

Information Needs of Farm Women Related to Dairy Farming and Home Management in Khuzastan Province

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In Khuzastan province of Iran Farm women play an important role in managing different kinds of dairy farming and home affairs. It is proposed that information for women involved in an enterprise is important to understand the production process and the economics of production. About 86 percent of women in rural areas of Khuzastan province are engaged in dairy farming and home management. The study was carried out in the rural communities of Ahwaz district of the Khuzastan province of Iran. A sample of 125 farm women was selected using cluster sampling technique. The survey research design was used for data collection. Data was also collected through interview schedule. Data were analyzed using quantitative approaches. Quantitative analysis was carried out with the SPSS program.

Results show that the information needs of farm women in study area are mostly occupation driven. Farm women were found to have a need for information about dairy farming and also for home management. Most of the farm women depend on the friends, husband, neighbors and other native sources like local leaders and educated people for their information needs. The study recommends that the farm women in Khuzastan state urgently should be provided with a formal system of information provisions like the services of extension personal, agricultural information officers and information technology equipments.

Keywords: Farm women, dairy farming, information need, information seeking behavior.

Introduction

Rural communities in Khuzastan state of Iran are mainly agricultural communities and dairy farming has been a prominent part of the survival of the people. Farm women in Khuzastan State of Iran play an important role in managing different kinds of farm and home affairs. Jamshidi (2004) reported, about 86 percent of women in farm families are involved in dairy farming related activities in Khuzastan State.

Farm women take decisions in their day-to-day lives that may affect them. In taking decisions, however, farm women are greatly aided by the amount of information available to them about their felt needs. So that, training and dissemination of information to farm women will be a critical input for the modernizing of farm production and home management in rural areas (World Bank 1992). Keeping the role of farm women in mind, there is a need for training farm women regarding necessary technologies, so that they can perform those activities with more competences. Meanwhile, a pre-requisite to reach this, is to access information needs and information seeking behavior of the farm women.

The growing number of studies on the farm women and their roles in dairy farming and home

management helped us to generate a framework for the study. So, the main objective of this study was to identify the information needs of farm women in the light of dairy farming and home management.

The following objectives provided for the study are as follows:

- To determine demographic characteristics of farm women.
- To identify the information needs of farm women related to dairy farming and home management.
- To ascertain the preferred communication sources of farm women for seeking information related to dairy farming and home management.

Material and Methods

Theoretical approach

Information need is constructed in the sense of data or a set of data specially required enabling the user to make an appropriate decision on any related problem facing him or her at any particular time (Solomon 2002).

Information is needed because it affects individuals living activities. According to Dervin (1995) information represents an ordered reality about the nature of the world people live in. Research on information needs and information seeking concurs that information is tailored to

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individual's job and to their tasks within those jobs (Ingwerson 1996 and Zeffane and Gul 1993).

Information in an enterprise is important for the production process, the economy of products, technical quality, production capacity, and the market and market related needs, such as competitive intelligence. Mudukuti and Miller (2002) suggested that in the information age, dissemination of information and applying this information in the process of agricultural production will play a significant role in development of farm families. Similarly Sligo and Jameson (1992) have also stressed that farm women must be given training on latest technological skills and maximize production. Meanwhile, a pre-requisite to reach this, is to assess information needs of farm women. This study is therefore centered on identifying the information needs, and preferred communication sources for seeking information related to dairy farming and home management.

Information seeking behavior is a broad term encompassing the ways individuals articulate their information needs, seek, evaluate, and use the needed information. A cognition or information acquisition depends on needs of individuals involved in special activities such as dairy farming and home management.

Information and communication sources could be classified into two broad types: internal and external. The information-seeking process may require either or both of these sources. In context of rural communities, two important ways of satisfying information needs, are as follows:

- (1) To consider farm women individually as self-sustaining information system.
- (2) To look at these people as a community, interacting with each other and with systems within their immediate environment (Kempson 1986 and Ikoja-Odongo and Ocholla 2003).

