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Consumer's preference and buying behaviour towards food products of farmer producer companies

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Abstract
Food industry is one of the fast growing sectors and consumers' preferences play a major role in development of this sector. Farmer Producer Companies are established not only to support the production but to involve in value addition so as to increase their income over a period of time. FPCs are primarily involved in various productions and also some extent in value addition and trade activities. This study aims to identify the consumers' preferences and buying behavior towards the FPC which are involved in products and brands. Consumer survey has been conducted in four different farmer producer companies in Southern district of Tamil Nadu. Among the buyers, married women consumers visiting FPCs were more in number compared to men. Most frequently visiting buyers were the middle aged (30 to 40 years), middle income category (Rs. 7500 – 10000 / month) and most of them were farmers and employees. Average amount spent on purchase of food products was between Rs. 2000 and 4000 (46.67% consumers). Groundnut oil was largely preferred by the customers and 96.00 percentage of the respondents purchased two liters per month. In case of Chilli, 42.55 per cent of consumers bought 1 kg per month and the preferred pack size was 500 gram. At the same time, 46.15 per cent consumers bought 500 gram sambar masala per month and preferred pack size was 500 g. Black gram was purchased twice a month by most of the consumers. Good quality, reasonable priced and native materials were the main factors influencing the consumers to buy the products from FPCs.

Keywords: Farmer Producer Company, buying behavior, consumer preference

Introduction
India has been achieving significant progress in agriculture and food sectors in terms of growth in output, yields and processing. It has gone through a series of production revolutions namely, green revolution, white revolution, yellow revolution and blue revolution. India is the largest producer of milk, fruits, cashew nuts, coconuts and tea in the world, the second largest producer of wheat, vegetables, sugar and fish and the third largest producer of tobacco and rice. In recent times, the focus is on food processing and marketing infrastructure for Indian industries to serve good quality and safest processed ready to eat foods.

India is one of the largest food producers of the world with the organized sector accounting for food output worth US $34827 billion (World Factbook, 2014) [11], only a small percentage of its farm produce is being processed. This underlines the enormous scope for investing in the processed food sector in the areas of infrastructure, packaging and machinery.

On the production side, farmers as producers are unable to realize the right value of their produce. The defragmentation of land, lack of awareness, distrust in scientific practices, less inclination towards technology adoption leads to under production against the optimal potential. The absence of adequate marketing infrastructure, presence of middle man, lack of collectivization effort leads to grabbing less marketing opportunities and earnings. Collectivization of producers, especially small and marginal farmers, into producer organizations is emerging as one of the most effective pathways to address many challenges of agriculture and most importantly, improved access to investments, technology and inputs and markets. Department of Agriculture and Cooperation, Ministry of Agriculture, Govt. of India has launched a pro - farmer network called farmer producer organization (FPO) which registered under the special provisions of the Companies Act, 1956 as the most appropriate institutional form around which to mobilize farmers and build their capacity to collectively leverage their production and marketing strength. Vision of the FPO is to build prosperous and sustainable member-owned producer organizations that enable farmers to enhance productivity through efficient, cost-effective and sustainable resource use and realize higher returns for their produce, through collective action (NMS foundation, 2019) [12]. These farmer-owned companies are now helping marginalized farmers to earn stable livelihoods through trade in agricultural platforms. These FPCs follow a Business to Consumer model (B2C model, Ashok, 2019) [13] and started operating their own outlets to reach the consumers directly.

On the other side, consumers buying behavior and preferences drive the success of the modern food sectors. Many factors, specificities and characteristics influence the individual in making process, shopping habits, purchasing behavior, the brands he buys or the retailers he goes. A purchase decision is the result of each and every one of these factors. Initially the consumer tries to find what commodities to consume that promise greater utility (Pinki rani 2014) [14]. After selecting the commodities, the consumer makes an estimate of the available money to spend. Lastly, the consumer analyzes the prevailing prices of commodities and takes the decision about the commodities to consume. Meanwhile, there are various other factors influencing the purchases of consumer such as social, cultural, economic, personal and psychological.

A consumer purchases a variety of goods and services to satisfy his wants which lead him to select a particular retail store in preference to others and so a consumer buying is a complex. One influenced by physiological, psychological and sociological factors (Waqaruddin Siddiqui 2016) [1]. Every individual has physiological needs such as hunger, shelter, thirst, etc., which are to be satisfied for survival. The psychological factors like status, prestige and social factors like friends, neighbors, job and relatives influence their purchasing capacities.

