ABSTRACT

India has been the world’s principal producer and exporter of spices since time immemorial. India, next to Guatemala, enjoys -a predominant place among the countries producing and exporting cardamom. Despite having the largest area under small cardamom cultivation in the world, India has a record of poor productivity. Non-availability of genetically upgraded saplings/seedlings and the vagaries of monsoon are the principal reasons as of now for the lower yield and poor productivity. Market trend is also not favourable all the time, especially to the small and marginal farmers.

The domestic consumption, which keeps the price of Indian cardamom always at a higher rate than the international price, has increased substantially. The study is an attempt to appraise the production and marketing practices and the plight of the cardamom growers in respect of small cardamom in three southern states viz., Kerala, Karnataka and Tamilnadu. The study analyses the recent trends in marketing of small cardamom and the role of institutional and non-institutional agencies in the promotion of cardamom production and marketing. This is an analytical study based on multi-stage random sampling technique with a sample size of three hundred growers.

The study revealed that there has been a declining trend in the extent of area under cultivation during the period between 1990-91 and 2000-01. This trend was due to: (i) the sudden downward changes in the area under cultivation; (ii) shifting of farmers from cultivation of cardamom to pepper; (iii) changes in climatic factors; (iv) decline in the price of cardamom; and (v) lack of interest shown by the growers due to decline and fluctuation in the price.

The percentage of yielding area is slightly high in Kerala compared to the other two states. However, the yielding area has shown declining trend in Kerala and TamilNadu whereas it has been increasing in Karnataka. Cardamom
growers have made concerted efforts in adopting the improved methods of cultivation in recent years, especially from 2000-01.

The study found that the small and marginal farmers are more in Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu, whereas big farmers with more than five acres are more in Kerala. The farmers, irrespective of their location, applied both organic and inorganic manure at least two times in a crop season. While the majority of the farmers in Tamil Nadu took-up soil testing, farmers in Kerala and Karnataka have not shown the required attention.

Farmers in Tamil Nadu relied on sources such as kangani and others (friends, relatives and neighbours) for meeting extra labour demands. They used migrant labourers from neighboring states also. The farmers incurred a cost ranging between Rs 20,001 and 60,000 per acre for cultivation of cardamom. The cost of production of cardamom was high in Kerala compared to the other two states.

High cost of storage and the unfavourable fluctuations in the prices were the prompting reasons for disposal of the produce immediately after the harvest. While majority of the growers from Kerala and Tamil Nadu have chosen the Cardamom Producers Association, the Karnataka farmers selected the private channels for the disposal of the produce. The majority of the respondents were not aware of the undercover system widely practiced by the private traders in the sale process of cardamom.