

Socio–Economic Conditions and Behaviors of Rice Producers in Meriç Plain (Edirne, Turkey)

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Meriç Plain, with wide land and water resources, is known as “Agriculture Land” and one of the most important agricultural regions of Turkey. This region is the largest rice cultivation area of Turkey and makes great contributions to rice production. In this study, social and economic structures of rice producers living in İpsala, Karpuzlu and Meriç regions were investigated by using some systematic data collection techniques and also a socio – economic assessment was suggested for the region according to the data.

Keywords: West Thrace Region of Turkey, Rice Producers, Socio–Economic Assessment

Meriç Ovasındaki (Edirne, Türkiye) Pirinç Üreticilerinin Sosyo-Ekonomik Koşulları ve Davranışları

Geniş arazi ve su kaynaklarına sahip olan Meriç Ovası, "Tarım Arazisi" olarak bilinir ve Türkiye'nin en önemli tarım bölgelerinden biri olarak kabul edilir. Bu bölge Türkiye'nin en büyük pirinç tarımı alanını oluşturmaktadır ve pirinç üretimine büyük katkı sağlamaktadır. Bu çalışmada, İpsala, Karpuzlu ve Meriç bölgelerinde yaşayan pirinç üreticilerinin sosyal ve ekonomik yapıları sistematik veri toplama teknikleri kullanılarak araştırılmış ve elde edilen verilere göre bölge için bir sosyo-ekonomik değerlendirme önerilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türkiye'nin Batı Trakya Bölgesi, Pirinç Üreticileri, Sosyo-Ekonomik Değerlendirme

Introduction

Meriç Plain, which is being irrigated from Meriç River and its tributaries, is the largest and most productive agricultural land of Thrace Region of Turkey. Lower Basin of Meriç River has very productive agricultural lands in Turkey and 95% of the basin (1,223,263 hectares) is suitable for agriculture. Rice production is made in 31 provinces of Turkey, but Edirne Province takes the first place (TZOB, 2003; Arda et al., 2014; Tokatlı, 2015).

In this study, social and economic structures of rice producers living in İpsala, Meriç and Karpuzlu districts were investigated by using some

systematic quantitative data collection techniques and a socio – economic assessment was suggested for the region according to data.

Material And Method

Meriç Plain is located on the down side of Meriç River Basin and İpsala District, Meriç District and Karpuzlu Town are located on the west side of Edirne almost parallel to the border of Greece (Figure 1).

It is known that survey technique is one of the most effective techniques for quantitative evaluation of data (Tokatlı and Gürbüz, 2014;

Tokatlı and Gürbüz, 2015; Helvacioğlu et al., 2015). Therefore, the techniques were used to assess the social and economic structures of rice producers in three important rice producing areas of Meriç Plain including İpsala, Meriç and Karpuzlu. In order to ensure the objectivity of the

results, randomly selected total of 134 rice producer dispersed in terms of investigated different regions (41 from İpsala District, 60 from Meriç District and 33 from Karpuzlu Town) were used in the present investigation.

