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Popular Article

Challenges and Opportunities in the Poultry sector in Jammu & Kashmir

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Abstract:

Poultry meat is the only type of meat that has been accepted across the globe. Poultry farming has been adopted in developing nations due to its relative simplicity. The entire scenario of backyard poultry farming has been transformed into a full-fledged agro-based self-sufficient industry. Poultry farming is emerging as an important enterprise to generate income and employment among the youth in Jammu & Kashmir. However, there is a shortfall in poultry meat and egg production in the Union Territory. The union territory of Jammu and Kashmir comprises two divisions - Jammu Division and Kashmir Division and is further divided into ten districts in each division. There is a gap between the demand and supply of poultry meat and eggs. The demand is mainly filled by purchasing poultry birds and eggs from the other states of the country, thus draining the Union Territory's revenue.

Keywords: Poultry, Broiler, Layer, Chicken, Industry, Jammu, Kashmir

Introduction:

According to a recent report, in the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir, around Rs 2000 crores of meat is imported from outside Jammu & Kashmir. Efforts are made to improve the progress of broiler production and commercial egg production. Some popular egg-laying poultry strains such as Vanraja, Chabro, and Chabrown have been introduced in Jammu & Kashmir which have raised hope for mitigating the eggs needed in Jammu & Kashmir. The cost of quality proteins is increasing rapidly, and due to the poor purchasing power of the farmers, their family members suffer malnutrition, especially of animal proteins. Jammu and Kashmir annually consume more than 51,000 tonnes of mutton worth Rs.12.06 billion, of which about 21,000 tonnes are imported from outside. In Jammu & Kashmir, there is a 69 percent shortfall in poultry meat production and a 97 percent shortfall in poultry egg production. This gap in production and need is fulfilled by the purchase of large quantities of eggs and poultry meat from outside thus draining the state finances. According to a recent report, the Jammu & Kashmir state import bill for meat, poultry, and eggs is approximately Rs 2,000 crore per annum. About 84 percent of Jammu & Kashmir's population is predominantly non-vegetarian. The last decade has witnessed remarkable growth in the poultry sector in J&K. Poultry farming has come up on a commercial scale in Jammu, Kathua, Udhampur, Reasi, Pulwama, Srinagar, and

Budgam districts. Large numbers of unemployed youths are taking up poultry farming as an enterprise. It has been estimated that every year, Kashmir imports around 5.5 crore chickens from the neighbouring states of Haryana and Punjab.

It is estimated that poultry traders in Punjab supply over half a million eggs and 40,000 to 50,000 chickens per day to mitigate the poultry in Jammu & Kashmir. These supplies cost around 50 million rupees per day. Several measures can be taken to discourage imports and encourage poultry production in the state to achieve self-sufficiency in poultry production. Kashmir is the biggest mutton consumer in India. Estimates put the quantum of annual imports of mutton, milk, and poultry to Rs 16000 crore. Jammu & Kashmir has more than 33.50 lakh laying birds, of which 90.36 percent are in Kashmir and only 9.63 percent belong to an improved category. The layer population experienced 60 percent growth over the last four years. The poultry sector in the state contributes around 510 million eggs and 438 lakh kg of meat. Still, the Union Territory has a deficit in both egg and meat production. Poultry farmers of Jammu are in great danger as big market players have taken over the whole market industry of the region. Contract poultry farming is also carried out by some owners who are not from Jammu & Kashmir. It is difficult for small local farmers to compete with these big market players. The Front-Line Demonstrations (FLDs) laid by Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Reasi on Kadaknath, Vanraja, and Chabrown significantly impact the farmers' income. Cluster farming in rural areas is possible with these chickens for enhancing meat production in the state in which groups of 8 to 10 farmers or educated youth can form a cluster and grow the birds in groups of 500 to 1,000 birds in low-cost houses as "organic chicken" by making their low-cost organic feeds without chemicals and antibiotics.

Poultry Scenario in Jammu Division:

The study conducted by the researchers in the Jammu Division revealed that commercial broiler farming is done largely by individuals. This is because broiler poultry birds require low inputs, have a short gestation period, and give better and quicker returns by the litter system. Imported/pure line Cobb 430 breed of chicken from Venkys India is usually reared for meat purposes. Broiler production has increased at an annual growth rate of about 15 percent. The price of a day-old chick fluctuates from Rs 10 to Rs 55 in Jammu city. The poultry farmer provides pre-starter (500 g), starter (1.20 kg), and finisher ration till its slaughter. The life cycle of broiler chicken is 30-45 days till slaughter. The birds grow faster than native birds reaching 1.50 kg weight in 45 days but can withstand variable feed qualities and also supplement themselves by scavenging. The price of meat sale varies and depends on different factors. There are no fixed margins. In the early year of the 2000s, the price was Rs 15 per kg. Due to increasing demands and decreasing production of poultry meat, there is an increase in the price. Currently, the price of live weight per kg in Jammu is Rs 170. The price of dressed chicken per kg in Jammu is Rs 260.