The perception of different customers for food products of FPO are getting more popular nowadays due to the increasing health and environmental concerns. This study aims at understanding the perception and buying behavior of different customers on food products of FPC in Southern Districts of Tamil Nadu with the following objectives.

Objectives

1. To analyze the buying behaviour of consumers towards food products of FPOs.
2. To examine various factors influence the consumer preference towards food products of FPOs.

Research methodology

A consumer survey was conducted for assessing the consumer perception and buying behavior towards food products of four Farmer Producer Organizationsin southern district of Tamil Nadu. Randomly 60 members were selected from the four Farmer Producer companies *viz*., Ramanar Millets Farmer Producer Company, SEEDs Farmer Producer Company, Virudhai Millets Farmer Producer Company and Thangaboomi Millets and Other crops Producer companies limited. Survey was taken from 15 randomly selected members of each company to tally sixty. Interview schedule was prepared accordingly to measure the consumer perception towards food products of FPO. The collected data were pertaining to the period 2019. Data were computerized and analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Results and Discussion

The data collected during the survey were tabulated and analyzed in relation to each of the specific objectives of the study. The results of the study are presented and discussed below.

I. General characteristics of sample respondents and household

Analysis of the general characteristics of the sample respondents and household enabled to understand FPOs retail store buyers' profile. The gender, marital status, age, educational status and occupation of the person making purchase at FPO retail outlet were used to analyze buyers' profile. The general characteristics of respondents were analysed and discussed under buyers profile and their household profile.

1. Gender and marital status of the respondents

Gender plays a significant role in purchasing behaviour of consumers. The gender and marital status of the respondents were classified into two categories and the results are given in Table1.

Table 1: Gender and marital status of the respondents

S. No	Gender	Marital status				Total	Percentage
		Married	Percentage	Unmarried	Percentage		
1.	Male	19	90.48	2	9.52	21	35.00
2.	Female	39	100.00	0	0.00	39	65.00
	Total	58	96.67	2	3.33	60	100.00

It could be observed from Table1 that majority of the sample respondents were married women (65.00%). Thus the study clearly indicated that married female customers were frequently visiting FPO retail stores compared to males. Female customers visiting FPO retail store look for quality products at affordable price compared to the popular brands available in the market.

2. Age of the respondents

Age is an important factor influencing purchase pattern of consumer. Buyers of different age groups reflect different buying pattern. Similar changes occur on their buying decision making patterns. The sample respondents were classified into five groups *viz*., 20 to 30, 31 to 40, 41 to 50, and more than 50 years based on their age and the details are given in Table 2.

Table 2: Age of the sample respondents

S. No	Age	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1.	20 to 30 years	9	15.00
2.	31 to 40 years	26	43.33
3.	41 to 50 years	18	30.00
4.	More than 50 years	7	11.67
	Total	60	100.00

Majority of the sample respondents (43.33%) belonged to the age group of 31 to 40 years. This is followed by middle age group buyers constituted to 30 per cent, followed by young buyers (15%) and senior buyers (11.67%). Among the consumers, large share of middle-aged people (31-40 years) visited FPOs for purchase of food products.

3. Educational status of respondents
Educational status of the respondents was examined and the results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Educational status of respondents

S. No	Education level	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Illiterate	17	28.33
2.	SSLC	26	43.33
3.	HSC	7	11.67
4.	Diploma	3	5.00
5.	Graduate	5	8.33
6.	Post graduate	2	3.33
	Total	60	100.00

Nearly half of the sample respondents (43.33%) visited the FPOs were Secondary School qualified followed by buyers with no formal education (28.33%). Buyers with higher secondary level education were only 11.67 per cent, while other qualification like diploma, degree and post graduation holder were less than 10 per cent. This aspect must be taken into account while developing marketing strategies especially packing, labeling, branding and pricing.

4. Occupation of the respondents
The occupation of the respondents was classified into three group's *viz.,* farmers own business and employee and the results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Occupation of the respondents

S. No	Occupation	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Farmer	34	56.67
2.	Own business	3	5.00
3.	Employees	23	38.33
	Total	60	100.00

Among the respondents 56.67 per cent of the respondents were farmers, 38.33 per cent of the respondents were employees and 5.00 per cent of the respondents were business people.

