

## CHAPTER III

### PROBLEMS OF MARKETING CONFRONTING FARMERS

Farmers in Block S2 along with farmers from the other blocks in Sekinchan in the marketing of their padi are not free from marketing problems. Problems of marketing are encountered by the farmers at almost all the stages in the marketing process. Discussion of these marketing problems forms the focus of this chapter.

#### Problem of Padi Wastage

Adherence to traditional, inefficient and time-consuming methods of harvesting, threshing and drying has resulted in much padi being wasted which otherwise could have been sold to augment the farmer's income. Throughout Block S2 harvesting, as has already been mentioned, is done by cutting the padi stalks about 6 inches from the ground by means of a saw-edged sickle. The act of cutting the stalks by holding their middle portion and running the sickle through their lower portion a certain amount of force is introduced which results in fully ripe padi being shaken to the ground.

Threshing which is the act of beating the padi stalks repeatedly handful at a time against the rough-surfaced walls of a large wooden tub proves to be a strenuous and monotonous piece of work. Farmers or their hired workers feeling the strain after a few beatings tend to discard the beaten stalks, which, as it frequently happens, still have some padi grains clinging on to them. Anyway, however, meticulously the padi stalks may have been beaten, this method of threshing does not prove to be 100% effective in separating padi from the stalks. Some padi grains are bound to cling to the stalks unbeaten into the tub.

Harvesting and threshing although two separate processes are, however, performed simultaneously. The joint-process of harvesting and threshing as practised by farmers in Block S2 is time-consuming. With the assistance of 4 workers each working from 8 to 10 hours per day, harvesting and threshing of padi in an average plot of 3 acres cannot be accomplished in one day but has to be stretched to as long as one week or more. (The majority of farmers in Block S2 hire 4 workers to assist them in harvesting and threshing). A prolonged period of harvesting has a grave disadvantage to the farmers. A certain amount of padi is lost through being eaten by birds and rodents which could have easily been avoided had a more efficient and speedier method of harvesting and threshing been adopted.

The time-consuming nature of the prevailing methods of

harvesting and threshing occasionally prevents farmers from completing the works of harvesting and threshing in time. All activities of harvesting and threshing must be performed within the period that precedes the rainy season which is relatively short. Otherwise, the processes of harvesting and threshing have to be performed during the rainy season which is occasionally the case with most of the farmers. The works of harvesting and threshing then have to be rushed during the few hours of sunshine and the flooding in the fields makes harvesting and threshing rather difficult. Wastage of padi occurs when the heavy downpour coupled with the strong winds - typical of rain-storms in the equatorial belt - washes away a considerably large amount of padi to the ground. Furthermore, harvesting under rainy conditions makes drying an indispensable process - an additional burden to the farmers' already bagful of burdens.

Inadequate drying facilities is also a factor contributing to wastage in padi. The only drying facilities available to the farmers are the small strips of land in front of their houses which may or may not be covered with cement and unprotected at all from the intrusions of fowls, ducks, dogs and pigs etc. Padi wasted through being eaten by fowls, ducks and pigs etc. accounts for a considerable amount.

#### Problems of Drying and Transport

Use of out-moded traditional drying facilities pose a number of marketing problems to the farmers besides the problem of padi wastage which has just been discussed. The inefficiency of the prevailing method of drying padi is revealed by the fact that the farmer or a member of his family has to keep a constant watch over the padi looking for the slightest signs of approaching rain besides shoeing fowls, ducks, pigs and dogs etc. from eating and urinating on the padi. The slightest signs of approaching rain causes panic among the farmers because of the fact that the padi cannot be promptly sheltered from the rain. The padi grains either have to be swept to form molehills and then covered with roof-like structures made of sime or immediately packed into gunny sacks and stored in the house. Once the rain has stopped and the sun begins to shine again the padi grains have to be spread again to dry. This method of drying padi is problematic to the farmer in that besides being inconvenient it is too demanding of the farmer's time and effort especially in an equatorial type of climate like Malaysia's when the rain stops as suddenly as it starts to fall.

It frequently happens that the act of sheltering the padi from the rain cannot be done in time. What happens then is just the opposite of what it is supposed to be - getting the padi wet instead of getting it dried. The whole process of drying has then to be repeated involving a duplication of work and a delay in the sale of the farmer's padi.

This method of drying apart from being inefficient and labour-intensive (it requires 5 or 6 people to sweep the padi to

form molehills or to pack them into gummy sacks when it starts to rain and the same number of people to spread them again when it begins to shine again) is also time-consuming. With the on and off wetting and drying of the padi it may take days and even weeks to get the padi to contain 13% or less of moisture. Largely due to this factor, farmers feel reluctant to sell "good, clean, dry" padi to the co-operative mill. With all the inconvenience and trouble involved they feel that it is not worth their while to dry their padi properly. As a result they sell padi with a moisture content exceeding 13% and they get paid a flat price of \$13.80 which is well below the government's guaranteed minimum price of \$16.00 per pikul. This, in turn, breeds discontent among the farmers. They feel that they are not getting a square deal, the cultivation of padi is not profitable, the use of the moisture-measuring meter is working to their disadvantage and they feel that they should be left to cultivate whatever crops they like. Thus, they view any programme of the government such as double-cropping or triple-cropping with suspicion and contempt and look upon the government as nothing more than an interfering authority.

