

Improving Nutrition Through Supermarket Sales

Farming households that sell directly to supermarkets eat more nutritious diets than their counterparts

Study Overview

In order to characterize the impact of direct supermarket sales on the nutrition outcomes of farm households, researchers surveyed more than 500 vegetable-growing households in India's Delhi National Capital region. Heads of household and their spouses were asked to recall 30 days of food consumption, in addition to answering questions related to other variables, such as education and spending levels.

Background

In spite of strong economic growth, malnutrition persists in India, often in the form of "hidden hunger," like micronutrient deficiencies. Such ailments can cause health-related challenges and impede physical and cognitive development. More than two thirds of India's population cannot afford to eat a diet that meets the country's guidelines, and spending on nutrient-rich is particularly low. However, the rapid expansion of supermarkets over the past two decades has brought hope for improved nutrition outcomes. Direct sales to supermarkets can increase farmer incomes and provide stronger incentives to produce high-quality crops.

RESULTS

After analyzing the survey results, researchers found that households that sell directly to supermarkets consumed 44% more vitamin A and 65% more zinc than those that sell through traditional markets. They also found that such households get more protein, iron and zinc from non-cereal sources, meaning they eat more diverse diets.

The income of the farmers selling to supermarkets was nearly 30% higher, suggesting that income gains could play a key role in their households' improved nutrition consumption. The high standards of supermarkets could also play a role, as the researchers found that growers and their families eat some of the vegetables rejected by supermarkets.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Strengthen supermarket-led value chains by facilitating private investments.
- Support the inclusive participation of smallholder farmers in supermarket value chains.

Nuthalapati, C., Beero, S., and Mishra, A., Nutritional Impacts of Direct Selling to Supermarkets: The Case of Farm Households in India, *Agricultural Economics*, Volume 57, Issue 2, March 2026.

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