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Q3

Explain the factors influencing the decision of the farmers on the selection of high value crops in India.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · GS III · 10 marks · Crops, Irrigation and Marketing

Major crops - cropping patterns in various parts of the country; different types of irrigation and irrigation systems; storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints; e-technology in the aid of farmers.

Core demand of the question

- **List the decision factors:** price, water, risk, labour, market, MSP, knowledge
- **Show how they push high-value crops:** horticulture, spices, flowers, dairy-linked fodder
- Keep the farmer as a calculator, not a slogan

Revision summary

High-value crops are horticulture, spices, flowers and similar bets that can earn more than grain.

Farmers weigh expected price and a real buyer against water, labour, credit and the chance of a price crash.

MSP rice and wheat remain the safer default where they exist.

Horticulture tonnage in India has already overtaken foodgrain, which shows the shift is underway.

Policy must cut risk with storage, processing and insurance, not only cheer diversification.

Introduction

A farmer who plants a high-value crop - a grape, a chilli, a floriculture bed, a kinnow - is not being fashionable. She is making a **bet**. The bet is that the extra rupee will beat the extra **risk, water and labour**. India's horticulture output has already overtaken foodgrain in **tonnage** in recent years. That shift is a pile of household decisions.

Body

Price and market

Expected price is the first lever. When tomato or onion spikes, more farmers sow them the next season, which is why the crash follows. **Export** windows (mango, grape, pomegranate, spices) and **urban supermarkets** pull some districts into perennial horticulture. **MSP** still anchors rice and wheat in Punjab-Haryana; where MSP does not exist, the high-value crop must have a **buyer on the phone** - a processor, an FPO, or a trader. Without that, "high value" is a magazine phrase.

Water, soil and climate

Grapes in Nashik, bananas in Andhra, and spices in Kerala follow **rainfall, groundwater and slope**. Drip irrigation made some arid-land horticulture possible; it also **mined aquifers**. A farmer who lacks a well cannot copy a neighbour's orchard. **Climate risk** - untimely rain on a grape, a heat wave on a chilli - is higher than on a hardy millet.

Labour, credit, knowledge, risk

High-value crops are **labour heavy** (picking, grading). Family labour, or a migrant gang, decides the choice. **Credit** for a drip line or a polyhouse is a bank or a scheme (**MIDH**, PMKSY). **Knowledge** - pest, residue, export quality - comes from a private company, an FPO, or luck. **Risk** is why many smallholders still keep a **cereal strip** as insurance.

- **The decision is therefore a bundle: price minus water minus labour minus crash risk**, compared with a known paddy cycle. Policy that wants diversification must buy down that risk (insurance, storage, processing), not only print a horticulture target.

Flow diagram

Farmer decision -> Price and buyer
Farmer decision -> Water climate
Farmer decision -> Labour credit knowledge
Farmer decision -> Crash risk vs MSP grain
Price and buyer -> High value crop

Conclusion

Farmers pick high-value crops when price, a buyer, water and labour line up, and when they can survive a crash. Where MSP and canal paddy are safer, they stay with grain. The calculator is rational.

Facts & figures

Horticulture tonnage

India's horticulture production has in recent years exceeded foodgrain output in million tonnes, led by vegetables and fruits.

MIDH

The Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture, a public support line for orchards, nurseries and post-harvest.

Nashik grapes

A cluster where export price, drip irrigation and contract knowledge pulled farmers into a high-value perennial.