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## Retention of rural youth in agriculture: Influencing factors and strategic interventions for livelihood security

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### Abstract

The retention of rural youth in agriculture is crucial for ensuring the sustainability of India's agrarian economy and securing the livelihoods of millions. However, agriculture today faces multifaceted challenges including decreasing landholdings, low profitability, climate risks, and the growing disinterest among youth. This study explores the key factors influencing rural youth in their decision to either continue or abandon agriculture as a livelihood in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat. Using a mixed sampling technique, the study surveyed 240 rural youth across selected talukas of Rajkot and Jamnagar districts, where migration trends are notably high. The findings revealed that landholding size, income level, education, access to agricultural resources, family background, market and risk orientation, and achievement motivation significantly influenced youth decisions. The study also gathered suggestions from youth and stakeholders to improve youth engagement in agriculture. These included improved access to credit and technology, training on modern practices, market linkages, and better recognition of agriculture as a viable career. The study provides practical insights for policymakers, extension agencies, and educational institutions to develop targeted strategies for engaging rural youth in agriculture, thereby ensuring sustainable rural livelihoods.

**Keywords:** Rural youth, agriculture, livelihood, influencing factors, retention

### Introduction

Agriculture remains the principal livelihood source for a large portion of India's rural population. Despite its importance, the sector is witnessing an alarming decline in youth participation. Rural youth, who once viewed farming as a way of life, are increasingly shifting away due to limited profitability, lack of support services, poor infrastructure, and the lure of urban employment opportunities. This trend poses a serious threat to the sustainability of rural communities and national food security. The future of Indian agriculture heavily depends on the younger generation. With over 65% of the population residing in rural areas and a significant proportion being youth, their engagement in farming is not only vital for productivity but also for innovation and entrepreneurship in agriculture. Various government and institutional efforts, such as skill development initiatives, agri-startups, and subsidies, aim to reverse this trend. However, these initiatives often fail to address the ground realities and diverse factors that influence the decision-making process of rural youth. This study aims to identify and analyze the socio-economic, psychological, and institutional factors that influence rural youth in retaining agriculture as a livelihood in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat. It also seeks to gather practical suggestions from youth themselves to inform the design of effective policies and programs that can make agriculture a more attractive and sustainable career path.

### Objective

1. To find out the factors influencing the rural youth to retain in agriculture for livelihood security
2. To elicit suggestions of rural youth to retaining in agriculture for livelihood security

## Materials and Methodology

The study was conducted in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat, specifically focusing on the retention of youth in agriculture. It utilized an ex post facto research design, where the researcher examines variables that have already occurred. The research adopted a purposive and random sampling technique, selecting Rajkot and Jamnagar districts from South Saurashtra based on high migration rates. Four talukas were randomly chosen from each district, resulting in eight talukas. From each taluka, two villages were randomly selected, totalling 16 villages. In each village, 15

rural youth were chosen as respondents, totalling 240 youth who expressed a desire to leave agriculture as their profession. An interview schedule was developed in accordance with the objectives of the study, pre-tested, and translated into Gujarati. Data were collected using this structured interview schedule, classified, tabulated, analysed, and interpreted to make the findings meaningful. Statistical measures such as percentage, mean, standard deviation, regression coefficient and correlation coefficient were used in the study.

**Table 1:** Selected taluka, village and respondents of Rajkot and Jamnagar district for data collection

Sr. No.	Name of District	Name of Talukas	Name of Villages	Number of selected respondents
1	Rajkot	Rajkot	Hadmatiya	15
2			Haripar	15
3		Padadhari	Fatepar	15
4			Ishvariya	15
5		Jasdan	Amrapur	15
6			Atkot	15
7		Lodhika	Balsar	15
8			Devgam	15
9	Jamnagar	Jamnagar	Jambuda	15
10			Khimrana	15
11		Lalpur	Dharampur	15
12			Jasapar	15
13		Kalavad	Kharedi	15
14			Chhatar	15
15		Dhrol	Hamapar	15
16			Kharva	15
Total Number of Respondents				240

## Results and Discussion

### Factors Influencing the rural youth to retaining in agriculture for livelihood security

For ascertaining the factors influencing the rural youth to retaining in agriculture for livelihood security, the different factors were invited openly from respondents. The frequency was calculated for each factor and converted into percentage and rank was given.

The most significant factors influencing rural youth to retaining in agriculture for livelihood security were ranked based on their importance as perceived by the respondents. High income potential and better market prices for agricultural produce were identified as the most crucial factor, with (83.33 per cent) of respondents ranking it first. Access to essential resources like land, water, seeds, fertilizers, and other inputs was the second most influential factor, reported by (80.42 per cent) of respondents. Subsidies, loans, crop insurance, and supportive government schemes ranked third with (75.42 per cent), while access to modern farming tools, mechanization, and agricultural

innovations ranked fourth, supported by (75.00 per cent) of respondents.