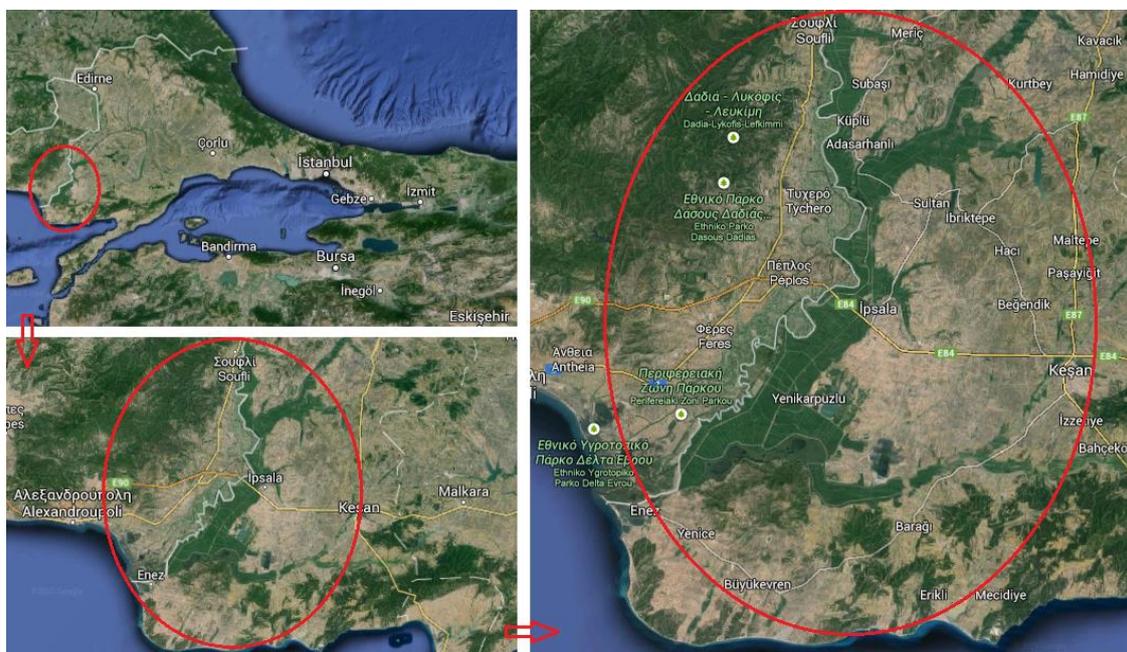


Figure 1. Meriç Plain

Results And Discussion

Rice is mainly produced by transplanting method, direct seeding with sowing machine or broadcast seeding method. In our country, the production is mostly performed by broadcast seeding with hands (Arın,1987; 1990). So, rice producers face many difficulties and it is important to analyze the social and economic conditions of rice producers. In this study, some questions were directed to the rice producers living in İpsala, Meriç and Karpuzlu as given in Table 1 and the results of the quantitative data collection technique was analyzed as given in Figure 2 – 12.

Agricultural production has a big importance for countries' rural policies and the scope of agricultural production policy is so broad. Interventions to the structure of the company by using an appropriate land policy, the planning of agricultural production and implementation of this plan, dissemination of education and technical improvements in agricultural sector, some precautions such as increasing input use or

supporting agricultural production with financial credits, all can be considered as agricultural production policy (Eraktan, 1988; 1989).

Table 1. Questions directed to the rice producers

No. of questions	Questions
1.	What is your marital status?
2.	What is your educational status?
3.	Where do you live?
4.	Do you want your children to continue the same profession?
5.	Where do you ask to sell your production?
6.	Which cooperatives are you registered on?
7.	Which people do you want to see on the cooperative management?
8.	Where do you sell your production?
9.	Do you have another source of income?

In Turkey, “Soil Products Office” is an effective tool used by the government to apply the agricultural production policies mentioned above. “Soil Products Office” entered rice market with a small amount of rice purchases for the first time in 1959 and continued through 1960, and stopped in 1961. Rice purchase was resumed once again in 1966 and continued through 1967, however during following years, rice purchase was stopped and preference was given to purchase of paddy instead (Güneş, 1971; 1980; 1996).

The “Soil Products Office” in Turkey used pricing policies effectively in the process of purchasing paddy or rice. Pricing policy is the sum of all precautions applied for affecting the existence of free price in the economy and protecting both producers and consumers by getting price stabilization. Although short-term pricing policy is often in practice, long-term pricing policy is more effective in economic stability and protection by consumers and farmers (İnan, 1992; 1998).

To protect consumers and farmers, first and foremost, the socio-economic conditions of these farmers should be known properly. Thus, in our study, some questions were directed to the producers about their social and economic conditions. In the first question, it was asked to the rice producers whether they are married, single or widow (divorced) to analyze the marital status as seen in the Figure 2 below, a large number of replies (92%) was in positive. We can assume that most of the producers have families and are old enough to marry, which suggests that most of the rice producers are not very young.