The external environment, for instance, would include all those individuals, groups, or organizations involved in the same activities in the farming communities, and those other organizations that have or may have the responsibility for, and interest in, keeping them informed. Studies on information sources used by most farmers, especially in developing countries, have described the following variety of sources used for seeking information: colleagues, friends, neighbours, relatives, family (Kaniki 1994,

Rezvanfar and Mandape 2000), professional and modern media (Shilaja and Jayaramiah 1992), personal network and business contacts (Barton and Bear 1999). Knowledge about information needs and information seeking behavior of the women farmers is crucial for effectively meeting their information needs. Understanding about the type of information sources preferred by women farmers could be useful for extension services in developing their collection development policies. This study will investigate the information needs and information seeking behavior of farm women regarding dairy farming and home management in Khuzastan State of Iran.

Methodology

Sample population for this study was selected from Vyaas-Mollasani district of Khuzastan province of Iran. The survey research design was used for data collection. A sample of One hundred twenty five (125) farm women in five different rural communities of Vyaas-Mollasani was selected using cluster sampling technique. Data were collected through interview schedule.

The interview schedule constructed for the research was administered to the respondents who constituted the sample in their villages. The researcher had to ask the questions outlined in the interview schedule of each respondent and record the response accordingly, because the respondents were mostly illiterates.

Earlier, in April 2006, a pilot study was conducted in one of the rural areas using 25 people. The aim was to test and improve the instrument. The main study was conducted between June to August 2006. Two people conducted interviews, one of them was resident of the place, where the study was carried out.

In this study information need has been operationalized as the need of information realized by the farm women in dairy fanning and home management. According to the purpose of the study the amount of information need was measured with the help of information need index developed by Borich (1980). The respondents were asked to indicate their responses to extent of their need and knowledge on each item on five-point continuum like very high, a little above average, average, a little below average and very low with assigned scores of 5,4,3,2 and 1, respectively.

The following formula was used to calculate the score of information need in each item obtained by each respondent.

$IN = (EN - EK) \times MN$ Where:

IN = Information need in each item obtained by each respondent

EN = Extent of need in each item

EK = Extent of knowledge in each item

MN = Mean score of need of all respondents in each item

In respect of study communication sources for seeking information regarding to dairy farming and home management, respondents were given a list of these communication sources for gathering information and asked to select those they often use. Data were analyzed using quantitative approaches.

Findings and discussion

(A) Characteristics of farm women

As evident from the Table 1, the majority of the respondents (60%) are within the age range of 36-45 years, indicating that most of the women farmers are still in their middle age of life. Majority of the respondents (62.4%) are married. Also about one third (40%) of respondents had no formal education at all.

Table - 1: Frequency distribution of respondents as per their demographic characteristics

S/N	Item (Age in yrs)	Frequency	%
1.	Under 25	9	7.2
2.	26-35	17	13.6
3.	36-45	75	60
4.	46-55	17	13.6
5.	56 and above	7	5.6
S/N	Marital status	Frequency	%
1.	Single	44	35.2
2.	Married	78	62.4
3.	Divorced	3	2.4
S/N	Education attainment	Frequency	%
1.	No formal education	50	40
2.	Able to read	42	33.6
3.	Primary school only	30	24
4.	Secondary school only	3	2.4

(B) Information needs of women farmers related to dairy farming

It was clear from the results in (Table - 2) that farm women wanted to know more about treatment of animals, controlling external parasites, controlling internal parasites and animal breeding assigned as first, second, third and fourth priority. Nutrition, low cost diet, clean milk production, preparing ration and reproduction occupied the next four positions. Respondents comparatively showed less interest in information on concentrate producing and saving nutritious material.