5. Family size of the respondents
Family size has a big influence on buying pattern of the food products from retail shop. A large family size may buy more when compared to small size family. Respondents were grouped and analyzed based on the family size (Table 5.)

Table 5: Family size of the respondents

S. No	Family size	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Less than 4 members	41	68.33
2.	5 – 7 members	18	30.00
3.	More than 8 members	1	1.67
	Total	60	100.00

Majority of the sample respondents had family size of less than four members (68.33%) followed by 5 – 7 members. Only one respondent had a family size of more than 8 members.

6 Family type of the respondents
There are two types *i.e* nuclear and joint families are in existence in Tamil Nadu. The family type could influence the purchase pattern of food products from FPO retail store. The respondents were surveyed and results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Family type of the respondents

S. No	Family type	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Nuclear	51	85.00
2.	Joint	9	15.00
	Total	60	100.00

Between two types, 85.00 per cent respondents had nuclear family whereas 15 per cent of sample had joint family system. Decision making would be more liberal in nuclear family than in joint family.

7 Average monthly income of the sample household
The sample households were classified into five income categories *viz.,* less than Rs.7500, Rs.7500 to 15,000, Rs.15001 to 30,000, and more than Rs.30, 000 based on their average monthly income and the results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Average monthly income of the sample household

S. No	Monthly Income category (Rs.)	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Less thanRs.7500	1	1.67
2.	Rs. 7500 – 15,000	30	50.00
3.	Rs. 15,001 – 30,000	26	43.33
4.	More than Rs. 30,000	3	5.00
	Total	60	100.00

Among the respondents, 50.00 per cent of the sample households had a monthly income of Rs.7500- 15,000, while 43.33 per cent of the respondents come under Rs.15001 - 30,000. It could be concluded that majority of the sample households belonged to middle income group of 7500 to 15,000 per month.

8. Average monthly expenditure on food products of the sample household
The expenditure on food products consisted of cereals, pulses, spices, condiments, vegetables, fruits, oil, beverages, milk products and snacks. The monthly expenditure on food products of the sample respondents were classified into four categories and the results are presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Average monthly expenditure on food products of the sample household

S. No	Monthly expenditure on food products (Rs.)	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Less than Rs. 2000	22	36.67
2.	Rs.2000 – 4000	28	46.67
3.	Rs.4001 – 10000	9	15.00
4.	More than Rs. 10000	1	1.67
	Total	60	100.00

From Table 8, it could be observed that majority of the sample respondents (46.67%) spent from Rs. 2000 to 4000 per month on food products followed by 36.67 per cent of the sample respondents spent less than Rs. 2000 on food products in a month. This is an important observation to FPCs to design their food products and quantities to be packed.

9. Working Members in the sample household

The number of working members in the household determines the overall income of the family. Hence the details on the number of working members in the sample household were collected, analyzed and the results are presented in Table 9.

Table 9: Working members in the sample household

SI. No	Working members in the household	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1.	1	22	36.67
2.	2	33	55.00
3.	3	4	6.67
4.	4	1	1.67
	Total	60	100.00

Majority of the sample households in the study had two working members (55.00%) in their family while 36.67 per cent had only one working member per family. Hence FPOs can make more promotional activities to attract these categories of buyers to retain their present consumers.

10. Working Women in the sample household

Working women are playing an important role of buying decisions in the household. Hence working women's in the sample household was analyzed and the results are presented in Table 10.

Table 10: Working Woman in the sample household

SI. No	Working woman in the household	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Housewife	40	66.67
2.	Working	20	33.33
	Total	60	100.00

Majority of the sample households (66.67%) did not have working woman in their family, while 33.33 per cent of sample household had working woman in their family.

II. Consumer buying behaviour

1. Food products purchase in FPOs retail store

Food products sold at of FPO retail stores were divided into 15 categories and are presented in Table 11.

Table 11: Food products purchase in FPO retail store (n = 60)

SI. No	Product categories	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Cold pressed Oil	50	83.33
2	Spices	49	81.67
3	Masala items	48	80.00
4	Pulses	40	66.67
5	Jaggery and Sugar	37	61.67
6	Pickles	24	40.00
7	Rice	22	36.67
8	Millet flour	20	33.33
9	Millet (Unpolished)	19	31.67
10	Rava items	17	28.33
11	Snacks	9	15.00
12	Podi and powders	8	13.33
13	Honey	8	13.33
14	Avul	7	11.67
15	Readymix	4	6.67

It could be inferred from Table 11 that 83.33 per cent of the respondents purchased cold pressed oils followed by spices (81.67%) and masala items (80.00%). This is followed by pulses (66.67%) and jiggery (61.67%). The commodities namely pickles, rice, millet flours and rava items are of moderate requirement. Among the fifteen Avul (11.67%) and ready mix (6.67%) were found to be rated as very low.