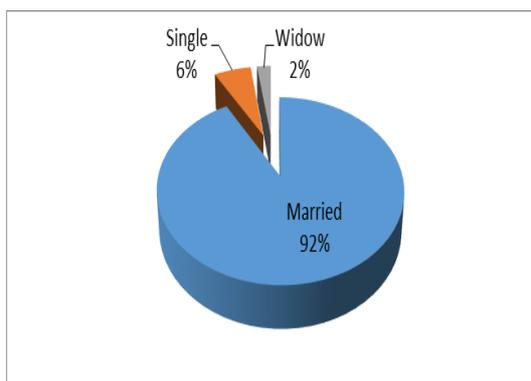


Figure 2. Frequencies of the answers for 1st question

In Figure 3, we see the results about the educational status of the participants in survey. The results are so interesting, because when we analyze the pie chart below, we can see that only

10% of the participants are educated more than middle school (secondary school). And unfortunately, none of those graduated from university, that means most of the educated farmers are only high school graduated. This shows that, rice producers in Meriç plain do not give importance to education.

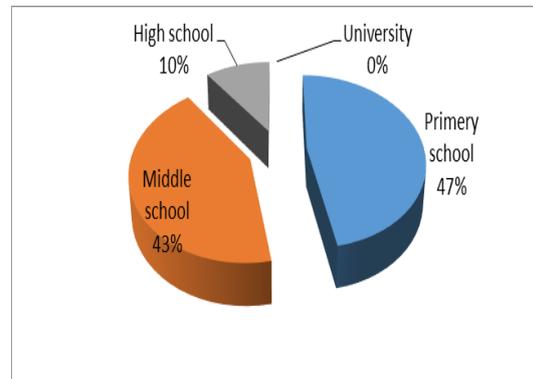


Figure 3. Frequencies of the answers for 2nd question

In reply to third question, as seen in Figure 4, the results showed that only 28% of farmers lived in rural areas and rest of the 72% lived in towns or had habitations both in villages and towns. From socio-economic point of view, we can say that, though rice producers gain their economic income from paddy growing in rural areas; they do not prefer to live in those rural areas because of social needs. Cities come more attractive to the rice producers because of life standards.

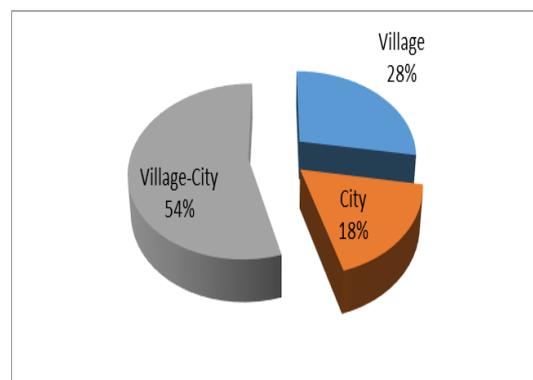


Figure 4. Frequencies of the answers for 3rd question

In figure 5, we can see the answers of the third question according to regions, because in this question, regions are quite distinct from each other. When we analyse the results according to

regions, we can see that rice producers in Meriç district prefer to live in only villages (81,67%) and those prefer to live in just cities are only 5% in Meriç district. The percentage of producers preferring to live in just cities in Karpuzlu town is also similar with Meriç district, that is only 6,06%. However, İpsala district is different from these 2 regions. In İpsala, 43,9% of the producers prefer to live in just cities, and those preferring to live in villages are only 26,83%. So, we can say that, especially in İpsala, producers are not happy to live in villages and they mostly prefer to live in cities.

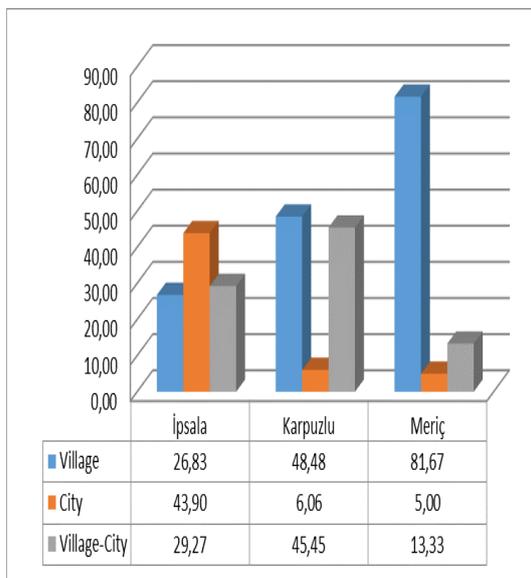


Figure 5. Frequencies of the answers for 3rd question according to regions

If we analyze first three questions collectively, we see that most of the rice producers are married, but they prefer to live in cities with their families and despite the desire to live in cities, they do not desire to be educated (at least for themselves, we cannot generalize for the whole family).

