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Micro-entrepreneurship development through food processing technologies in Kashmir valley

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Abstract
Horticultural crops play an important role in generating employment, improving economic conditions of the farmers and entrepreneurs and above all providing nutritional security to the people. The food processing industry provides vital linkages and synergies between industry and agriculture. Entrepreneurship among women is a recent phenomenon and a large percentage of micro entrepreneurship in developing countries is undertaken by women. The study focusses at capacity building of micro-entrepreneurs mainly through Micro-Enterprise creation and development in food processing technologies of perishable food products. Training program also included marketing, account keeping, production management, growth programme, etc. which is essential to help them grow their agri-business. The study revealed that women participants have acquired the necessary skills to start up small and medium enterprise. They were selling their produce at primary, secondary and tertiary processing after harvest. Thus making it fit for final marketing and consumption with maximum acceptability and convenience resulting there is increase in income, self-confidence, social recognition and participation in decision making for better quality of life.

Keywords: empowerment, micro-enterprise, food processing, women entrepreneur

Introduction
It has been well accepted that women play an important role in economic welfare of the family and society. The emergence of entrepreneurs in a society depends to a great extent on the economic, social, religious and psychological factor prevailing in the society. When an enterprise is established and controlled by women, it not only boosts economic growth, but also desirable outcomes. Maruthesha *et al*. (2014) [2].

Agriculture being an important occupation for the rural people in Jammu &Kashmir region has potential for micro entrepreneurship development through food processing units. The state grows a variety of food crops like rice, maize, wheat pulses, oilseeds and has a monopoly of growing temperate fruits like apple, pear, peach, plum, apricot, cherry, walnut, almond and quince. The Horticulture industry serves as a major economic boost for the development of the state.

Horticultural crops typically have a high moisture content, tender texture and high perishability and deteriorate rapidly, if not handled properly. Losses during post-harvest operations are enormous and the matter of great concern. The important sites where postharvest losses are noticed are farmers' field, packaging area, transportation, storage and wholesale or retail markets. Actual post-harvest losses of fruits and vegetables have been estimated to be as high as 25-40%.

However, owing to lack of production planning, post-harvest, infrastructure and climatic factors a huge accumulation of particular fruit take place in a particular region resulting in glut. Therefore, growers are forced to make distress sale and substantial quantity of the produce goes waste. Horticultural crops play an important role in generating employment, improving economic conditions of the farmers and entrepreneurs and above all providing nutritional security to the people.

Agro-based industry is regarded as the sunrise sector of the Indian economy in view of its large potential for growth and likely socio-economic impact specifically on employment and income generation. Gayathri *et al*. (2015) [1] studied that the knowledge and practical approach of postharvest management of horticultural produce offers good opportunities for entrepreneurship and employment generation especially for rural youth and women.

Therefore need arises to make all over development among all sections of the society especially in agro based industrial units. Keeping in view, this paper aimed at empowering rural women by promoting entrepreneurs in food processing activities and livelihood security.

Material and Method

Srinagar block was selected purposively due to higher number of Food processing training programs organized by women empowerment cell in this block. Out of them 5 villages were selected for vocational training purpose and a total of 160 rural women were trained by the women empowerment cell at Food Processing Training Centre SKUAST-Kashmir during 2015-2017 on various aspects of food processing technologies. An interview schedule was used as the research instrument to collect relevant information from beneficiaries on entrepreneurial activities in food processing. Data was analysed using statistical tools and techniques.

Result and Discussion

Postharvest losses of horticultural crops are enormous and it is a serious threat for horticulture industry. However, these losses can be avoided to some extent, if the produce is handled with great care after harvest. The properly harvested, graded and packed fruits and vegetables have good market potential, because now-a-days consumers are becoming quality conscious and believe in hygiene and food safety. Grading and packing are important in adding value to a product and in many markets enable better prices to be obtained. These practices not only help in reducing the postharvest losses but farmers and traders can get better price for their produce in the market and consumers will get better quality produce.

These food processing technologies provide opportunity to the individuals or group of skilled persons to become successful entrepreneur. Value added agriculture has attracted attention in recent years as a means to increase and stabilize farm income. Micro-enterprise creation through food processing training aims at developing entrepreneurial competence and confidence of potential entrepreneurs to help them start new ventures. Poonam *et al*. (2017) [5].

The training of farm women and youth in this sector in hygienic handling and quality control aspects will go a long way in improving the quality of these products. The regional Agricultural Universities and *Krishi Vigyan Kendras* (KVK) will have to play active role in training of small entrepreneurs and micro-entrepreneurship development.

Table 1: Food processing technologies for micro-entrepreneurship development

S. No	Food Processing Technologies	Number of participants (n=160) Number	Per cent
1	Apple Jam	20	12.5
2	Masala/Chilli grinding	16	10.0
3	Mixed vegetable pickle making	26	16.2
4	Preparation of tomato puree	18	11.2
5	Drying of fruits n vegetables	21	13.1
6	Osmo-dehydration of fruits	4	0.25
7	Preparation of fruit Beverages	10	6.25
8	Walnut and almond processing	9	5.62
9	Extruded products	13	8.12
10	Packaging of fruits and vegetables	12	7.50
11	Storage of processed products and Canning	6	3.75
12	Mushroom processing	5	3.12
Total		160	100

The data presented in Table 1 showed that the mixed pickle making was the main choice of the respondents (16.2) followed by value addition of apples (12.5), drying of vegetables (13.1) and tomato puree (11.2). Mushroom processing (3.12) was selected least due to high cost involvement in mushroom pickle making. Packaging of fruits and vegetables (7.50) and walnut and almond processing (5.62) was selected by the respondents to attract the consumers and for export purposes. Other enterprises like canning, masala, chili grinding, fruit beverages, and osmotic dehydration of fruits were selected by some of the respondents.

It clearly shows that majority of women were interested in setting up of micro enterprises in food processing. Kadu *et al*. (2013) [4] the study conducted in Parbhani district of Marathwada region of Maharashtra state revealed that majority of respondents had medium level of participation in food processing and dairy management practices.

Conclusion

Employment for farm women is essential not only to increase their status but also to supplement their family income. Women have potentiality for self-help and development. But this must be tapped for productive purposes through economically viable projects and activities. We have very good examples of this functioning like Annand Milk Dairy Cooperative, Annand (Gujarat), Mahila Grih Udyog etc. Agro based enterprises like dairy cooperatives, vermi-composting, nursery raising of fruits and vegetables, processing and value addition to horticulture crops, mushroom cultivation, apiculture's sericulture, fish farming, poultry management have greater potential to empower farm women.

The ICAR and SAUs form a close network for agricultural research and extension education through All India Coordinated Research Projects, National Agriculture Research Project, KVKs, National Agriculture Extension Projects and deeper intervention of the ICAR have provided an umbrella to develop and demonstrate front line technologies to empower farm women. Coordination is to be made among technology generation, technology dissemination and technology receiving system. The empowering strategies would need to be further sharpened to make them effective and result-oriented.

Micro and small industries need to be nurtured and Government support in form of financial assistance for term loan, working capital, machinery and technology up gradation and food testing laboratories is required for safe quality products.

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