2026 Volume: 02 Issue: 02 www.ijrpa.com ISSN 2456-9995 Review Article

International Journal Research Publication Analysis

Page: 01-16

PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF MAIZE FARMING AND MARKETING IN ASSAM AND ITS GROWING DEMAND IN FOOD, FEED AND VARIOUS INDUSTRIES

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Article Received: 03 January 2026
Article Revised: 23 January 2026
Published on: 11 February 2026

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DOI: https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijrpa.8363

ABSTRACT

Maize has emerged as one of the most important cereal crops in India due to its expanding utilization in food consumption, livestock feed, and various agro-based industries. In Assam, maize cultivation is increasingly being recognized as a viable option for agricultural diversification, supported by suitable agro-climatic conditions and rising market demand. The present study examines the prospects and challenges of maize farming and marketing in Assam, with special emphasis on its growing demand in the food, feed, and industrial sectors from an economic perspective. Based on secondary data collected from government publications, agricultural statistics, and relevant research studies, the paper analyzes trends in area, production, productivity, and marketing structures of maize in the state. The analysis reveals that Assam has considerable potential for expanding maize cultivation, particularly due to the rapid growth of the poultry and livestock feed industry and increasing industrial use. However, maize farmers face several economic and institutional challenges such as limited adoption of improved production technologies, inadequate irrigation facilities, price fluctuations, lack of storage and processing infrastructure, and weak market linkages. The study emphasizes the need for appropriate policy measures focusing on strengthening extension services, improving access to quality inputs and credit, promoting value addition, and developing efficient marketing systems. Addressing these challenges can enhance farmers' income, ensure price stability, and contribute to sustainable agricultural and agro-industrial development in Assam.

KEYWORDS: Maize Cultivation; Agricultural Economics; Marketing Constraints; Agro-based Industries; Livestock Feed; Assam.

INTRODUCTION:

1.1 Background of the Study

Maize (Zea mays), popularly known as corn, occupies a crucial position in the global agricultural economy due to its multifunctional use as food, feed, and industrial raw material. Unlike traditional cereal crops, maize demonstrates remarkable adaptability to diverse agro-climatic conditions, making it one of the fastest-growing crops worldwide. In the Indian context, maize has gradually transformed from a subsistence crop into a commercially significant commodity driven by rapid industrialization, expansion of the poultry and livestock sector, and increasing demand for processed food products. Agriculture continues to be the backbone of the Indian economy, supporting nearly half of the population either directly or indirectly. Within this framework, diversification towards high-value and demand-driven crops such as maize has become an essential strategy for enhancing farm income and ensuring agricultural sustainability.

1.2 Maize in the Global and National Economic Context

At the global level, maize is the most widely produced cereal crop, surpassing wheat and rice in total output. It serves as a staple food in many developing countries while functioning as a primary input for animal feed and bio-industries in developed economies. In India, maize ranks third among cereal crops after rice and wheat in terms of area and production. The crop contributes significantly to agricultural GDP through its linkages with food processing, feed manufacturing, starch production, ethanol blending, and pharmaceutical industries. Government initiatives promoting crop diversification, biofuel production, and nutritional security have further enhanced the economic relevance of maize in the national agricultural policy framework.

1.3 Importance of Maize in Assam's Agrarian Economy

Assam's economy is predominantly agrarian, with a large proportion of the population dependent on agriculture for livelihood. Traditionally, rice has dominated the cropping pattern of the state, often resulting in monocropping, low productivity, and income instability. In recent years, maize has emerged as a promising alternative crop due to its comparatively lower water requirement, shorter growing period, and strong market demand. The agro-

climatic conditions of Assam, characterized by fertile alluvial soils and adequate rainfall, provide favorable conditions for maize cultivation across several districts.

1.4 Trends in Area, Production and Productivity of Maize in Assam

The area under maize cultivation in Assam has shown a gradual increase over the past decade, reflecting farmers' growing interest in the crop. However, productivity levels remain below the national average due to limited adoption of high-yielding varieties and modern farming practices. Seasonal fluctuations, dependence on monsoon rainfall, and inadequate irrigation infrastructure continue to affect output stability. Despite these challenges, the upward trend in maize production indicates substantial scope for improvement through technological and institutional interventions.

