



RESEARCH ARTICLE

FARMERS' SUICIDES IN TAMIL NADU- REASONS AND RESPONSES WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THIRUMANUR DELTA

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 11th May, 2025
Received in revised form
24th June, 2025
Accepted 19th July, 2025
Published online 20th August, 2025

Keywords:

Agriculture, farmer, suicide, cultivation, crisis, rainfall, crop, Cauvery water, debt, loan, cyclone and calamities.

ABSTRACT

Central and state government always claim that agriculture is the backbone of India. "India lives in villages." Agriculture with its allied sectors is the largest source of livelihood in Thirumanur delta, Tamil Nadu. Agriculture continues to be the most predominant sector of this district economy, as 70 percent of the population is engaged in Agriculture and allied activities for their livelihood. The district has as an area of 1933.38 sq.km with a gross cropped area of around 0.948 lakhs Ha with 93 percent of farmers being small and marginal. The sustained struggle of the delta farmers against the hydrocarbon project has given them a slight relief. However, the farmers of the western districts are still fighting the GAIL pipeline project through agricultural lands, the high-tension electric line and the green corridor road between Chennai and Salem. Ground water levels have fallen down below 200 feet in many places in Tamil Nadu and water shortage due to poor rainfall, reduced crop costs and decreasing access to formal financial services to the farmers. The water level at Mettur dam often goes below the threshold level in and out of the seasons and hence it becomes almost impossible to obtain water from the dam. In Thirumanur delta, there was sufficient ground water even at 90ft below ground level, but of late one is able to find a little water only after digging up to 200ft. In many parts of the district a variety of crops, ranging from paddy to onions and pulses are grown during the regular seasons. Farmers sow the winter crops two or three times. Each time the field dries up, they would make a fresh attempt in the hope that more showers would arrive and douse their crop. But on the other hand, drought and insufficient rain leads to high expenses and leads to subsequent crop loss. District rural economy is high and dry due to the transport, harvesting, marketing and procurement bottlenecks, lack of cold storage, adequate processing facilities, market shutdowns and labour shortages. Lack of knowledge of agricultural mechanization among farmers to carry out various farming operations, starting from land bed preparation, sowing, crop protection, post harvest technology management and value addition in time is also a responsible factor for economic downfall. Farmers' suicides are precisely due to career problems, sense of isolation, abuse, violence, family problems, mental disorders, addiction to alcohol, financial loss, chronic pain, crop failure, debt, bank loan, cyclone and MSP (minimum support price) is unheeded. Natural calamities have also resulted in huge losses for paddy, coconut, plantain and sugarcane farmers in different time periods. The delayed dispatching teams by the government to see crops affected areas during natural calamities and cyclones and the compensation announced by the government is not sufficient for the damaged crops. Therefore, the Union and state governments need to be more proactive in framing policies to save farmers from further damage.

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Citation: Dr. Anand, E. 2025. "Farmers' Suicides in Tamil Nadu- Reasons and Responses with Special Reference to Thirumanur Delta". *International Journal of Current Research*, 17, (08), 34236-34241.

INTRODUCTION

Farmers' suicide is one of the cruellest incidences that happen in the world and in particular in Thirumanur delta, Tamil Nadu, India. Debt, Loan and not earning adequate income has led the farmers to low self-esteem and loss of dignity and this has eventually led them to be bonded labourers. Methane extraction is synonym of destruction of agriculture and farmers' community. From southern shore of Palaru to Ramanathapuram, 500 ft to 1690 ft deep coal deposits were found. Great Eastern Energy Corporation Ltd (GEECL) won

license in a bidding to explore and extract methane gas and coal deposits in Mannarkudi block of Thiruvavur district in the Cauvery basin from Government of India. Petroleum extraction company ONGC also started drilling bore-wells of methane. Methane gas is extracted from coal bed by using hydraulic fracturing. This is a dangerous process in which rock is fractured by a pressurized liquid consisting of more than 600 chemicals. The moderate to high levels of salt in coal bed water can destroy soils and decrease crop production. The salts gather in the root base of plants, making it harder for the plants

to extract water from the soil and inhibiting growth. As many farmers make use of stream and river diversion to water their crops and grazing fields, the surface discharge of coal bed water can negatively impact local agriculture. In this way, Cauvery basin is being contaminated by oil companies, making drinking water unsafe. Indian government gave permission to private companies to convert the birth land which habituate crores of people, birds, cattle, trees into graveyard.

