ISSN Print: 2664-844X
ISSN Online: 2664-8458
NAAS Rating (2025): 4.97
IJAFS 2025; 7(9): 435-438
www.agriculturaljournals.com
Received: 09-07-2025
Accepted: 11-08-2025

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Crop Production Constraints: A Study on Challenges and Mitigation Strategies

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DOI: https://www.doi.org/10.33545/2664844X.2025.v7.i9f.776

Abstract
This research explores the major constraints affecting crop production and productivity in western Maharashtra, India. Based on a survey of 50 farmers, the findings reveal that ecological, agro-climatic, and economic factors play a significant role in limiting yields and impacting farmer livelihoods. Among ecological issues, scarcity of water was identified as the most pressing challenge, reported by 82% of respondents, followed by declining soil fertility (80%).

In terms of agro-climatic challenges, the majority of farmers cited unfavorable weather conditions (96%), disease and pest attacks (92%), and limited access to high-yielding varieties (90%) as serious obstacles. On the economic front, farmers pointed to rising input costs (98%), shortages of essential inputs (96%), and high labor charges (94%) as critical barriers to production.

The study emphasizes the importance of adopting climate-resilient farming practices, ensuring reliable access to quality seeds, irrigation facilities, and affordable inputs, and creating an enabling environment for farmers to improve productivity. Farmers themselves suggested that price stability, reduction in input costs, and measures to enhance land productivity would significantly improve their livelihoods.

Based on these insights, the study recommends promoting stress-tolerant crop varieties, expanding irrigation infrastructure, and providing farmers with affordable inputs and credit facilities. Furthermore, policymakers should focus on stabilizing crop prices and introducing programs that support soil health and productivity improvements.

By addressing these constraints through targeted interventions, farmers in western Maharashtra can achieve better yields, secure sustainable incomes, and contribute to regional food security. This research offers practical guidance for policymakers and stakeholders to strengthen agricultural productivity while enhancing farmer well-being.

Keywords: Ecological, economic, constraints, production, productivity, farmers, etc.

Introduction
Crop production and productivity play a vital role in ensuring food security and promoting sustainable agricultural growth (FAO, 2020). However, several challenges limit the full potential of crop yields and affect the livelihoods of farmers (Lobell & Burke, 2010) [8]. These challenges are generally grouped into biotic factors, such as pests, diseases, and weeds, and abiotic factors, including climate variability, soil degradation, water scarcity, and weak infrastructure (Savary *et al*., 2019) [16].

Biotic constraints like insect pests and plant diseases can cause heavy yield losses and reduce crop quality (Oerke, 2006) [9]. Pests inflict direct damage, while diseases weaken plants, making them more vulnerable to environmental stresses (Strange & Scott, 2005). Similarly, weeds compete with crops for essential resources such as sunlight, nutrients, and water, thereby lowering productivity (Rao, 2017) [12].

On the other hand, abiotic stresses are increasingly critical in today's agriculture. Climate change, with its rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, and frequent extreme weather events, poses severe risks to crop growth (IPCC, 2013). Soil health problems—such as erosion, salinity, and nutrient depletion—further reduce agricultural output and sustainability (Lal, 2004) [7]. Beyond biological and environmental issues, socioeconomic barriers also restrict agricultural progress. Limited access to credit, poor connectivity to markets, lack of modern technologies, and inadequate policy support slow down the adoption of improved farming practices (World Bank, 2019).

To secure higher productivity and sustainability, it is essential to identify and address these challenges. Developing climate-resilient crop varieties, promoting integrated pest and disease management, and encouraging soil conservation practices are key steps (Ceccarelli *et al*., 2010) [2]. At the same time, improving farmers' access to financial resources, markets, and technology can accelerate the adoption of modern, sustainable agricultural methods (Pingali, 2012) [11]. Collectively, these measures can strengthen food security, enhance farmer incomes, and support long-term agricultural development (Godfray *et al*., 2010) [4].

Materials and Methods

The study was completely based on the primary data and conducted in the Western Maharashtra region at a district level. The required data was collected for the year 2022-23, using a predesigned and pretested questionnaire. Total 50 sample farmers were selected including five from each selected district. Ahmednagar, Pune, Solapur, Sangli, Satara, Kolhapur, Nashik, Jalgaon, Dhule and Nandurbar were the selected districts. The collected data were analysed using tabular method and tools like percentages and ranking.

