

## **PPI Funded Go to Market Model – MLDMHI Farmer Group Year 2 - Six Monthly Report February – July 2020**

### **Backdrop**

Subsequent to the PPI funds for Go to market Model, MLDMHI recruited a marketing/logistics manager based at Vikramgad. Last year in Rabi Season farmers got good rate for the vegetables due to the transport facility and constant marketing support. Thus the farmers were inspired to do better. They not only preserved local variety seeds, round Dudhi, Warva wal with various sizes and colors like white-green & pink but also tried new vegetables at their farms, French-beans & Surati papadi. Sharing of good seeds with each other, Pumpkin, regional tomato, Sweet potato gives cost benefit.

Marketing efforts got a fillip through the active involvement of MOFCA (Mumbai organic farmers and consumers association) and particularly Venkat Iyer a Dahanu based organic farmer who through his networking provided not just access to markets but helped in organizing and monitoring of the activity too. Through his network MLDMHI got a vehicle for transportation of vegetables donated by Green Earth Logistics from their CSR funds.

### **Rabi 2019 – 20 (Jan to March)**

The various market channels explored from January – March 2020 were:

- We continued from previous year to the School at Mumbai where consumers were the parents who dropped and picked up their children
- Three large residential complexes at the outskirts of Mumbai and Thane.
- Two buyers continued from previous year and four joined this year who picked up our produce at Bhopoli.
- Added two new buyers who used to pick up small quantities from our tempo on the way to market and are working with direct home delivery to consumers.
- Introduced alternate transport facility for those who could not pick up from Bhopoli

### **Summer 2020 (April to June)**

The onslaught of Covid 19 put considerable stress on marketing activity since direct marketing to Mumbai markets became infeasible. Farmers had cultivated in good quantity in anticipation of expanding sale prospects. In fact in the last visit in March just before lockdown got imposed a section of the customers of one large residential complex got reactive towards the farmer and our team. Our team faced challenges from the villages too who put up barriers preventing entry of any outsiders to the village even if for collection of vegetables which as essential services was excluded from lockdown restrictions. They were also wary of tempo coming to village. The vegetable collection had to be done skillfully and taking all necessary precautions to ensure that vendor needs were met and maximise collection at farmer end. On an average around 30 - 35% of the produce could not get marketed because only 2/3 vendors were active. This produce though was not wasted but came handy to serve village needs of vegetables as villagers had no access to market. Farmers could not get commensurate price but they were happy to cater to village needs. This thinking on their part is commendable.

### **Financials**

The rate is computed net of expenses such as driver charges, fuel, daily wages to farmers going to market, maintenance expenses, salary to collection person. All these expenses are borne by farmers from total revenue from vegetable sales. Farmers could have earned higher rate as well as increased

sale but due to complete lockdown from mid-March there was limitation on collection as well as transportation of veggies.

	Total veggies sold	Average Rate per Kg	Earnings in Rs.(net of expenses)
Jan-March 2019	8624 Kg	38/-	327712
Jan-March 2020	10139 kg	51/-	520168
April- June 2019	1934 Kg	40/-	77360
April- June 2020	2770 Kg	47/-	131790

Farmers are learning:

- How to use smart phones, accepting orders on whatsapp.
- Flexibility in collection time and location
- How to keep veggies fresh, packing & arranging vegetables in the tempo.
- Executing multiple orders at same time.
- How to protect themselves and also make money, during pandemic.

Farmers earned:

- Good rate for their vegetables. Efficient farmers earned around 15000/-pm.
- Some got around 2400/- to 3000/- per month as labor charges to go with tempo.
- Farmers paid 8000/-pm to collection person who represents next generation of local farmers.
- From Nov-2019 to June-2020, total earning other than vegetables is around 1,13,510/-. So local employment such as driver, collection person, labour charges contributed more than 70,000/-. While remaining is through dry sale like pulses, rice, loofah, dried veggies.

### Impact

- For kharip season this year, almost 45 farmers have cultivated as compared to 21 farmers last year.
- Market planning and guidance to farmers helped increase in rate of vegetables to farmers.
- Just because farmers reached market for consecutive two years, there was a bonding between farmers and consumers. Response was multiplied.
- Many farmers got good financial uplift.

### Major challenges

- Marketing  
Access to markets during the continuing pandemic situation will continue to pose a challenge. We have been actively networking with a number of vendors whose requirement may not be large but collectively would add upto a significant number. Cost effective transport arrangement has to be sought out.
- Farm production  
As farmers have reached many markets, huge demand has got generated. To fulfill this, production planning is a challenge. Sufficient quantity of high demand veggies, moderate quantity of less demand veggies and to encourage farmers to grow new varieties, is a need.
- Quality control  
While there has been consistent improvement in sorting, packing, and precaution while transportation farmers still show hesitation to reject damaged goods of their peers.

- Farmer organisation/ownership/leadership  
This continues to pose a challenge as well as a dilemma. So long as Trust's team is involved farmers prefer to take a laid back stance. Since commitments to vendors is made our team feels reluctant to let go control.
- Sustainability of initiative  
One very recent challenge has been that our marketing manager (recruited with PPI funds) who would have continued upto January 2021 (when PPI project concluded) has sought to be relieved from July 2020 for personal reasons. Recruiting another person at this stage is infeasible as by the time the person settles in the job the funding will be over. We have thus as of now crafted a dual arrangement of taking the services of an outside resource person who would function as a guide and mentor and take someone locally to handle the marketing aspects. Atleast for a year we are not envisaging this to be a completely farmer led and driven initiative but intend to work to make that happen. Continued dependence on Trust team as well as external resource persons raises the question of sustainability.