2. Food products preferred in FPO retail store

Out of 5 product categories the purchase pattern varied with each category. The consumers most purchased products are presented in Table 12.

Table 12: Most preferred food products purchase in FPO retail store

S. No	Products	Number of respondents	Percentage
1.	**Cold pressed oil (n =50)**		
	Groundnut oil	48	96.00
	Coconut oil	42	84.00
	Gingelly oil	31	62.00
	Castor oil	14	28.00
2.	**Spices(n=49)**		
	Chilli	47	95.92
	Coriander	39	79.59
	Fenugreek	28	57.14
	Cumin	28	57.14
	Black pepper	27	55.10
	Mustard	27	55.10
	Garlic	26	53.06
	Cardamom	20	40.82
	Clove	15	30.61
3	**Masala items (n=48)**		
	Sambar masala	39	81.25
	Mutton masala	22	45.83
	Chicken masala	22	45.83
	Turmeric powder	21	43.75
	Biryani masala	17	35.42
	Fish masala	8	16.67
4.	**Pulses (n=40)**		
	Black gram	38	95.00
	Red gram	36	90.00
	Green gram	33	82.50
	Chickpea	22	55.00
	Cowpea	16	40.00
	Horse gram	5	12.50
5.	**Jaggery and Sugar (n=37)**		
	Country sugar	23	62.16
	Cane jaggery	17	45.95
	Palm jaggery	14	37.84

Among the cold pressed oil category, 96.00 percentage of the respondents purchased groundnut oil, while 84.00 per cent of the respondents purchased coconut oil. In spices category, 95.92 percentage of the respondents purchased chilli and 79.59 per cent of the respondents purchased coriander. In masala items most of the respondents (81.25%) purchased sambar masala.

In pulses category, 95.00 percentage of the respondents purchased black gram, followed by red gram (90.00%). In jaggery and sugar category majority of the respondents (62.16%) purchased country sugar.

3. Quantity of FPO food products purchased per month

Quantity of purchase of mostly preferred food products (Groundnut oil, chilli, sambar masala, black gram, and country sugar) of FPOs are presented in Table 13.

Table 13: Quantity of purchase of FPO food products per month

S. No	Quantity of Products purchase per month	Number of respondents	Percentage
1.	**Groundnut oil (n=48)**		
	500 ml	1	2.08
	1 Litre	17	35.42
	2 Litre	18	37.50
	3 Litre	4	8.33
	4 Litre	4	8.33
	5 Litre	2	4.17
	7 Litre	2	4.17
2.	**Chilli (n=47)**		
	100 g	1	2.13
	250 g	3	6.38
	500 g	17	36.17
	1 kg	20	42.55
	2 kg	6	12.77
3.	**Sambar masala (n=39)**		
	50 g	1	2.56
	100 g	8	20.51
	200 g	3	7.69
	500 g	18	46.15
	1 kg	9	23.08

4.	**Black gram (n=38)**		
	500 g	2	5.26
	1 kg	10	26.32
	1.5 kg	1	2.63
	2 kg	11	28.95
	3 kg	6	15.79
	4 kg	1	2.63
	5 kg	6	15.79
5.	**Country sugar (n=23)**		
	500 g	8	34.78
	1 kg	10	43.48
	1.5 kg	1	4.35
	2 kg	3	13.04
	3 kg	1	4.35

Majority of the consumers (37.50%) bought 2 litre in case of groundnut oil, and 42.55 per cent of consumers bought 1 kg of chilli, 36.17 per cent of consumers bought 500 g of chilli per month. In case of sambar masala, 46.15 per cent consumers bought 500 gram pack and 28.95 per cent consumers bought 2 kg black gram per month. In case of country sugar, 43.48 per cent of consumers bought 1 kg per month.

4. Pack size of FPO food products preferred by the consumers

Pack size preferred by consumers for mostly preferred FPO food products (Groundnut oil, chilli, sambar masala, black gram, and country sugar) were analyzed and the results are presented in Table 14.

