shows that only 11.66% of the farmers cultivate up to 16 plots an above of land for vegetable production while 20%, 36.66%, and 31.66% cultivate 11-15, 6-10, and 1-5 plots respectively. This implies that farmers in Ahiazu Mbaize are predominantly small scale farmers. Findings show that 86.66% have farming as their major occupation. It was found that 53.33% of the farmers inherited their land, while 20% got their land through rent/lease and 26.7% got theirs through communal ownership. This shows that most of the land sizes used by the farmers were inherited. About 16.66% of the farmers have a household size of 0-3, 45% of the size of 4-6, 31.66% the size of 7-9 and 6.66% the size of 10 to above. Mean household size is about 6 people per household. This implies that most of the farmers have fairly large household which may mean more hands that can help in the farm. From the data presented in the table, 60% of the farmers practice mixed cropping, while 25% and 15% practice rotational cropping and mono cropping respectively. From the result it means that the farmers do not grow only vegetables but they add other crops to supplement their income.

Also, about 42% of the farmers use family labour while 20% and 38.33% use hired labour and both family and hired labour respectively. It means that the size of household is an advantage for vegetable production. It also makes the production cost to reduce. From the table above, 35% of the farmers cultivate fluted pumpkin, while 31.66%, 11.66% and 21.66% of the farmers cultivate waterleaf, okro and others respectively. This implies that most of the farmers cultivate fluted pumpkin. It also shows that fluted pumpkin and water leaf are the most predominantly grown vegetable crops in the area. From the table above, 36% indicated that vegetable production is highly successful while 66.66% indicated that it is moderately successful. Only 1.66% indicated that it is less successful. This means that vegetable production is moderately successful to the farmer in the study area. The average amount spent on vegetable production per month was N765.50, while an average income of N1200 was realized from vegetable production. The result implies that the farmers make small profit. This may be due to the small farm size the farmer uses for vegetable production.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Vegetable gardening is an enterprise which sustains the household with small earnings to buy basic domestic needs, though faced with a lot of constraints that inhibit its effectiveness, it is profitable and viable. Therefore, there is need for government to help encourage/motivate the farmers by providing them with the necessary materials. This will help to increase production in the study area in particular and the state and Nigeria in general. Its increase will not only be valuable for consumption but it is also required at a high demand by food manufacturing companies in Nigeria. Based on the study, the following policy recommendations are highlighted:

- There is need for the government to enforce the land use decree to ensure that land is made available to intending farmers for vegetable gardening purposes.
- The government through the ADP Extension agents can also encourage vegetable farmers to form co-operative societies which will facilitate their chances of easy procurement of loan from bank and other financial institutions to boost their production.

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- The government should also through the Agricultural development program and ministry of Agriculture encourage producers by providing appropriate technologies such as irrigation system facilities and others. Also, extension agents should be sent or posted to such areas as a matter of urgency.

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