In the 4th question, it was asked to the answerers whether they want their children to continue the same profession (same occupation) and results are given in Figure 6. The results are again interesting; because most of the participants (54%) do not desire their children to continue the same profession that is paddy cultivation. 16% of the participants are unstable (indecisive) and only 30% of the participants desire their children to continue paddy cultivation. That means rice producers in our region are not happy from paddy

cultivation and are not happy to live in villages too, as seen in the previous question.

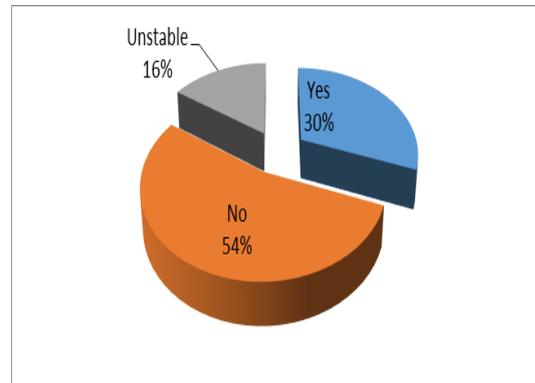


Figure 6. Frequencies of the answers for 4th question

In the 5th question, we asked where they sell their production, in order to understand whose advice is important for them. Unfortunately, results are really threatening. As seen in Figure 7 below, 54% of the participants replied “I do not consult anyone”. Participants choosing to ask their family became 28% and choosing to ask a friend became 17%, whereas choosing to ask a district director of agriculture becomes just 1%. That shows us that, rice producers in Meriç plain do not give any importance to education and confidence on an expert opinion. This also shows loopholes in government sector that has resulted in loss to expert opinion among people.

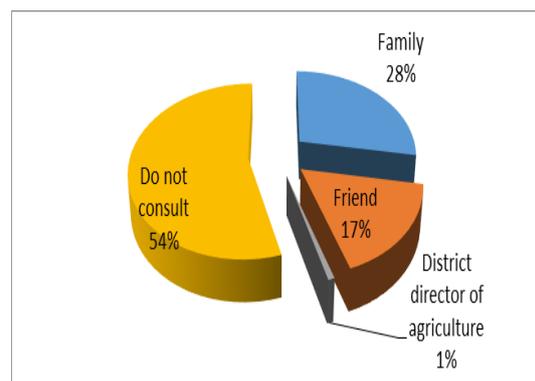


Figure 7. Frequencies of the answers for 5th question

In the 6th question, we asked to the participants “Which cooperatives are you registered on” and took the results shown in Figure 8. Interesting data in this question is those saying “No one”, since their percentage is 11%. This does not seem

a big percentage at the first sight, but if we think about the obligation and necessity of being a cooperative member in the agriculture sector, we may clearly say that, this percentage is high.

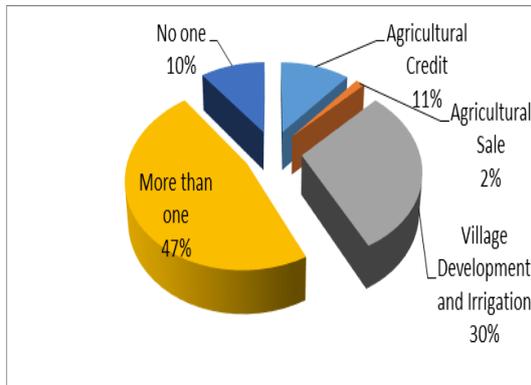


Figure 8. Frequencies of the answers for 6th question

In Figure 9, the frequencies of the answers for the sixth question is given according to regions in order to show that answers in İpsala is again different from other regions. When we analyze the answers according to regions, we see that, the percentage of saying “No one” in İpsala district is 24,39%; whereas this number is 9,09% in Karpuzlu and only 1,67% in Meriç district. This is the second deviation of İpsala from other regions. Comparing with other regions, producers in İpsala do not desire to live in villages and do not desire to be a member of any cooperative. These are not good results for people gaining their economic income from agricultural activities.