With the advent of ready-to-eat frozen meat by various private companies in retail shops (e.g. Easyday), the demand for fresh broiler meat has substantially reduced. More retail outlets, mass gatherings, and home awareness about the nutrient values of chicken and eggs are needed. The Indian Army procures frozen meat in its ration. Though the subsidy is more in rearing layer birds for eggs, long-term investment in feeding the layers, and increasing loss due to mortality/morbidity due to Ranikhet Disease, New Castle Disease, and bird flu from migratory birds have discouraged poultry farmers from opting for poultry layer farming. In Jammu, the entrepreneurs of broiler farming

depend on companies like Indian Herbs, Himalayas, and Aimil Pharmaceuticals for liver tonic, gout, growth promoters, and amino acids. Extension training programmes are imparted by Venkys India through its veterinarians. 50 kg broiler poultry feed is procured from Anmol Agro Vets (SIDCO, Samba) and Chinara Feeds Private Limited (Gangyal, Jammu). The demand for poultry meat is higher in marriage season and festivals. The demand for poultry meat decreases in the summer. Dogras living in the Jammu region are predominantly vegetarians.

Tremendous efforts are needed to mitigate the poultry products needs of Jammu & Kashmir. The low technology input birds are mostly of dual purpose. Mother units are being encouraged to take care of the brooding and vaccination in the first four weeks before they are distributed among poultry farmers/entrepreneurs to ensure disease security. Integrated farming is being encouraged in Jammu & Kashmir. Animal Husbandry Department's Belicharana government poultry farm and other offices have been shifted for the expansion of Jammu Airport which has done damage. But the efforts of the Agricultural Production Department are much appreciated if implemented as projected, it will be a game changer for poultry production in Jammu and Kashmir, a self-reliant, best quality product and of course employment generator.

Poultry Scenario in Kashmir Division:

With the growing demand for chicken, over the past two decades, a significant number of unemployed youths have ventured into poultry farming in Kashmir. Around ten thousand people are directly employed in this sector, with many involved indirectly. There are approximately 1300 private farmers registered with the Animal Husbandry Department, and many others operate unregistered. In the years 1957-58, the Poultry Development Programme (PDP) was initiated in the Kashmir division to introduce improved breeds to meet the increasing demand for meat and eggs in the region. The Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims in the valley are mostly meat eaters.

To evaluate the poultry scenario in the Kashmir division, researchers from the Jammu and Kashmir Policy Institute (JKPI) visited various poultry farm units based on a questionnaire prepared for the study. The study revealed that hundreds of commercial poultry farms have been established in Kashmir, equipped with automatic poultry house management systems. The number of birds on each farm ranges from 1000 to 10000 per cycle, mostly sourced from outside Jammu & Kashmir. Both Cobb 430 breeds from Venkys, Surya, Rathi, etc., and non-Cobb varieties are being purchased at a rate of 62 rupees per chick in 2024. Previously, before 2024, the chick rate remained between 25 and 40 rupees. The birds are ready for the market within 35-38 days. A one-day-old chick weighing 40-50 grams grows to 1.5-2.0 kg within these 35-38 days, faster than native birds. The price of chicken has been fluctuating between 100 and 145 rupees per kilogram since 2019.

To set up a poultry farm capable of rearing around 6000 birds per cycle, a minimum of one kanal of land is required (rates vary from one area to another), along with an infrastructure setup costing around 10-15 lakhs. Running a poultry farm requires a minimum of three employees, with labour costs ranging between 20,000 and 30,000 rupees monthly. In a random sampling conducted by JKPI, it was found that farmers have not benefited from any government scheme of the Animal Husbandry Department. None of the farmers sampled have received any subsidies, nor are aware of any ethno-veterinary practices.

Challenges of the Poultry Sector in Jammu & Kashmir:

The condition of the poultry segment in Jammu & Kashmir is alarming as thirteen hundred crores have been spent

in importing broilers, eggs, and feed. The problem gets more complicated with the fact that harsh conditions to carry day-old broilers, sometimes stuck up for days on the ongoing construction of national highways, resulting in poor sustainability and increasing cost manifold.

As Jammu & Kashmir is non-industrialized, there are not many employment opportunities. Keeping all these aspects in mind, an expert committee worked out 29 points programme and focus on poultry and allied works is one of them. The Plan has been chalked out to infuse two hundred fifty crores over five years to increase poultry yield from approximately seven hundred crores to approximately two thousand crores. More than four hundred enterprise units are supposed to come up generating thousands of employment avenues. Investments are planned to form new composite broiler parent farms cum hatcheries, strengthening existing egg production capacity to 100 crore eggs annually and feed manufacturing units with a focus on millet crops on the agricultural front for feed.