Table - 2: Relative position of items of information needs related to dairy farming

S/N	Information Item	Score	Rank
1	Treatment of animals	5.76	1
2	Controlling external parasites	5.63	2
3	Controlling internal parasites	5.52	3
4	Animal breeding	5.47	4
5	Nutritious and low cost diets	5.33	5
6	Clean milk production	5.14	6
7	Preparing ration	5.03	7
8	Reproduction	4.81	8
9	Marketing of milk	4.73	9
10	Improving sheep production	4.65	10
11	Food and feeding	4.53	11
12	Concentrate producing	4.01	13
13	Saving nutritious material	3.63	14

(C) Information needs of women farmers related to home management

Data in Table 3 showed that items on family planning, home decision and dairy technology were placed at first, second and third positions respectively. The next three items on which the respondents wanted the information were new methods of cooking food and dairy products conservation and preparation of handicrafts.

Respondents were less keen to know about home decoration, saving schemes, mending and repairing of cloths and machine knitting.

It can be concluded that farm women are very keen to know about family planning, home decision and dairy technology. This findings supports the findings of Mudukuti and Miller (2002) and Ikoja-Odongo and Ocholla (2003).

Table - 3: Relative position of information need related to home managements

S/N	Information item	Mean score	Rank
1	Family planning	4.97	1
2	Home decision	4.33	2
3	Dairy technology	4.25	3
4	New methods of cooking	4.11	4
5	Food and dairy products conservation	4.09	5
6	Preparation of handicrafts	3.94	6
7	Harmful effects of drugs	3.71	7
8	Pickle and jam making	3.26	8
9	Home decoration	3.14	9
10	Saving schemes	3.08	10
11	Mending and repairing of cloths	3.00	11
12	Machine knitting	2.95	12

(D) Preferred communication sources for seeking information

Respondents were given a list of communication sources for gathering information regarding dairy farming and home management and asked to select those they often use.

Table 4 shows that, 20% (the highest percentage) of respondents rely on friends, husband and neighbors, for acquisition of information.

Table - 4: Distribution of respondents by their preferred communication sources for seeking information

S/N	Sources	Frequencies	%
1	Friends, husband and neighbors	25	20
2	Personal experience	12	9.6
3	Opinions of leaders	18	14.4
4	Educated people	20	16
5	Extension personnel	20	16
6	Written material	8	6.4
7	Radio and television	22	17.6
	Total	125	100

A significant number of others rely on listening to radio and television (17.6%), meeting extension personnel (20%), meeting educated people (16%), recourse to opinion leaders (14.4%) to seek information in respect of dairy farming and home management. This is not surprising given that majority of women farmers (73.6%) are illiterate.

The few that read and write are the young ones in various levels of education who use the opportunities provided by the rural libraries and courses established by Ministry of Agriculture. It is interesting to note that, though about 90 percent of families in study areas using radio and television, but because of lack of suitable educational programmers, only 17.6 percent of the respondents showed using radio and television to seek information in respect of dairy farming and home management. The above findings confirm findings of (Kempson 1986, Tucker and Napier 2002) that rural people are information seeker through use of local sources like friends, neighbors and colleagues.

Conclusions and Recommendations

- It is very interesting to note that women are very keen to know more about treatments of animals, controlling external parasites, controlling internal parasites and animal breeding in the area of dairy farming and very keen to know more about family planning, home decision and dairy technology in the area of home management. All these topics are of immense importance in today's dairy production economics and home management. It is highly recommended that adequate training and awareness to the farm women in the sub-areas of dairy farming and home management be given through different kinds of information and communication sources.
- The farm women depend on friends, husbands, neighbors and other native sources like local leaders and educated people for their information needs, while those sources of information are never to be reliable. So, women in Khuzestan state need the formal system of information provision like the services of extension personal and agricultural information officers to assist them with updated information in the sub-areas of dairy farming and home management in order to boost and sustain their productivity.
- Farm women take decisions in their day-to-day lives that may affect their economic capabilities. In taking decisions, however, farm women are greatly aided by the amount of information available to them about their felt needs. So, it is recommended that any programs concerning education and training of farm women must lay more emphasis as per topics suggested by them.

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