

COVID-19 LOCK DOWN MARKET ECONOMICS: A NOTE ON THE CASE STUDY OF WATERMELON MARKETING IN WEST BENGAL, INDIA

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Globally, covid-19 has eaten into the vitals of human life, be they healthy or hygienic, rich or poor, idle or active alike. Social distancing, isolation and quarantine are imposed but vaccine is awaited to protect humans from its pandemic presence. Herein, an economic front is upheld to view its role in market interplay of a widely liked summer fruit, the watermelon in the Indian context. It is mentioned that watermelons are globally consumed fat-free refreshing summer fruits with significant levels of vitamins A, B6 and C, lots of lycopene, antioxidants and amino acids, which help prevent damage, and fight cancer (<https://www.livescience.com/46019-watermelon-nutrition.html>)

Farmers are known to grow watermelon widely all over West Bengal. Marketing channel is from farmers (Fig. 1) to *paikars* (middlemen) to *aratdars* (godown owners) or from field to local market to wholesale market to retail market to consumers with various variants. This month, on May 7, 2020, a farmer located hundred kilometers away from Kolkata sold @ Rs. 6/- a kilo to the middlemen which is in turn sold to godown (*khata*) owners at Rs. 10/- , then to retailers and consumers at Rs. 12/- and Rs. 18/- a kilo respectively, indicating three fold price escalation from farmers to consumers of urban and suburban Kolkata areas. Last year (in May 2019) almost same scale of price escalation prevailed, Rs. 10/- at farmers and Rs. 30/- at consumer level, paving a sale price par stage highly higher (40-45%) than this year. The price scaling down this year in the second week of May 2020 is forty percent, which may be attributed to covid-19 lock down effect on man and transport machineries in this part of the country.

Mention is made that such scale down of prices is prevailing with vegetables including lemon, containing immune boosting vitamin-C in covid-19 context, selling eight medium size pieces at Rs. 10/ at consumer level by Rickshaw van vendors of suburban Kolkata, showing an impact at third phase after 45 days lockdown since 24 March, 2020. Farmers and growers of green chilies selling Rs.1/- a kilo and flowers (total wastage sometime) suffer most, from ninety to cent percent. However, “**Save Farmers Toil**” needs to be the nation’s most careful covid-19 concern.



Fig. 1. Watermelon produce awaiting sale of a small farmer located 100 km away from Kolkata