Results

Constraints Faced by Farmers: The study assessed the major ecological, agro-climatic, and economic constraints faced by farmers in western Maharashtra based on a survey of 50 respondents. The findings revealed that all three categories of constraints significantly influenced crop production and farmer livelihoods. Under ecological constraints, low water availability emerged as the most serious issue, reported by 82% of the farmers. This indicated that limited access to irrigation sources and rainfall dependency had hindered crop growth and productivity. Poor soil fertility was the second major problem, cited by 80% of respondents, reflecting the declining nutrient status of agricultural land in the region. In addition, 52% of the farmers expressed concern over small landholdings, which restricted opportunities for mechanization and large-scale cultivation. These ecological challenges suggested that resource limitations had placed substantial pressure on agricultural productivity.

Table 1: Constraint involved in production and productivity

Sr. No.	Constraints	Total (N=50)	Percentage	Rank
A	**Ecological constraints**			
1	Poor soil fertility	40	80.00	2
2	Low water availability	41	82.00	1
3	Small land holdings	26	52.00	3
B	**Agro climatic Constraints**			
1	Lack of developed irrigation facilities	35	70.00	5
2	Non availability of high yielding varieties	45	90.00	3
3	Poor quality of seeds	44	88.00	4
4	Adverse weather conditions	48	96.00	1
5	Disease and pest infestation	46	92.00	2
C	**Economic Constraints**			
1	High cost of inputs	49	98.00	1
2	High wage rates	47	94.00	3
3	Lack of timely availability of labour	35	70.00	4
4	Insufficiency of credit	33	66.00	5
5	Shortage of inputs	48	96.00	2
6	Lack of Scientific advice	28	56.00	6

In the case of agro-climatic constraints, adverse weather conditions were the most dominant challenge, as highlighted by 96% of farmers. Unpredictable rainfall, extreme temperatures, and irregular climatic patterns had directly affected crop performance. Disease and pest infestation was another major issue, reported by 92% of respondents, showing that crop protection remained a critical concern. Moreover, 90% of farmers pointed to the non-availability of high-yielding varieties, while 88% mentioned poor seed quality as major bottlenecks in achieving higher yields. Lack of developed irrigation facilities was also reported by 70% of farmers. These results indicated that farmers faced multiple, interlinked agro-climatic challenges, which limited their ability to adopt modern, resilient practices.

With regard to economic constraints, high input costs posed the greatest difficulty, mentioned by 98% of respondents. Rising prices of fertilizers, pesticides, and other agricultural inputs had placed a heavy financial burden on farmers. Shortage of inputs was another pressing issue, reported by 96% of respondents, reflecting supply chain inefficiencies. High wage rates also emerged as a significant problem (94%), making labor-intensive farming costly. Furthermore, 70% of farmers faced problems due to the lack of timely availability of labor, while 66% highlighted insufficiency of credit as a barrier to adopting improved practices. Additionally, 56% of farmers mentioned lack of scientific advice, which suggested inadequate access to extension services and technical guidance.

Overall, the results showed that farmers in western Maharashtra had faced a complex set of ecological, climatic, and economic challenges. The dominance of high input costs, water scarcity, adverse weather, and pest infestations underscored the urgent need for interventions such as improved irrigation facilities, affordable input supply, availability of high-quality seeds, and stronger institutional support. Addressing these constraints would have been crucial for improving crop productivity, farmer incomes, and regional food security.

Suggestions Quoted by The Farmers to Overcame Constraints

The study also examined the suggestions provided by farmers to overcome the constraints they experienced in crop production. The responses highlighted a range of

measures that farmers believed could improve productivity, reduce risks, and strengthen their livelihoods.

Among all the suggestions, stabilization of farm output prices was ranked the highest priority, mentioned by 96% of the respondents. This indicated that price fluctuations had been a major source of insecurity for farmers, affecting their incomes and investment capacity. Farmers felt that ensuring stable and remunerative prices for their produce would have encouraged them to continue farming with confidence and reduce financial risks.

