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**The Role of Agricultural Extension in Improving Vegetable Production for the New Market in Meru District, Tanzania**

**Abstract**

Awareness of and use of skills needed to improve production practices and that represent good agricultural practices (GAP) and good manufacturing practices (GMP) are essential to help producers ensure the safety of their produce. They are most likely to be accessed through agricultural extension services. A study of the role of agricultural extension in improving vegetable production for the new market in Meru District, Arusha region was conducted as a way of verifying whether or not this is indeed the case. The specific objectives of the study were to determine the attitudes vegetable producers towards different agricultural extension services in the study area, to examine the agricultural extension needs of vegetable producers in the study area, and to examine the types of extension services offered to vegetable producers in the study area. A cross-sectional study design was used to accomplish this. The study utilized a structured questionnaire. One hundred and twenty vegetable producing farmers in different parts of the district were interviewed on the extension services being provided to them at different phases of the vegetable production cycle. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze data. The study used frequencies and percentages, as well as the Pearson Chi-square statistic to estimate relationships among study variables. Data from the study suggest that very few vegetable production farmers receive inputs from extension services during preparation to production, production and marketing phases. Only 10% indicated that they received assistance related during the pre-production period; only 37.5% received assistance related to the growing of vegetables; and only 5% received assistance related to vegetable marketing. Farmers most frequently (60%) cited the lack of extension agents as the reason for this lack of interaction with extension. Only 25% of the respondents were members of farmers' groups. As a result, only 40% of them managed to meet vegetable market standards. Most of the interviewed farmers were married (90%) with primary school education (62.5%). It was observed that the provision of extension services at different times during the production cycle was directly related to the amount of vegetables produced. Therefore, efforts should be made to ensure that extension agents are present in every village and that they have access to supportive logistics, such as transport facilities and housing in order to best serve farmers.