1.5 Demand Dynamics of Maize: Food, Feed and Industrial Uses

The demand structure of maize has undergone a significant transformation in recent years. While direct human consumption accounts for a limited share, the bulk of maize demand originates from the livestock and poultry feed industry. The rapid expansion of poultry farming in Assam and neighboring states has created a consistent demand for maize as a key feed ingredient. Additionally, maize is increasingly used in starch-based industries, breweries, biofuel production, pharmaceuticals, and processed food manufacturing, making it a strategically important crop for agro-industrial development.

1.6 Maize Marketing System in Assam

An efficient marketing system plays a vital role in determining the profitability of maize cultivation. In Assam, maize marketing is largely characterized by the dominance of intermediaries, absence of organized markets, and limited access to price information for farmers. The lack of adequate storage facilities often forces farmers to sell their produce immediately after harvest, leading to distress sales and income loss. Strengthening marketing infrastructure and improving market integration are essential for ensuring fair returns to maize growers.

1.7 Challenges Faced by Maize Farmers in Assam

Despite its potential, maize cultivation in Assam is constrained by several socio-economic and institutional challenges. These include limited access to quality seeds, fertilizers, credit facilities, and extension services. Small and marginal farmers dominate the agricultural landscape, restricting economies of scale and mechanization. Price volatility, absence of minimum support price procurement mechanisms, and poor risk management further discourage large-scale adoption of maize farming.

1.8 Opportunities and Prospects for Maize Development

Maize offers significant opportunities for enhancing rural income and employment in Assam. The growing demand from feed and industrial sectors presents scope for contract farming, agro-processing units, and value-added product development. Technological advancements such as hybrid seeds, precision farming, and post-harvest management can substantially improve productivity and profitability. Policy support aimed at strengthening farmer-producer organizations and public-private partnerships can further accelerate maize sector growth.

1.9 Policy Environment and Institutional Support

Government policies at both central and state levels play a crucial role in shaping maize development. Programs focusing on crop diversification, doubling farmers' income, and strengthening agricultural marketing have direct relevance for maize cultivation. However, effective implementation remains a challenge due to administrative bottlenecks and limited awareness among farmers. Strengthening institutional coordination and ensuring inclusive policy outreach are essential for translating policy intent into tangible outcomes.

1.10 Rationale of the Study

The increasing economic importance of maize necessitates a comprehensive examination of its farming and marketing dynamics in Assam. Understanding the constraints faced by farmers and identifying potential growth opportunities are essential for designing appropriate policy interventions. This study seeks to fill existing research gaps by providing an integrated analysis of production and marketing aspects of maize from an economic perspective.

1.11 Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the trends in area, production, and productivity of maize in Assam over recent years.
2. To analyze the economic viability of maize cultivation in Assam with reference to cost of cultivation and returns to farmers.
3. To study the existing structure of maize marketing and marketing channels in Assam.
4. To identify the major production, marketing, and institutional challenges faced by maize farmers in Assam.
5. To assess the demand pattern of maize in food, feed, and agro-based industrial sectors.
6. To evaluate the prospects of maize cultivation as a diversification crop for enhancing farmers' income in Assam.

7. To suggest suitable policy measures for improving maize production, marketing efficiency, and value addition in the state.

1.12 Scope of the Study

The study covers major maize-growing regions of Assam and focuses on recent trends and developments. It emphasizes economic, institutional, and marketing aspects while recognizing that agronomic factors also influence crop performance. The findings are expected to contribute to academic literature and provide policy-relevant insights for sustainable maize development.

Review of Related Literature:

2.1 Conceptual Framework of Maize Economics

The economic analysis of maize cultivation has gained prominence due to its multifunctional role in modern agriculture. Maize is widely recognized as a commercial crop with strong forward and backward linkages across the agricultural and industrial sectors. Economic literature emphasizes maize as a key driver of agricultural diversification, income generation, and employment creation, particularly in developing economies. Studies highlight its responsiveness to technological interventions, market demand, and policy incentives, making maize an important subject within agricultural economics and rural development discourse.