In the marketing of padi the service of transport is performed at two stages (a) from the field to the farmer's house and (b) from the farmer's house to the rice-mill. Different means of transportation are used for both the stages; the most popular vehicle used by a majority of farmers in the first stage is the bicycle the popularity of which is declining steadily in favour of light motor-cycles of 150 c.c. or 175 c.c. capacity of Japanese make. Motor-cycles however small or light they may be are, of course, preferable to bicycles for they improve the service of transporting both qualitatively and quantitatively. Speedy transportation of padi from the fields is possible by motor-cycles and more sacks, too, can be transported since more trips can be made to and from the fields in a given period of time. However, as yet only a handful of farmers especially the well-to-do ones have been able to avail themselves to this new service.

For those farmers who hire workers to harvest their padi transportation of padi is not a problem to them because the hired workers are contractually bound by their hire-of-labour contracts to transport the farmers' padi from the fields to their houses. It is only to those farmers who harvest their own padi without the help of hired workers and who still make use of bicycles as a means of transportation that the transportation of padi pose a problem as well as giving rise to other marketing problems.

The number of trips which a farmer can make by bicycle to and from his plot is governed by such factors as (i) the distance between his house and his plot (ii) the conditions of the path or road along which he travels (iii) his physique and age and (iv) the conditions of his bicycle. The number of sacks of padi which he can carry on his bicycle at each trip is, in turn, governed by his experience and dexterity in handling his bicycle.

In view of the above factors most of the farmers who do their own harvesting transport their padi home only once a day when they return home at dusk (the farmers have their lunch in the fields). Although farmers carrying 2 or 3 sacks of padi at the back of their bicycles is a sight that occasionally captures the eye, these are, however, exceptional cases. The majority of farmers owing to a lack of dexterity and experience can only carry one sack of padi at each trip. As a result, padi which have been threshed and packed in gunny sacks but which cannot be transported home for the day are left in sheaves in the fields unprotected from rain beats, pests and thieves.

Due to the many limitations present in the use of bicycle as a means of transportation (e.g. the number of trips that can be made per day and the number of sacks that can be carried at each trip) a farmer learning through trial and error tries to restrict his harvesting to that quantity of padi which can be transported home with his available transport facilities and labour resources. For example, if a farmer assisted by 3 members of his family with his available supply of 4 bicycles can transport 4 sacks of padi a day, will try to harvest padi enough to fill 4 sacks only even though he and 3 other members of his family are capable of harvesting 6 or 7 sacks of padi. They are, therefore, working below full capacity and are prolonging the harvesting period unnecessarily. This makes them face the problem of padi wastage which a prolonged period of harvesting entails as has already been discussed.

Transportation of the farmer's padi from his house to the rice mill is carried out by lorry which is provided free of charge by the rice mill. Under normal circumstances transporting padi to the rice mill does not pose any problem at all. Lorries are made available to the farmer by the co-operative rice mill as soon as it is notified of the farmer's need for lorries. At the most the farmer has to store his padi for one or two days only.

However, when the harvesting season in Sakinchan coincides with that of the other neighbouring villages of Sungai Lemau, Sungai Burong and Pasir Panjang etc. the problem of lorry transport becomes acute as there is a scramble for the limited number of lorries serving these areas. Under such circumstances a farmer finds that he is compelled to store his padi for a few days before he can finally sell it to the co-operative rice mill which results in the emergence of another marketing problem - that of storage.

### The Problem of Storage

The need for storage in the marketing of padi by farmers in Block S2 arises not for the purpose of spreading concentrated production during harvesting over extended periods of relatively stable demand in order to stabilise price but more for the purpose of safe-keeping. Besides the need to store their padi during rainy days and at nights when the padi cannot be exposed to the sun to dry

the farmers also need to store their padi while awaiting the availability of lorries to transport their padi to the co-operative rice mill for sale.

There is a marked absence of adequate storage facilities among the farmers in Block S2. With the exception of a handful of farmers who have storage structures suited for the prevention of rodent damage, insect infestation and quality deterioration through dampness, the majority of the farmers do not have any storage facilities at all. The unavailability of storage facilities compels these farmers to store their padi either at odd places in their house wherever space is available - on the damp earth floor, in the kitchen, in the bed-room - or at any convenient spot outside the house usually alongside a wall where the sacks of padi are stacked up on the bare ground one on top of the other and then covered with two or three sheets of zinc roofing to shelter them from the rain. Apart from its vulnerability to the intrusions of rodents and insects which may inflict damages on the padi, this method of storing padi is also disadvantageous to the farmers in that it affords no protection at all against the penetration of the damp ground moisture and dew into the padi which may increase its moisture content.

#### The Problems of Grading and Pricing

The absence of any form of grading between varieties of padi and within a particular variety constitutes a problem of marketing to the farmers especially to those who are producers of superior quality padi. The provision of a single price for all grades of padi under the prevailing system does not allow for any discrimination between quality-conscious farmers and the "could'nt-care-less" ones. Both groups of farmers are indiscriminately lumped together into a single group and so their padi although differing considerably in quality, fetches the same price. Under a single price system "injustice" is done to the producers of good quality padi as they are paid less than what they should have been paid. On the other hand, producers of poor quality padi benefit from the absence of price differential as they receive more in price than what they should have received for their padi.