Table 14: Pack size preferred for purchase of FPO food products

S. No	Pack size of the products	Number of respondents	Percentage
1.	**Groundnut oil (n=48)**		
	500 ml	1	2.08
	1 L	47	97.92
2.	**Chilli (n=47)**		
	100g	1	2.13
	250g	3	6.38
	500 g	34	72.34
	1 kg	9	19.15
3.	**Sambar masala (n=39)**		
	50 g	8	20.51
	100g	5	12.82
	500g	18	46.15
	1 kg	8	20.51
4.	**Black gram (n=38)**		
	500 g	3	7.89
	1 kg	35	92.11
5.	**Country sugar (n=23)**		
	500 g	14	60.87
	1 kg	9	39.13

Most of the consumers (97.92%) preferred ground nut oil in pack size of 1 litre. In chilli, 72.34 per cent of consumers preferred pack size of 500 gram. In sambar masala, 46.15 per cent of consumers preferred pack size of 500 g. In black gram most of the consumers (92.11%) preferred a pack size of 1 kg. This information could be important for maintaining stock levels of different food products.

5. Frequency of purchase of FPO food products per month

Frequency of purchase of most preferred FPO food products per month were examined and the results are presented in Table 15.

Table 15: Frequency of purchase of FPO food products per month

S. No	Frequency of purchasing per month	Number of respondents	Percentage
1.	**Groundnut oil (n=48)**		
	1	25	52.08
	2	17	35.42
	3	3	6.25
	4	2	4.17
	5	1	2.08
2.	**Chilli (n=47)**		
	1	40	85.11
	2	5	10.64
	3	1	2.13
	4	1	2.13
3.	**Sambar masala (n=39)**		
	1	33	84.62
	2	4	10.26

	3	3	7.69
4.	**Black gram (n=38)**		
	1	14	36.84
	2	18	47.37
	3	2	5.26
	4	3	7.89
	5	1	2.63
5.	**Country sugar (n=23)**		
	1	18	78.26
	2	4	17.39
	4	1	4.35

In case of groundnut oil, the frequency of the consumers buying once in a month was higher (52.08%), because of higher quantity of usage per month and higher price of the product. In case of chilli, the frequency of consumers bought monthly once is the highest (85.11%). In, sambar masala category, 84.62 percentage of the consumers buying once in a month. In black gram, 47.37 per cent of consumer bought twice in a month. Most of the consumer did monthly purchase except black gram where it was twice a month.

6. Major factors influencing the consumers buying behaviour towards FPOs food products

The products traits (quality, price, nutrient content, etc.) that influence the purchase of food products of FPO were ranked by using garrett ranking method and the results are presented in Table 16.

Table 16: Product traits influencing the Purchase of Food products of FPO (n = 60)

S. No	Traits	Average	Rank
1.	Reasonable pricing	70.58	1
2.	Better quality	68.17	2
3.	No adulteration	63.22	3
4	No preservatives	62.55	4
5.	Good packaging	52.78	5
6.	Hygiene	47.72	6
7.	Ideal for children/elders	45.58	7
8.	High nutritional content	45.57	8
9.	Availability in required quantities	41.07	9
10.	Guaranteed due to their label	40.00	10
11.	To support local farmers	38.42	11
12	Convenient for use	36.05	12
13	Traditionally prepared	33.87	13

The results clearly revealed that the majority of the customers go with reasonable pricing as first (70.58), followed by better quality (68.17), no adulteration (63.22) and no preservatives (62.55) while traditionally prepared (33.87) was ranked last. Reasonable price and better quality of the products were found to influences the consumer buying behaviour towards FPCs food products.

Summary

Consumer survey has been conducted in four different farmer producer companies in Southern district of Tamil Nadu. Among the buyers, married women consumers visiting FPCs were more in number compared to men. Most frequently visiting buyers were of the middle aged (30 to 40 years), middle income category (Rs. 7500 – 10000 per month) and most of them were farmers and employees. Average amount spent on purchase of food products was between Rs. 2000 and 4000 which constituted 46.67 per cent of respondents. Groundnut oil was largely preferred by the customers and 96 percentage of the respondents purchased two liters per month. In case of Chilli, 42.55 per cent of consumers bought 1 kg per month and preferred pack size was 500 gram. At the same time, 46.15 per cent consumers bought 500 gram sambar masala per month and preferred pack size of 500 g. Black gram was purchased twice a month by most of the consumers. Good quality, reasonable priced and clean products were the main factors influencing the consumers to buy food products from FPCs.

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