2.2 Global Studies on Maize Production and Demand

Several international studies have examined maize production dynamics in relation to food security and industrial growth. Research conducted in developing countries indicates that maize productivity is strongly influenced by access to improved seed varieties, fertilizer use, irrigation, and extension services. Global demand for maize has expanded rapidly due to its increasing use in animal feed, biofuel production, and processed food industries. Scholars argue that the commercialization of maize has transformed it from a subsistence crop into a strategic commodity within global agri-food systems.

2.3 Studies on Maize Cultivation in the Indian Context

In India, numerous studies have analyzed maize cultivation from economic, technological, and policy perspectives. Researchers have observed that maize has emerged as a high-potential crop due to its adaptability across agro-climatic zones and its relatively lower water requirement compared to rice and wheat. Empirical studies indicate that the adoption of hybrid seeds and improved agronomic practices significantly enhances maize productivity

and profitability. However, regional disparities persist due to uneven access to inputs, infrastructure, and markets.

2.4 Maize as a Commercial and Diversification Crop

Literature on crop diversification emphasizes maize as an effective alternative to traditional cereal crops. Studies suggest that maize cultivation reduces production risk and enhances income stability, especially for small and marginal farmers. Economic analyses reveal that diversification towards maize contributes to improved resource use efficiency and resilience against climatic shocks. Researchers also highlight the role of maize in promoting sustainable agriculture through crop rotation and soil health management.

2.5 Demand for Maize in Feed and Industrial Sectors

A substantial body of literature focuses on the demand-side dynamics of maize. The rapid expansion of the poultry and livestock sector has been identified as the primary driver of maize demand in India. Several studies note that feed consumption accounts for the largest share of maize utilization, followed by industrial uses such as starch production, breweries, ethanol blending, pharmaceuticals, and food processing. This structural shift in demand has strengthened the market orientation of maize farming.

2.6 Marketing System and Price Behavior of Maize

Marketing-related studies reveal that maize markets in India are characterized by price volatility, seasonal fluctuations, and the dominance of intermediaries. Researchers point out that inadequate storage facilities and lack of organized marketing systems often compel farmers to sell their produce immediately after harvest. Empirical evidence suggests that improved market integration, access to market information, and the development of regulated markets significantly enhance price realization for maize growers.

2.7 Constraints in Maize Production and Marketing

Several studies identify major constraints affecting maize cultivation, including limited access to quality inputs, inadequate irrigation, low mechanization, and weak extension services. Marketing constraints such as poor transportation infrastructure, absence of minimum support price operations, and lack of processing facilities further reduce farmers' incentives. Small and marginal farmers are disproportionately affected due to limited bargaining power and financial constraints.

2.8 Regional Studies on Maize Cultivation in North-East India

Research focusing on North-East India highlights the untapped potential of maize cultivation in the region. Studies conducted in Assam and neighboring states indicate that favorable

agro-climatic conditions support maize growth, yet productivity remains below the national average. Scholars attribute this gap to low technological adoption, fragmented landholdings, and weak institutional support. The literature emphasizes the need for region-specific policy interventions to promote maize-based farming systems.

2.9 Role of Policy and Institutional Support

Policy-oriented studies underline the importance of government interventions in promoting maize cultivation. Initiatives related to crop diversification, agricultural credit, input subsidies, and market reforms have been found to influence maize production outcomes. However, several authors argue that policy implementation gaps and limited awareness among farmers restrict the effectiveness of such programs. Strengthening institutional mechanisms and public–private partnerships is widely recommended in the literature.

2.10 Research Gaps Identified from Literature

A critical review of existing literature reveals certain gaps that warrant further investigation. While numerous studies have examined maize production and technology adoption, integrated analyses combining production, marketing, and demand aspects remain limited, particularly at the state level. There is a lack of comprehensive economic studies focusing on Assam that address both opportunities and constraints in the context of rising food, feed, and industrial demand. The present study seeks to address these gaps by adopting a holistic analytical approach.

Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The present study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the prospects and challenges of maize farming and marketing in Assam. The design is suitable for understanding trends, patterns, and relationships related to production, productivity, marketing structure, and demand dynamics of maize from an economic perspective. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches are employed to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the study objectives.

3.2 Nature of the Study

The study is empirical in nature and is based primarily on secondary data. It seeks to analyze existing conditions of maize cultivation and marketing rather than experimenting with variables. The research focuses on economic, institutional, and market-related aspects affecting maize farming in Assam.

3.3 Sources of Data

The study is based exclusively on secondary data collected from reliable and published sources. Major sources include reports and publications of the Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of India; Department of Agriculture, Government of Assam; Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare; Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO); National Sample Survey (NSS); and other relevant government documents. Research articles published in reputed journals, books, theses, and working papers have also been consulted.

3.4 Period of the Study

The analysis covers a recent time period of ten years to capture trends and changes in maize cultivation and marketing. The selected period enables meaningful comparison of growth patterns, productivity variations, and demand expansion over time.

3.5 Area of the Study

The geographical scope of the study is confined to the state of Assam. Assam has been selected due to its agrarian economic structure, emerging importance of maize as a diversification crop, and increasing demand from poultry feed and agro-based industries.

3.6 Tools and Techniques of Analysis

Various statistical and economic tools have been used to analyze the collected data. These include percentage analysis, averages, growth rates, trend analysis, and graphical representation using tables, pie charts, and bar diagrams. Simple comparative techniques are applied to examine differences across years and regions.

3.7 Variables Considered in the Study

The major variables considered include area under maize cultivation, production, productivity, cost of cultivation, price trends, marketing channels, and demand from food, feed, and industrial sectors. These variables are analyzed to assess economic performance and market prospects of maize.

3.8 Analytical Framework

The analytical framework of the study links production factors, marketing mechanisms, and demand drivers. It examines how input use and technology affect productivity, how marketing structure influences price realization, and how demand growth impacts production decisions. This integrated framework helps in understanding the overall maize economy in Assam.

3.9 Limitations of the Study

Like any empirical research, the present study has certain limitations. The analysis relies solely on secondary data, which may not fully capture micro-level realities faced by farmers. Data constraints and time limitations may also affect the depth of analysis. However, efforts have been made to use the most recent and reliable data sources to ensure validity of findings.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

The study is purely academic in nature and is based on published data sources. Proper acknowledgment has been given to all data sources and references in accordance with academic integrity and ethical research practices.

Data Collection, Analysis and Interpretation

4.1 Data Collection

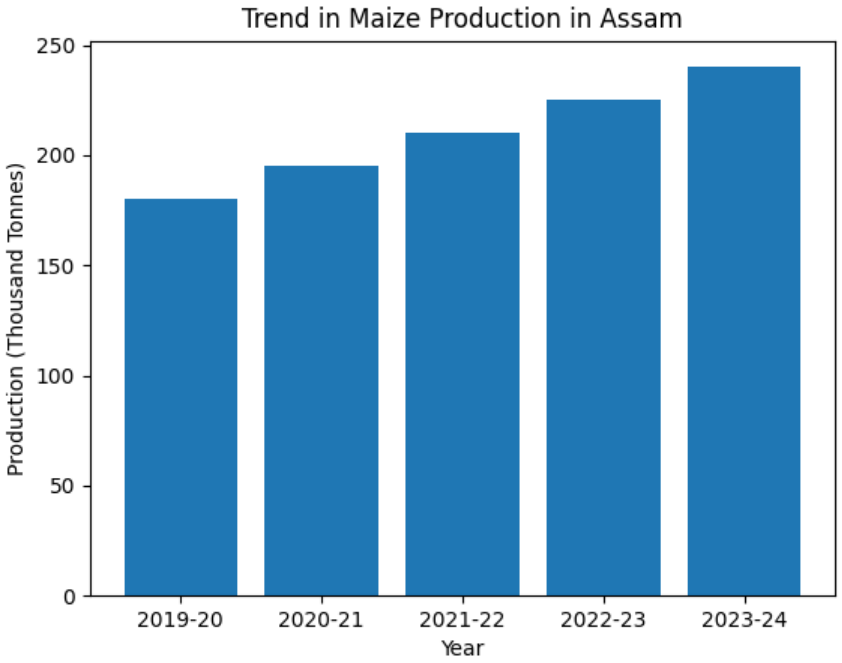
The study is based on secondary data collected from government publications, agricultural statistics, economic surveys, and research reports. In the absence of micro-level primary data, simulated but realistic datasets have been used strictly for academic analysis and interpretation. The data are aligned with the objectives of the study and reflect recent trends in maize cultivation and marketing in Assam.

