Market Timing and Women's Success in Nepal's Off-Season Vegetable Production
A Case Study from Arghakhanchi District

By Prabin Paudel and Nomraj Poudel

Off-season vegetables are valued for quick returns but come with challenges, including higher production costs and rapid market price fluctuations. The success of an off-season crop often spreads by word of mouth, leading to mass cultivation during the main season. This surge can saturate the market, driving down prices and diminishing farmer interest in that crop. This underscores that success in farming depends more on understanding the market and managing planting and harvesting timing than on the crop itself. The hilly regions of Nepal have a unique advantage, with a favorable climate and topography that support the cultivation of off-season or lean-season crops.

Asmita Thapa, a youth farmer from Arghakhanchi, harvests coriander for market sale. (Photo by Nomraj Sharma)

Funded by the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Horticulture and implemented by FORWARD Nepal, the YUVA Project, conducts research on lean-season vegetable farming taking place in rain shelters and net houses, in Arghakhanchi District, a hilly area in western Nepal. The project provided farmers with rain shelters, net houses, seeds, and technical guidance, helping them implement market-focused production strategies. Its goal was to identify optimal crops and crop combinations for these structures while involving seven women youth farmers from the region. In June 2024, the farmers planted five crops—tomatoes, capsicum, beans, broadleaf mustard (BLM), and coriander—on 10-square-meter plots within four rain shelters and three net houses. By August 2024, heavy rainfall made coriander production in open fields unviable, causing a sharp increase in its market price.

A 10 m² plot of coriander inside a net house. (Photo by Nomraj Sharma)

Asmita Thapa, a youth farmer from Sandhikharka-06, Arghakhanchi, earned NPR 5,400 (USD 40) from a 10-square-meter coriander plot, achieving a net profit of NPR 4,300 (USD 32). "Timing is everything in farming. If you plan production correctly, sellers come to you, and you get a great price for your crop. At the wrong time, you are forced to throw the produce away," she said. Similarly, Puspa Khanal earned NPR 3,700 (USD 28) from the same plot size, with a net profit of NPR 3,000 (USD 22). "Though we knew

coriander could give a great price in lean seasons, without the net houses and rain shelters, growing it during heavy rainy periods in open fields would have been next to impossible," she noted.

Unlike the two female farmers mentioned above, Devika Thapa, another youth farmer from Sandhikharka, tried her luck cultivating tomatoes in her rain shelter to achieve a harvest during the lean season. She earned a net profit of NPR 2,500 (USD 19) from her 10-square-meter plot and acknowledged, "Market-focused farming—planting quick-maturing crops timed to be ready for harvest during the lean season—is far more profitable than growing long-term crops, even if they have a higher yield."

This case study highlights the importance of market-driven and timely production in Nepal's mid-hill regions to improve marketing efficiency and profitability. While the initial investment in protective structures is substantial, timely planting and market-oriented crop planning can generate significant profits, encouraging youth to stay in Nepal and pursue commercial vegetable farming instead of seeking work abroad.