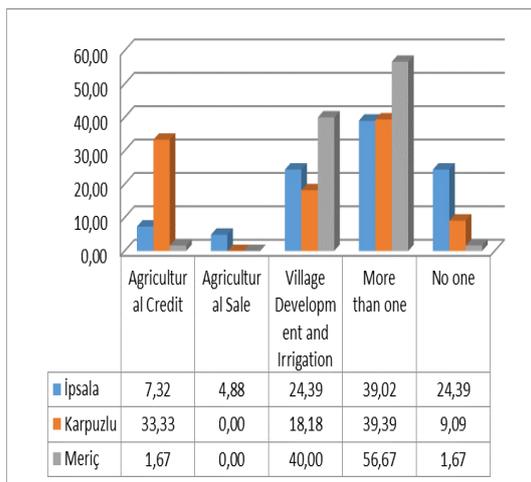


Figure 9. Frequencies of the answers for 6th question according to regions

Actually, this situation in İpsala is not so different from general of Turkey. Because, in developing countries such as Turkey, agricultural cooperative activities has not reached the desired level yet. There are many factors leading to the failure of cooperatives. These are sometimes economic reasons like insufficient management or insufficient operating capital and business volume, and sometimes reasons like legal restrictions, lack of education, dishonest managers, voluntary disintegrations or shifting to ideological and political areas (İnan, 1992; 1998).

In the 7th question, it was asked to participants who, want to see in the cooperative management, and the results were listed in Figure 10. Today, in developed countries, where agricultural activities are organized at advanced level, producers may often be effective in the decisions concerning with their living conditions (Gaytancıoğlu, 1997). We can see such a desire in our study area, because most popular answer is “rice producers” with 60%, which means rice producers desire to see themselves in cooperative managements and desire to be more effective in the decisions. The second popular answer is “I have no idea” with 24%. Participants who want to see district director of agriculture is only 15% and participants who want to see district governor in cooperative managements is only 1%. As understood in the most popular answer, rice producers want to see “themselves” in cooperative management, besides official or government personals.

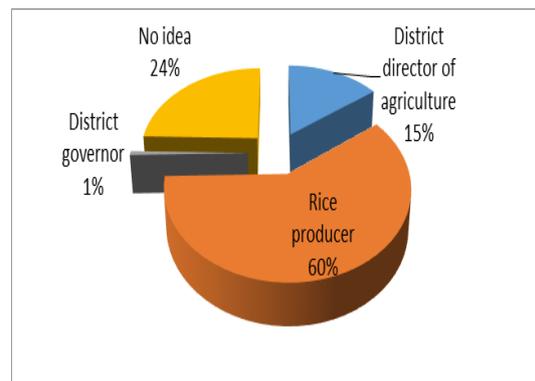


Figure 10. Frequencies of the answers for 7th question

In Figure 11, you see the results as a pie chart according to the question “Where do you sell your production?” What’s interesting about the answers is, those saying “I sell my production to “Soil Products Office”” are only 9%; whereas

choosing to sell the production to a factory is 57% and to a trader is 34%. If we analyze these answers, we can see likewise the answers in the previous question that, rice producers do not trust government institutions or personals. They don't want to see government personals in cooperative managements and they also do not want to sell their products to the governmental institutions, they choose private sector like factories or traders to sell their product. This indicates a lack of confidence among producers and governmental economic executives.