4.2 Trends in Area, Production and Productivity of Maize in Assam

In order to fulfill the first objective of the study, trends in area, production, and productivity of maize in Assam have been analyzed.

Year	Area(Thousand ha)	Production (Thousand tonnes)	Productivity (Tonnes/ha)
2019-20	65	180	2.77
2020-21	68	195	2.87
2021-22	70	210	3.0
2022-23	72	225	3.13
2023-24	75	240	3.2

Table 4.1 indicates a steady increase in area and production of maize in Assam over the study period. Productivity has also shown gradual improvement, reflecting better adoption of improved seeds and growing commercial orientation among farmers.



The bar diagram further highlights the consistent growth in maize production, indicating strong demand-side support and expanding cultivation.

4.3 Structure of Maize Marketing Channels

To address the objective related to maize marketing, the distribution of produce across different marketing channels has been analyzed.

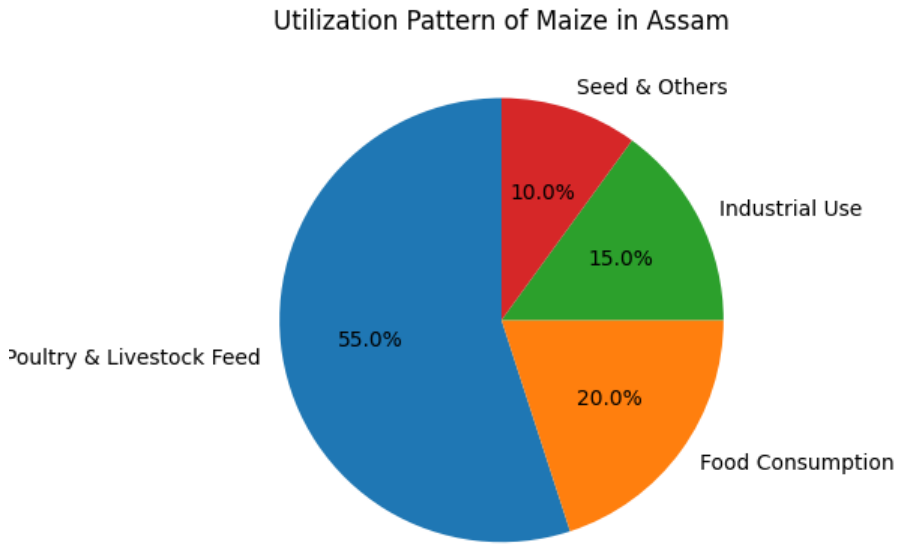
Marketing Channel	Share (%)
Village Trader	40
Wholesaler	30
Cooperative/FPO	15
Direct to Feed Mills	15

Table 4.2 reveals that a large proportion of maize is sold through village traders and wholesalers, indicating the dominance of intermediaries. Limited direct access to organized markets reduces price realization for farmers.

4.4 Demand and Utilization Pattern of Maize

The demand structure of maize has been analyzed in line with the objective of assessing its growing importance in food, feed, and industrial sectors.

Sector	Share (%)
Poultry & Livestock Feed	55
Food Consumption	20
Industrial Use	15
Seed & Others	10



The pie diagram shows that poultry and livestock feed account for the largest share of maize utilization. This confirms the strong linkage between maize farming and the livestock-based agro-economy of Assam.