Relief and Control on Natural and Manmade Calamities in Thirumanur delta Tamil Nadu: Floods along lowland rivers still cause a lot of damage. Therefore, planting new grass can reduce the impact of floods and choose local plants that prevent flooding in lowland crops cultivation.

Crop Diversification for Maximizing Productivity: Crop diversification is one of the important methods to alleviate the problems of farmer's suicide through fulfilling the basic needs and regulating farm income and controlling price fluctuation. And also ensuring balanced food supply, conserving natural resources, reducing the chemical fertilizer and pesticide loads, environmental safety and creating employment opportunity to farmers.

Irrigation: Government should be provided irrigation facilities by construction of dams and increase the productivity of agriculture.

Agriculture farmer training: Farmers should be trained in modern method of cultivation. They should learn to employ scientific method, update our agriculture research and try improving our agricultural yield.

Use of Modern technology: In the present farming, it is necessary for the farmers to adopt new technology which helps them to achieve an increase in the agricultural productivity. Modern equipment should be provided by the government at free of cost. This helps to increase the income of the farmers.

Supportive sources for farmers: Encourage the farmers to adopt allied activities like dairy and poultry with farming activities and also adoption of Non-Farm agricultural activities.

Implementation of Natural farming method: Crops are grown by using different factors in nature such as, sunlight, shadow, cow urine, cow dung etc. Production cost for farmers goes down by using traditional seeds with the farmers, natural crop nutrients and natural insecticides. Thus, there is no need for farmers to take loan for sowing. Farmers become self sufficient and self technique.

Sustainable Agriculture support: Government should extend incentives, subsidies, credits and other support to achieve sustainable agriculture activities.

Water management: In most cases, it is not the lack of water but the lack of proper water management that causes water shortage. Improved modern methods of rain water harvesting should be developed. Most of the water from drainage is drained into the river. Instead of draining the water into the river, they can be desalted and purified and diverted to some tanks or lakes in nearby agricultural lands to be used for irrigation.

Measures to Improve Farming Productivity in Thirumanur delta, Tamil Nadu: Many agricultural researchers are now looking to a set of practices known as smart water management using of drop by drop or sprinkler irrigation systems they can increase crop yields up to 50 percent. Farm management software may be utilised in agricultural diversification towards high value farming while retaining the core-competence in area of food crops and nutritional security. Thirumanur delta, Tamil Nadu farmers practice subsistence intensive farming with the availability of water for cultivation in the seasons. Farming methods are classified into three types namely wet farming, dry farming and irrigation farming. In addition, they practiced conventional farming in growing vegetable crops like onion and chilli in the red sandy loam soil will be earned profitably. Agriculture for better productivity, it is imperative that the state moves away from traditional water-intensive crops of paddy and sugarcane and tap into the benefits of flowers, fruits and vegetable cultivation. As corn consumes much less water, its productivity can be enhanced by testing and correcting soil and use of quality seeds. Enhancing the modify production strategies based on market preference. Increase the yield of food grain, oilseeds and commercial crops by introducing site specific crop management technologies. These strategies may be adopted in agricultural farming which would increase farmer's income and reduce suicides rate in Thirumanur delta, Tamil Nadu.

The Objective of the Study

- To identify reasons for farmers suicides.
- To find out the growth of farmer's suicides in Tamil Nadu
- To respond with possible measures to overcome the current crisis

Aim of the study: This study endeavours to find out reasons for farmer suicides and possible measures to improve farming productivity and control natural and manmade calamities and cyclone cause a lot of damage lowland rivers in Thirumanur delta.

METHODOLOGY

Purposive sampling is used for the study. Data was collected from small and marginal farmers, including household survey of Thirumanur delta, Tamil Nadu. The interview schedule, structured questionnaire was used for reasons behind farmers' suicides. Statistical tools like percentage and average methods were used for the study.

Area of the study: The Ariyalur District has a Geographical area of 1,93,338 Hectares, of which the net area cropped is 94,725 Hectares. Out of which about 36284 Ha are irrigated and about 58441 Ha are rainfed. The River Cauvery tributary irrigates about 10,389 Ha. in Thirumanur.

Statement of the problems Data: Farmers are affected by multiple factors such as non availability of irrigation sources, depleting ground water, inadequate price for the produce. Majority of farmers affected at Thirumanur delta region in Ariyalur District of Tamil Nadu State are due to lack of farming practices and knowledge like the type and strength of their farmland soil, getting right seeds, sowing in the right time,

water supply, harvesting at in right time, marketing for good price have resulted in rotting of the harvested produce in the fields. It is one of the crisis for farmers' suicides. Therefore, the present study has been taken up to find out the causes of farmer suicides in the study area.