Table 2: Suggestions quoted by the farmers

Sr. No.	Suggestions	Total (N=50)	Percentage	Rank
1	Farm mechanization	38	76	5
2	Availability of quality seeds	25	50	7
3	Use of fertigation method	15	30	9
4	Availability of experts	10	20	10
5	Timely distribution of crop credits	40	80	4
6	Affordable input prices	44	88	2
7	Adoption of group farming	20	40	8
8	Increasing productivity of land	41	82	3
9	Use of water stress tolerant varieties of crops	36	72	6
10	Stabilization of farm output prices	48	96	1

The second most common suggestion was making input prices more affordable, reported by 88% of farmers. Rising costs of fertilizers, pesticides, and other essential inputs had been a serious burden, and farmers emphasized the need for subsidies or regulated pricing mechanisms to make inputs accessible. Closely related to this, 82% of respondents suggested measures for increasing land productivity, which reflected their concern over declining soil fertility and stagnating yields. Farmers believed that adopting soil conservation techniques, improved nutrient management, and better farming practices could have enhanced productivity in the long term.

Timely distribution of crop credits was also emphasized by 80% of farmers. They noted that delays in access to loans often forced them to rely on informal credit sources at higher interest rates. Timely and adequate institutional credit, therefore, was viewed as essential for purchasing inputs and managing crop cycles effectively. Another significant suggestion was the promotion of farm mechanization, reported by 76% of respondents. Farmers acknowledged that the adoption of modern machinery could save time, reduce labor dependency, and improve efficiency, particularly in the context of rising wage rates and labor shortages.

About 72% of respondents recommended the use of water stress-tolerant crop varieties, which reflected their awareness of the recurring water scarcity and erratic rainfall patterns in the region. Farmers recognized the potential of such varieties to ensure stable yields under adverse climatic conditions. Other suggestions included adoption of group farming (40%), which farmers felt could have improved resource-sharing and bargaining power, and the availability of quality seeds (50%), which remained a basic requirement for better yields. Less frequently mentioned but still relevant were the use of fertigation methods (30%) and the availability of experts for technical advice (20%). These pointed to the need for modern irrigation techniques and improved extension services.

Overall, the findings revealed that farmers in western Maharashtra had been proactive in identifying practical solutions to their production challenges. Their emphasis on price stabilization, affordable inputs, better credit access, and productivity improvement showed a clear understanding of the factors critical to sustainable farming and livelihood security.

Discussion

A survey of 50 farmers in western Maharashtra revealed that ecological, agro-climatic, and economic constraints significantly impacted crop production and productivity. The study found that low water availability (82%) and poor soil fertility (80%) were major ecological constraints (Kumar *et al*., 2020; Rao *et al*., 2019) [13]. Agro-climatic constraints, such as adverse weather conditions (96%), disease and pest infestation (92%), and non-availability of high-yielding varieties (90%), also posed significant challenges (Rathore *et al*., 2020) [15]. Economic constraints, including high input costs (98%), shortage of inputs (96%), and high wage rates (94%), further exacerbated the difficulties faced by farmers (Sonawane, 2023) [19].

The study's findings highlighted the need for climate-resilient agricultural practices, improved access to quality seeds and irrigation facilities, and affordable inputs. Farmers suggested that price stability, minimizing input costs, and improving land productivity were crucial for their livelihoods. These findings were consistent with previous studies (Shrey, 2015; Asmatoddin, 2009; Paswam & Sinha, 2014) [17, 1, 10].

The farmers' suggestions for overcoming constraints included stabilization of farm output prices (96%), affordable input prices (88%), and increasing productivity of land (82%). These suggestions emphasized the importance of price stability, minimizing input costs, and improving land productivity. The study's results have implications for policymakers and stakeholders seeking to support farmers and improve agricultural productivity in western Maharashtra.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study underscored that farmers in western Maharashtra faced a combination of ecological, agro-climatic, and economic challenges that directly influenced crop yields and livelihoods. Issues such as water scarcity, soil degradation, adverse weather, pest infestations, and high input costs created multiple barriers to sustainable farming. At the same time, farmers demonstrated awareness of practical solutions, prioritizing price stabilization, affordable inputs, and measures to enhance land productivity. These insights provide a strong basis for policymakers and stakeholders to design targeted interventions that not only

improve agricultural output but also strengthen the long-term resilience and well-being of farming communities.

Acknowledgments
The first author is a doctoral research scholar, has authored this article based on her doctoral research at Mahatma Phule Krishi Vidyapeeth. The institution named SARATHI has been provided financial support for the research. Additionally, the departmental staff and students provided significant assistance.

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