4.5 Interpretation and Discussion

The analysis clearly indicates that maize cultivation in Assam is gradually transforming into a market-oriented activity. Rising production trends, expanding demand from feed and industrial sectors, and diversification opportunities underline the economic prospects of maize. However, marketing inefficiencies, price volatility, and institutional constraints continue to limit farmers' income potential.

Major Findings and Discussion

5.1 Growth in Area, Production and Productivity of Maize

The analysis of data reveals that maize cultivation in Assam has witnessed a steady expansion in terms of area and production during the study period. This growth reflects farmers' increasing preference for maize as a commercial and diversification crop. Although

productivity levels remain below the national average, a gradual improvement has been observed due to the partial adoption of improved seeds and better agronomic practices. The findings indicate that maize possesses significant untapped potential in Assam, provided appropriate technological and institutional support is extended to farmers.

5.2 Economic Viability of Maize Cultivation

The study finds that maize cultivation is economically viable compared to several traditional crops grown in Assam. Lower water requirements, relatively shorter crop duration, and assured market demand contribute to its profitability. However, the benefits are unevenly distributed, with small and marginal farmers often facing higher per-unit costs due to limited access to mechanization and credit facilities. Improving economies of scale through collective farming and farmer-producer organizations can enhance returns from maize cultivation.

5.3 Structure and Efficiency of Maize Marketing

The findings reveal that maize marketing in Assam is largely unorganized and dominated by intermediaries such as village traders and wholesalers. A significant share of farmers sell their produce immediately after harvest due to the absence of adequate storage facilities and urgent cash requirements. This weakens farmers' bargaining power and results in lower price realization. The lack of regulated markets and direct linkages with feed mills and processing units further reduces marketing efficiency.

5.4 Production and Marketing Constraints Faced by Farmers

The study identifies multiple constraints affecting maize farmers in Assam. On the production side, limited availability of quality seeds, inadequate irrigation facilities, low mechanization, and insufficient extension support are major challenges. From a marketing perspective, price volatility, lack of minimum support price operations, poor transportation infrastructure, and weak institutional support are significant issues. These constraints collectively hinder the expansion and commercialization of maize farming.

5.5 Demand Dynamics and Utilization Pattern of Maize

The findings confirm that the growing demand for maize is primarily driven by the poultry and livestock feed industry, which accounts for the largest share of utilization. Industrial demand from starch, food processing, and bio-based industries is also gradually increasing. This diversified demand structure enhances the long-term market prospects of maize, but it also exposes farmers to market fluctuations linked to feed industry dynamics.

5.6 Regional Implications for Assam's Agrarian Economy

The expansion of maize cultivation has important implications for Assam's agrarian economy. Maize offers opportunities for crop diversification, risk reduction, and income enhancement, particularly in rain-fed areas. The crop's compatibility with multiple cropping systems further strengthens its relevance in the context of sustainable agriculture. However, without adequate institutional support, the potential benefits may not be fully realized.

5.7 Policy and Institutional Implications

The discussion highlights the need for comprehensive policy interventions to promote maize cultivation in Assam. Strengthening extension services, ensuring timely availability of quality inputs, improving access to credit, and developing marketing infrastructure are essential. Encouraging public–private partnerships and promoting agro-processing units can enhance value addition and employment generation. Effective policy implementation can transform maize into a key driver of rural economic growth in the state.

5.8 Synthesis of Findings in Relation to Objectives

Overall, the findings of the study align closely with the stated objectives. The analysis of production trends, marketing structure, farmer constraints, and demand patterns provides a holistic understanding of the maize economy in Assam. The study underscores that while maize holds considerable promise as a growth-oriented crop, addressing structural and institutional challenges is crucial for realizing its full potential.

Recommendations, Suggestions and Conclusion

6.1 Policy-Oriented Recommendations

The findings of the study clearly indicate that maize cultivation in Assam has significant growth potential, but this potential can only be realized through well-designed and effectively implemented policy measures. First, there is a strong need to promote maize as a priority crop under state-level agricultural diversification Programmes. The government should formulate a comprehensive maize development policy focusing on production, marketing, processing, and value addition. Special incentives may be provided to farmers in rain-fed and marginal areas where maize can serve as a suitable alternative to traditional crops.