Other influential factors included the availability of reliable and profitable markets for selling produce, ranked fifth with (68.75 per cent), followed closely by opportunities for learning modern agricultural techniques and business skills (68.33 per cent), and family traditions and societal respect for farming (61.67 per cent), ranked sixth and seventh, respectively. Addressing challenges posed by climate variability ranked eighth with (56.25 per cent). Less prioritized factors included the integration of allied activities like dairy, poultry, or agro tourism (40.42 per cent), and a positive outlook towards agriculture as a sustainable and rewarding profession (33.33 per cent), which ranked ninth and tenth, respectively.

This finding was in conformity with the findings of Anamica and Ravichandran (2013)<sup>[1]</sup>, Mali *et al.* (2015)<sup>[6]</sup>, Bodake (2016)<sup>[3]</sup>, Radhakrishnan and Arunachalam (2017)<sup>[10]</sup>, Vihari (2018)<sup>[12]</sup>, Uikey (2021)<sup>[11]</sup> and Bisen (2020)<sup>[2]</sup>.

**Table 2:** Factors influencing the rural youth to retaining in agriculture for livelihood security (n=240)

Sr. No.	Factors influencing	Frequency	Per cent	Rank
1	Access to modern farming tools, mechanization, and agricultural innovations.	180	75.00	IV
2	High income potential and better market prices for agricultural produce.	200	83.33	I
3	Availability of reliable and profitable markets for selling produce.	165	68.75	V
4	Family traditions, societal respect for farming, and community support.	148	61.67	VII
5	Access to land, water, seeds, fertilizers, and other inputs necessary for farming.	193	80.42	II
6	Opportunities for learning modern agricultural techniques and business skills.	164	68.33	VI
7	Availability of solutions to address challenges such as droughts, floods, and changing weather patterns.	135	56.25	VIII
8	Subsidies, loans, crop insurance, and other schemes that encourage agricultural activities.	181	75.42	III
9	Integration of allied activities like dairy, poultry, or agro tourism to enhance income.	97	40.42	IX
10	Positive outlook towards agriculture as a sustainable and rewarding profession.	80	33.33	X

### Suggestions of rural youth to retaining in agriculture for livelihood security

The suggestions from the respondents to retaining in agriculture for livelihood security, were invited openly from respondents. The frequency was calculated for each suggestion and converted into percentage and rank was given.

The suggestions provided by rural youth to retaining their interest in agriculture were ranked based on importance. The top-ranked suggestion, mentioned by (87.50 per cent) of respondents, was to ensure high income potential and better market prices for agricultural produce, highlighting the critical need for profitability in farming. Improved access to water resources and irrigation facilities ranked second (83.33 per cent), reflecting the region's reliance on efficient water management for agricultural success. Subsidies, crop insurance, and financial support were ranked third (79.17 per cent), showcasing the necessity for financial security and risk mitigation mechanisms. Access to modern farming equipment and mechanization was ranked fourth (77.08 per cent), emphasizing the role of technology in increasing productivity and reducing manual labour.

Skill development programs on modern agricultural techniques ranked fifth (72.92 per cent), while reliable markets free from intermediaries for better returns were ranked sixth (70.83 per cent). Demonstrations of drought-resistant crops and climate-smart practices ranked seventh (66.67 per cent), indicating the youth's awareness of climate challenges. Integrating allied activities like dairy and poultry ranked eighth (62.50 per cent), showing interest in diversification for income stability. Timely weather forecasts and agro-advisories was ninth (60.42 per cent), followed by strengthening cooperative societies and farmer producer groups (58.33 per cent) at tenth. Inclusion of youth in agricultural policy-making ranked eleventh (56.25 per cent), and developing rural infrastructure such as roads, storage facilities, and electricity ranked twelfth (52.08 per cent). These suggestions underscore the multifaceted approach required to address economic, technological, and infrastructural needs to retaining rural youth in agriculture.

This finding was in conformity with the findings of Hadagali (2013) <sup>[4]</sup>, Patel and Prajapati (2013) <sup>[9]</sup>, Lyocks *et al.* (2013) <sup>[5]</sup>, Parmar (2015) <sup>[8]</sup>, Viswanatha *et al.* (2014) <sup>[13]</sup> and Maurya *et al.* (2022) <sup>[7]</sup>.

**Table 3:** Suggestions of rural youth to retaining in agriculture for livelihood security (n=240)

Sr. No.	Suggestions	Frequency	Per cent	Rank
1	High income potential and better market prices for produce	210	87.50	I
2	Improved access to water resources and irrigation facilities	200	83.33	II
3	Availability of subsidies, crop insurance, and financial support	190	79.17	III
4	Access to modern farming equipment and mechanization	185	77.08	IV
5	Skill development programs on modern agricultural techniques	175	72.92	V
6	Reliable markets and removal of intermediaries for better returns	170	70.83	VI
7	Demonstrations of drought-resistant crops and climate-smart practices	160	66.67	VII
8	Support for integrating allied activities like dairy and poultry	150	62.50	VIII
9	Timely weather forecasts and agro-advisories	145	60.42	IX
10	Strengthening cooperative societies and farmer producer groups	140	58.33	X
11	Inclusion of youth in decision-making and agricultural policy-making	135	56.25	XI
12	Development of rural infrastructure (roads, storage, electricity)	125	52.08	XII

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