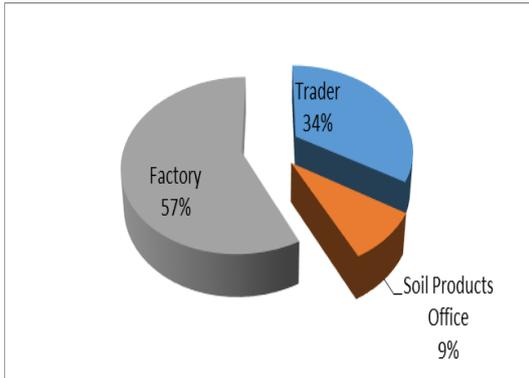


Figure 11. Frequencies of the answers for 8th question

In the last question, the participants were asked whether they had any other source of income or not. And as seen in Figure 12, 63% of the participants said "No" while only 37% of them said "Yes, I also have another source of income". If we consider about the previous questions and answers, we can see that this result is again so interesting. Because, those living in only villages were just 28%, but those gaining economic income only from rice production is 63%. As similar, when participants were asked "Do you want your children to continue the same profession?", only 30% of the participants had replied "Yes"; but we see that 63% of them have no other economic source of income. Likewise, in the question about educational status, we had seen that only 10% of the participants were educated higher than secondary school. That means, most of the rice producers in Meriç Plain have only one source of income (rice production); but they don't want to live in villages, they don't want their children to continue this profession, they don't want to be more educated, but they want to live in cities.

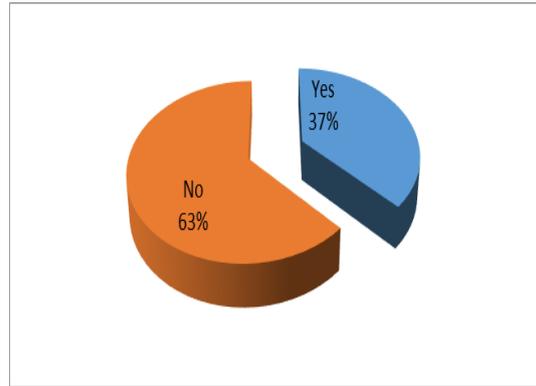


Figure 12. Frequencies of the answers for 9th question

Conclusion

Meriç Plain, where involves Meriç District, İpsala District and Karpuzlu Town, is known with wide natural water resources and fertile lands, especially for rice cultivation. Most of the people living in this region gain their economic income from rice production; if they have paddy lands, directly, if they don't, indirectly, by working in rice cultivation or rice milling factories. So, in this study, in order to examine socio-economic conditions and behaviors of rice producers, some questions were asked to the producers living in Meriç Plain and tried to analyze the region in a socio-economic way.

The first three questions were about the marital status, educational status and living place of the rice producers. When we analyze the answers for the first three questions, as stated in previous sections, we see that most of the rice producers are married and have a family, but they prefer to live in cities with their families and despite the desire to live in cities, their education level is so much poor (only 10% of the participants are more educated than just secondary school). And in the following questions, we see that 63% of the participants have only one economic source of income and this is just rice production. What's interesting is, although people in Meriç Plain are mostly depended on rice production from economic way, they don't seem so happy from this situation, they don't want their children to continue this profession, they don't want to live in villages or near the rice lands, they desire to live in cities and find another way of earning income, at least for their children. Actually, rice production is relatively more profitable than other agricultural

activities, but the problem does not seem economic, the problem seems social, they don't want to be in agricultural sector and live in villages, this seems about social needs.

According to the answers given, it is understood that there is a lack of confidence between the rice producers and governmental institutions or personalities. In the agricultural sector in Turkey, farmers mostly choose to sell their products to governmental institutions, but in Meriç Plain, we see that rice producers prefer to sell their products to private sector, like factories or traders. In another question, the participants mostly declared that they desired to see rice producers in cooperative managements, not any governmental personalities. And when asked who they consulted while selling their products, only 1% of the participants declared they consulted district director of agriculture. And what's interesting is, most of the participants declared that "I do not consult anyone". All these data show us that, rice producers in Meriç Plain do not trust governmental intuitions, but if they mostly choose not to consult anyone, and if 90% of the producers are educated less than high school, the problem is not only about the lack of confidence, but the problem is also about exaggerated self-confidence which causes from inadequate education. Rice is a very important agricultural and economical product and it should be produced in more specialized and educated hands. So, government should win the trust of rice producers as soon as possible and hold conferences with broad participation both to win the trust and to educate rice producers and should try to gain the optimum level of specialization by taking the most effective result in both rice production and selling amounts.

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