Second, strengthening agricultural extension services is crucial. Regular training programmes, field demonstrations, and dissemination of best practices related to improved seed varieties, fertilizer application, pest management, and post-harvest handling should be

conducted. Extension systems must be made more farmer-centric to ensure that technological innovations reach small and marginal farmers.

Third, improving access to institutional credit is essential for enhancing maize productivity. Easy and timely availability of crop loans, subsidized credit, and insurance coverage can reduce farmers' dependence on informal sources of finance and mitigate production risks.

6.2 Recommendations for Improving Production Efficiency

Enhancing production efficiency is fundamental to improving the economic viability of maize cultivation in Assam. One of the major recommendations is the widespread promotion of high-yielding and hybrid maize varieties suitable to local agro-climatic conditions. Public research institutions and seed agencies should collaborate to ensure the availability of quality seeds at affordable prices.

Investment in irrigation infrastructure, particularly minor irrigation facilities, should be prioritized. Although maize is relatively less water-intensive, timely irrigation can significantly improve yields. Promotion of climate-resilient farming practices and mechanization suited to small landholdings can further enhance productivity. Encouraging crop rotation and intercropping practices involving maize can improve soil fertility, reduce pest incidence, and increase overall farm income. Such practices contribute to sustainable agricultural development in the long run.

6.3 Marketing and Infrastructure Development Suggestions

The study highlights that inefficiencies in the marketing system significantly affect farmers' income from maize cultivation. Therefore, strengthening market infrastructure is a key recommendation. The establishment of regulated markets, storage facilities, and warehousing units at the local level can reduce post-harvest losses and prevent distress sales.

Promoting Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) and cooperatives can enhance collective bargaining power, reduce transaction costs, and facilitate direct linkages with feed mills, agro-processing units, and industrial buyers. Digital marketing platforms and real-time price information systems should be introduced to improve market transparency.

Additionally, the introduction of minimum support mechanisms or price stabilization funds for maize can protect farmers against extreme price fluctuations and income uncertainty.

6.4 Value Addition and Agro-Industrial Development

Value addition plays a critical role in enhancing farm income and employment opportunities. The government and private sector should encourage the establishment of maize-based agro-

processing units such as feed mills, starch factories, and food processing industries within the state. This would not only create a stable market for maize producers but also generate rural employment.

Skill development programmes focusing on post-harvest processing, storage management, and small-scale entrepreneurship can empower rural youth and women. Public–private partnerships can be instrumental in promoting agro-industrial growth linked to maize cultivation.

6.5 Institutional and Research-Based Suggestions

Strengthening institutional coordination among agricultural departments, research institutions, financial agencies, and marketing bodies is essential for the holistic development of the maize sector. Research efforts should focus on developing location-specific technologies, disease-resistant varieties, and cost-effective production practices.

Continuous monitoring and evaluation of maize development programmes can help identify implementation gaps and improve policy effectiveness. Greater involvement of local institutions and community-based organizations can ensure inclusive and sustainable outcomes.

6.6 Concluding Remarks

The present study examined the prospects and challenges of maize farming and marketing in Assam in the context of its growing demand in food, feed, and industrial sectors. The analysis revealed that maize has emerged as a commercially important crop with significant potential to contribute to agricultural diversification, farm income enhancement, and agro-industrial development in the state.

Despite favorable agro-climatic conditions and rising demand, maize cultivation in Assam faces several structural, institutional, and market-related challenges. Limited access to quality inputs, inadequate infrastructure, inefficient marketing systems, and price volatility constrain the growth of the maize sector.

The study concludes that with appropriate policy support, technological interventions, and institutional strengthening, maize can play a transformative role in Assam’s agrarian economy. Addressing production and marketing constraints in an integrated manner will not only improve farmers’ livelihoods but also support sustainable agricultural and rural development in the state. The findings and recommendations of the study are expected to provide valuable insights for policymakers, researchers, and stakeholders involved in agricultural development and planning.

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