Scope of the Study: Scope of this study is the reasons behind the crisis, but also stimulate farming, social and political movements to find solutions to overcome such crisis. Judicious utilization of available irrigation water, integrated nutrient management and integrated crop protection measures to reduce crop loss and ensure sustainable production system in dry land area. Therefore, the study is taken up for the problems.

Need of the study: Agriculture has been the backbone of our country since time immemorial. Even though its share in economy might have come down but it is still the highest employer of rural working force. India accounts for 7.68% of total global agriculture output. In Tamil Nadu share of agriculture in the GDP of the state is 21% (total GDP ₹13,842 billion). So, the recent hike in deaths of farmers around the country especially increase in suicide rates has rung an alarm in the society. This article primarily covers the issues behind the suicide of farmers in Thirumanur delta, Tamil Nadu.

Data Collection: Data collection consists of primary and secondary sources.

- The Primary Source of data is the interview schedule. The researcher will collect information from land holders, agriculture farmers, officers of primary co-operative society and interviewing people.
- The secondary data will be collected from the Government reports and records, Journals, magazines, periodicals, newspaper, books, and website, on line data, mobile phone, internet, iPhone, iPod, twitter, base book, libraries and digital libraries.

Results and Recommendations

Farmer's suicides are found concentrated at Thirumanur delta region in Ariyalur District of Tamil Nadu State is lacking of institutional mechanism to conserve the rain water makes for water shortage, which are no more irrigation and watershed development project. Ever increasing debt, due to the failure of crops owing to non-availability of irrigation water from Cauvery and the failure of North East monsoon and the monopoly of Multi-National Corporations in keeping the death toll on a steep rise in day to day. Lack of government support and in the state of total helplessness the farmers decided to end their life. Particularly the farmers who have been under the clutches of money lenders due to excessive pressure had to end their life. Moreover, in my research about the issue I did notice, that people who are not farmers or farmers who died due to some other reasons, also received compensation by misusing the powers by their own family members. This has also added to the increase in the suicide rate. Hence farmers have to remain deprived from the benefits of the good rainfall and are facing severe drought situation for last few years in Thirumanur delta, Tamil Nadu. Cultivating an area of paddy costs Rs 25,000 (per ha) but the government announces Rs 5,000 as compensation when crops damaged during natural calamities and cyclone. The Government do not follow the uniform compensation for the damaged crops. The last couple

of decades have witnessed several thousand farmers committing suicides for the above crisis.

Table 1. Landed Farmers and Farm Workers Suicides in Tamil Nadu

| S.No | Year | Number of Suicides |
|------|---------|--------------------|
| 1 | 2011-12 | 499 |
| 2 | 2012-13 | 124 |
| 3 | 2013-14 | 606 |
| 4 | 2014-15 | 606 |
| 5 | 2015-16 | 345 |
| 6 | 2016-17 | 381 |
| 7 | 2017-18 | 120 |
| 8 | 2018-19 | 401 |
| 9 | 2019-20 | 421 |
| 10 | 2020-21 | 76 |
| 11 | 2021-22 | 78 |

Source: National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)2020-21

The National Crime Records Bureau report recorded Tamil Nadu is ranked with the highest number of suicides 606 during 2013-14 and 14-15 due to crop failure and cyclone and various reasons. 124 suicides were reported during the year 2012-13. Almost 345 deaths were recorded during the year 2015-16 due to various reasons. 381 included farmers and farm labourers who committed suicide during 2016-17 followed by 401 died during the year 2018. Mostly 499 farmers and farm labourers were committed suicides during the year 2018-19 for Cauvery water failure and pressure from banks and crop dry up. 427 people engaged in agriculture in Tamil Nadu committed suicide an increase of 6% over the previous year figure. They include six landed farmers and 421 agricultural labourers. Among them, 294 were men and 133 women followed by 76 died in 2020-2021. Of the 78 suicides in 2022, 34 farmers were eligible for financial assistance as per government rules, 28 were not eligible and 14 were under scrutiny, the department.

Reasons for Farmers' Suicide

Natural Reasons: Tamil Nadu agriculture sector mostly depends on monsoons. Due to this situation farmers have incurred heavy losses by double or triple sowing or sometimes the total crop loss. Variations in the monsoon affect the agricultural production and lives of the farmers. Cultivated land is distributed unevenly most of the farmers are marginal farmers due to uncertainty in monsoon agriculture productivity is not fixed. It is difficult to fulfil requirement of family members which leads to suicides the farmers.

