

Improving Food Security and Commercial Development through Promotion of High Value Medicinal and Industrial Plants in the Swat Valley of Pakistan

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Abstract : Agriculture has a pivotal role in Pakistan's economy, accounting for about one-fourth of the GDP and employing almost half the population. However, the competitiveness, productivity, growth, employment potential, export opportunity, and contribution to GDP of the sector is significantly hampered by agriculture marketing laws/regulations at the provincial level that reward rent seeking behavior, promote monopoly power, artificially reduce farmer incomes while inflating prices to consumers, and act as disincentives to investment. Although of more recent vintage than some other provincial agricultural marketing laws, the NWFP Agricultural and Livestock Produce Markets Act, 2007 is a throwback to a colonial paradigm, where restrictions on agricultural produce marketing and Government control of distribution channels is the norm. The Swat Valley (in which we include its tributary valleys) is an area of Pakistan in which there is poverty is both extreme and pervasive. For many, a significant portion of the family's income comes from selling plants that are used as herbs, medicines, and perfumes. Earlier studies have shown that the benefit they derive from this work is less than they might because of: Lack of knowledge concerning which plants and which plant parts are valuable, Lack of knowledge concerning optimal preservation and storage of material, illiteracy. Another concern that much of the plant material sold from the valley is collected in the wild, without an appreciation of the negative impact continued collecting has on wild populations. We propose: Creating colored cards to help inhabitants recognize the 25 most valuable plants in their area; Developing and sharing protocols for growing the 25 most valuable plants in a home garden; Developing and sharing efficient mechanisms for drying plants so they do not lose value; Encouraging increased literacy by incorporating numbers and a few words in the handouts.

Keywords : food security, medicinal plants, industrial plants, economic development

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