Youth will be provided with the necessary training and financial assistance as such many opportunities are created for unemployed youth. It is a fact that with so many poultry imports, there is practically no check on quality and the situation becomes more serious in the case of bird flu as unchecked imports pose a serious health threat to the public. All the raw materials, including feed and chicks, are being imported from other states, except for heating materials. The monopoly of outside companies in the Kashmir poultry business remains the biggest challenge. Consequently, hatchery and feed companies are exploiting Kashmiri poultry farmers. There is no regulation on broilers imported from outside; for example, if there is a demand for one lakh broilers in Kashmir, surplus broilers are brought in, causing an increase in supply and a decrease in rates. Previously, before 2019, the Jammu & Kashmir state government imposed a state tax of 9 rupees per broiler at the Lakhanpur border. Lakhanpur town in Kathua district is the entrance to Jammu and Kashmir from Punjab connecting the rest of the country. Its abolition had a significant adverse impact on native poultry farmers. Similarly, poultry feed is sourced from outside states, reaching Kashmir at a considerably high cost. The price of feed bags, which was 1400 rupees in 2019, is now being sold at 2300 rupees. Other challenges are as follows-

- (a) Poor infrastructure for export is hindering the export of poultry products.
- (b) Stiff competition from players of neighbouring states such as Punjab and Haryana on opening up duty-free imports, and lifting of trade barriers in Lakhanpur after revoking Article 370 in Jammu & Kashmir.
- (c) Occurrence of *Salmonella* and other diseases in poultry meat.
- (d) Many states in India are protecting their poultry industry from cutthroat competition by protective measures like restricting imports, keeping egg prices at a lower level, etc.
- (e) Some neighbouring states provide subsidies, and export incentives to exporters and keep their prices low.
- (f) Increasing adoption of vegetarianism and veganism due to religious beliefs and healthy lifestyle choices.

Interventions And Research:

Some innovations in the poultry sector such as the horti-poultry model can help to enhance the income of the farmers of Jammu & Kashmir. This model is helpful in the natural weeding in the orchards, optimization of resource utilization, natural sanitation of the orchard, fertilization of the orchard, production of organic products, food security, etc. This model is very simple and can be easily adopted. Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), Reasi has introduced a black meat poultry variety namely Kadaknath in the district which is very low in cholesterol (0.73%-1.05%), rich

in proteins (25%), and vitamins, and helpful for asthmatic and nephritis patients. The meat and eggs of this poultry variety are costly and can help to improve the socio-economic status of the farmers. Krishi Vigyan Kendra has also introduced high egg-laying birds such as Vanraja, Chabro, and Chabrown.

Recommendations:

To minimize import demand, it is paramount to assist poultry farmers through subsidies and by providing training and other veterinary services. All poultry farmers should be registered with the animal husbandry department, and the department should enact strict guidelines for animal husbandry officers to provide veterinary and other departmental services to farmers.

Poultry farming is among the top business activities in Kashmir, with thousands of people associated with it. However, the raw materials needed for poultry farming are not produced locally in Kashmir, leading to high prices. Similarly, feed-producing mills should be set up in Kashmir to reduce dependency on raw materials from outside states. Furthermore, hatchery companies need to be established in Kashmir so that chicks can be provided to farmers at lower rates compared to outside companies, which often charge higher rates due to travel expenses. If the government successfully establishes such companies, it will create new employment opportunities and allow the government to monitor their quality. It has been found that many times, these outside companies sell low-standard materials to these poultry farmers under the guise of high quality.

The dependency on outside companies and the high import demand in Kashmir make Kashmiri poultry farmers helpless. They are unable to set the rates since the state tax at the Lakhanpur border was abolished, which added salt to the wounds of Kashmiri farmers. There is a need to set up a Mandi for poultry farmers, which should serve as the primary platform for farmers to sell their produce. Mandi administration will play an integral role in safeguarding the interests and rights of poultry farmers.

Chicken production and processing companies should be tied up with these poultry farmers so that they can directly sell their products to these companies. These companies can provide feed, veterinary services, and technical advice to these farmers, thus removing 90% of the economic risk from them.

Conclusion:

The poultry industry in Jammu and Kashmir needs a good branding system to increase chicken consumption. The poultry companies have to encourage direct procurement of maize from the farmers by using contract farming. Also, collecting reliable, updated statistics is necessary for immediate and long-term planning, thereby helping prevent shortages in poultry farming. There is a need to develop efficient, independent, authority for disease monitoring, biological quality control, and biosecurity measures in the poultry industry. This sector can open new avenues of income and employment for the youths of the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir. There are also layer farming, hatchery establishment, and poultry feed manufacturing opportunities in Jammu & Kashmir. More awareness and technical skills on value addition in poultry farming are also needed. There is a need for more basic and applied research in meat science and technology.

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