Natural Calamities: Tamil Nadu agricultural production mostly depends on favourable weather condition. Due to the global warming, deforestation and other manmade reasons and natural condition has become more worsen and reasons like heavy rain, floods, droughts, delay in rain, heavy cyclones etc. farmers are unable to receive qualitative and quantitative production from their farm. Most of the time farmers are unable to recover cost price of their product. Due to these reasons agriculture becomes an assured loss making business. But the marginal & small farmers don't have another option for earning. They again & again put all their efforts in the agriculture. Continuous losses turn them to become insolvent and frustration of the same forces them to commit suicide.

Water level decline: Water is the main reason for the existing agricultural problem in Tamil Nadu. Water is renewable resource and its availability depend on climate, geographical

and physical condition. But water decline caused by sustained ground water pumping, poor monsoons and high demand water poor shortage facilities, careless attitude toward conservation which cause soil erosion and soil unable to permit water percolation and also over exploitation of water. Sufficient irrigation facilities are the prerequisite for the sustainable development of the sector.

Economical Reasons: The indebtedness of the farmers is an outcome of an unrewarding nature of agriculture than other social and cultural factors. The agriculture has become unrewarding due to increasing gap between the cost of cultivation and the income received from the produce prices. The average gap between cost of cultivation and received price is high per cent for all crops. But the returns from agriculture were disproportionate to the investment hence farmers could not be able to cover the cost of cultivation from their agricultural income.

Costly modern agriculture technique: New technologies like hybrid seeds, insecticides, pesticides and innovation of new cultivation techniques makes farming more easier and production is increased by such innovations are costly. These techniques and technologies are so easily available to the poor and marginal farmers.

Cutback in agriculture subsidies: The government reduced different types of subsidies due to the fluctuations in the market. Cutback in subsidies and control of fertilizers has adversely affected agriculture. It increase the input cost and made agriculture less profitable. The increasing cost of cultivation with declining returns did not help the farmers to recover the cost of cultivation. The functioning of the federation was collapsed during the last few years. Increasing cost of cultivation with declined returns led to deterioration of the farmers

Educational Reasons: Knowledge and skills of a group of people are transferred from one generation to the next through teaching, training, research and understanding. A right to education has been created and recognized by some jurisdictions. After acquiring these basic abilities education is commonly focused towards individuals gaining necessary knowledge and skills to improve ability to create value and a standard of living for themselves. But the effects of poor condition definitely fall on the farmers education system. Because of poorness farmers cannot provide proper education to their children's. Therefore we see the farmers son becomes farmer and this sequence carry forward generation to generation.

Social reasons: Farmers borrow money from money lenders for cultivating the product. Farmers are always in great need of short- or long-term loans similarly there is also great need of money for farming related activities like digging bore well, pipeline setting purchasing seeds, bees, tractors and others related things to the farm. Bank demands documents are like an ordeal from farmers to sanctions loan but charges interest at the very high rate even after accepting all such adversities natural calamities make a great sabotage to the farm and finally the farmers are totally collapsed because not a single cultivating the product is encased. At last they are left with no option. Due to continuous pressure from money lenders for the payment of loans and their inability to repay the lone complete, farmers to commit suicide.

Fragmentation and subdivision of labour: According to Mahatma Gandhiji "Rural India and agriculture has become handicapped because of division of labour and mind". As predicted by him before 100 years, now it is found to be true that rural development is not possible without integration of labour force.

Religious reasons: In any society there is strong pressure on its members to believe in certain ways and for the farmers some of the pressure comes from within. In all society there are accepted ways of doing things these ways are directly related to the culture. In festival seasons farm distress due to financial crisis. Very few have money to spend. Meanwhile farmer's suicide there are going up as agrarian distress deepens the numbers of farmer's suicide in is mounting.

Basic facilities reasons: Thirumanur, delta farmer facing lack of transport facilities is main obstacle way of efficient marketing. The rural areas are not linked with the market by roads. A lot of agricultural product is wasted due to transport problems. The infrastructure facilities like electricity, safe drinking water, inadequate health facilities, proper food, cloth, shelter and absence of adequate social support infrastructure at the level of the village and district, uncertainty of agricultural enterprise in the region, affects on psychological and physical condition of the farmers. Sometimes they become drug addicted and drunker. All these things attracted heavy diseases and turn them to die.

Individual's reasons: In inorganic farming, farmers are required to spend on costly hybrid B.T. seeds, high prices of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, high irrigation is required till the season ends. Due all these reasons, cost of production increases which requires heavy loan. This burden of loan recovery follows the farmers. Inability to repay the loan leads to suicidal tendencies among the farmers.

Unavailability of labour: Tamil Nadu agriculture is providing seasonal employment. Most of the rural population migrated from rural to urban for earning. Therefore, unavailability of labour is one of the main causes.

Addiction: Most of the farmers are getting themselves addicted to products like Liquor, wine, smoking, drugs, tobacco chewing, cigarettes and Gutka etc. This addiction leads to deadly sickness and ailments which are often fatal. The non-availability of these lead then addicts to depression and as a result many of them commit suicide.

Reduce the Government investment: The investment in agriculture has been drastically reduced policy of minimum mediation. The because of its expenditure of the government in rural development including agriculture, more percentage irrigation, flood control, village industry, energy and transport declined. The rate of capital formation of agriculture came down, growth also was much reduced and the agricultural affecting the lives of farmers very much and they become frustrate and turn towards suicide.

Market system: Government does not provide proper price to the farmer's products which are enhanced difficult situations with high cost of production. Owners of company and Merchants decide price of product but not farmers for their produces. Farmers get exploited in the market which is controlled by brokers and big traders. They do not get proper

price for their produces and they become depressed. There is no place in the market for the farmers who grow traditional crops with higher price. He returns to the village with whatever meager amount after selling the crops. Thus farmers are unable to recover their cost of production. This happens every season continuously de-motivating them to commit suicide.

New changes: Innovation of new technologies, new hybrid seeds, insecticides, pesticides and farm cultivation technologies makes farming more easy and production is increased considerably. But these technologies and innovations are so costly and not affordable to poor, small and marginal farmers. There is an urgent need among the Thirumanur farmer to change their attitude towards suicides. The Government needs to adopt better practices and measures, consult with the field experts and do the needful then it is very difficult to improve the condition of our farmers. Do not forget, a mother feeds the family, a farmer feeds the nation.

Suggestions to Reduce Farmer suicide

- Government could start employment generation programmes on the same lines of MGNREGA to reduce the dependency on agriculture as the sole source of income.
- Provision of relief facilities alone is not sufficient as it has been observed in the case of various states where farmers committed suicides just to avail the benefits of relief packages.
- Media by not should not always blame the Government and create awareness that committing suicide is a crime.
- Agricultural Universities and Line Departments Contingent crop planning with the help of precision farming precipitation.
- Hydroponics can be taken as small trials by exploring local markets Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) must be encouraged in the agricultural sector.
- District wise list of indebted farmers and efforts in retrieved. Stressing them through counselling and other alternative mechanisms should be NABARD and local administration must take control of the situation and play a greater role in curbing farmers' suicides.
- The urban population which is dependent on rural economy for food should try to adopt villages.
- Bank and other financial sector should not exploit the farmers and disgraced for non-repayment of loan.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The government must provide seeds and fertilisers without any delay through cooperative society.
- The government must desalt and deepen all water bodies to store rainwater. They must also construct community ponds for storing excess rainwater.
- The government must also construct check dams, barrages across rivers to regulate water flows.
- The municipalities must treat all sewage water and provide treated water for farming.
- The government must provide low-interest loans and subsidized farm machines to enhance labour productivity in farming and to reduce labour problems.
- Crop insurance is a must for farmers to save them from natural disasters.

- The government must fix minimum prices for all commodities including perishable vegetables like tomatoes and fruits to prevent distress selling.
- The Government should establish storage facilities.
- The Government implement industrialization strategy to increase the agricultural productivity so as to expand the internal demand for intermediate and consumer goods which would generate higher income for the farmers.
- The State Government announced compensation was based on central government's disaster management guidelines. It was not estimated by taking into account of the actual losses incurred by the farmers.
- Educated youngsters coming into this sector and taking up farming with the help of modern technology.
- The government coming out with a law again to regulate groundwater extraction
- The government is promoting collective farming to counter the effects of fragmentation of land holdings.
- The Government should be taken all eligible farmers in PM Kisan scheme to receive 6,000 a year.

CONCLUSION

For the first time in the history of Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly, an exclusive budget for agriculture 2021-22 says that the government is planning to implement a project called 'Kalaingar's Anaithu Grama Oruginantha Velan Valarchi Thittam' in the span of next five years to ensure all the villages of Tamil Nadu attain overall agricultural development and self-sufficiency which would reduce farmer suicides in Tamil Nadu in Future.

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