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Protected Cultivation of Capsicum: Opportunities and Challenges

Shashank Shekhar[1], Rinku Bhaskar[1], Shivanshu Mishra[1], Ankit Kumar Chaurasia[2]

[1]Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel University of Agriculture and Technology, Meerut-250110, India
[2]Chandra Shekhar Azad University of Agriculture and Technology, Kanpur-208002, India

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*Corresponding Author
Shashank Shekhar*

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INTRODUCTION

Sweet pepper and bell pepper form the most important vegetable crop which people grow throughout the world. The vegetable provides essential dietary components with its high vitamin A and C and E content and its mineral content and antioxidant properties. The market demand for colored capsicum has increased because consumers now prefer red and yellow and orange varieties of colored capsicum.

Protected cultivation has emerged as a solution to enhance agricultural productivity because it offers new methods to address the restrictions of traditional open-field farming. The implementation of polyhouses and greenhouses and net houses allows farmers to control environmental conditions, which results in better crop development and increased crop production and top-quality agricultural products. The practice of protected cultivation for capsicum farming has become a successful business activity which helps small and medium-sized farms to generate greater profits from their cultivated land.

2. Concept of Protected Cultivation

The practice of protected cultivation allows farmers to cultivate crops while maintaining complete control over environmental conditions which include temperature and humidity and light intensity and carbon dioxide levels needed for optimal plant development.

Protected cultivation employs multiple structural types. The cost-effective and efficient performance of naturally ventilated polyhouses makes them a popular choice among Indian farmers. The use of climate-controlled greenhouses enables precise environmental control but demands substantial financial resources and specialized knowledge for operation. Shade net houses provide an effective solution for hot climates by decreasing both light and temperature levels. The nursery stage commonly employs low tunnels to provide weather protection for seedlings.

3. Importance of Capsicum under Protected Conditions

The nature of Capsicum shows strong growth in protected farming because it needs stable conditions which farmers cannot provide through regular farming methods. The plant needs particular temperature and humidity levels to achieve optimal growth which farmers cannot provide in open-field settings.

Extreme temperatures and frost and excessive rainfall create high risk conditions which directly harm the crops flowering and fruit production and yield results. Capsicum plants face multiple open growing spaces dangers which lead to production losses because of pest and disease infested areas. Protected farming systems decrease these threats because they create environments which can maintain stable conditions.

The market values colored capsicum at a higher price because of its visual appeal and its superior nutritional content. Protected cultivation systems enable farmers to produce premium capsicum varieties which have higher market value and greater export opportunities.

4. Production Technology of Capsicum under Protected Cultivation

4.1 Climate Requirements

The growth of Capsicum needs a climate that stays within moderate warmth ranges. The ideal temperature ranges between 20–25°C during the day and 16–18°C at night. The proper growth and fruit development process needs a relative humidity level which stays between 60 to 70 percent. The crop is highly sensitive to frost and extreme heat, which can cause flower drop and reduced fruit set.

4.2 Nursery Raising

Protected farming systems need nursery raising as their most important phase for capsicum cultivation. The seeds are planted in pro-trays which contain 98 or 104 cells to achieve proper seedling development. The growing medium used in the system uses cocopeat and vermiculite and perlite as its components to create a system which provides both air circulation and moisture storage capabilities.

Seed treatment with beneficial microorganisms such as Trichoderma and Pseudomonas prevents seed-borne diseases while it promotes healthy seedling growth. Seedlings are ready for transplanting after 25 to 30 days from their sowing date.

4.3 Transplanting and Spacing

Transplanting occurs on raised beds which have drip irrigation systems that provide efficient water and nutrient management. The optimal spacing for capsicum cultivation in protected environments requires 45 to 60 centimeters between rows and plants which results in a plant density of approximately 2.5 to 3.5 plants per square meter. Proper spacing enables plants to receive sufficient sunlight and fresh air while they maximize their resource consumption.

4.4 Training and Pruning

Plant training and pruning methods function as crucial components of protected capsicum farming because these methods help growers sustain plant growth while achieving higher yields. The typical plant training method allows plants to develop through two main stems or four main stems which create an equilibrium between growth and reproductive development.

The removal of side shoots referred to as suckers must occur because it enables the plant to focus its resources on producing fruit. The use of vertical trellising with plastic twine allows plants to receive support which keeps them from falling over while it helps farmers manage their crops and carry out harvesting more effectively.

4.5 Nutrient Management

Fertigation serves as the main method for nutrient management in protected cultivation because it enables the application of soluble fertilizers through drip irrigation systems. The balanced fertilization process requires the use of 19:19:19 and calcium nitrate and potassium nitrate which together provide essential nutrients for proper growth.

Micronutrient and biofertilizer applications increase both nutrient availability and nutrient uptake efficiency. The monitoring of nutrient status needs to happen continuously because this practice helps prevent deficiencies while creating optimal conditions for crop development.

4.6 Irrigation Management

Irrigation management requires efficient operation to achieve optimal soil moisture maintenance. Drip irrigation systems provide precise and uniform water application which reduces water wastage while increasing water-use efficiency.

The excessive application of water together with waterlogged conditions should be avoided because both factors create conditions that promote root diseases together with nutrient leaching. Mulching materials provide benefits by conserving soil moisture while they control temperature and prevent weed development.

4.7 Pollination

The capsicum plant self-pollinates its flowers but pollination success reaches its highest point when protected conditions exist. Plants experience increased fruit set together with higher yield when their branches are manually shaken or when bumble bees are used in advanced greenhouse systems.

4.8 Pest and Disease Management

Protected cultivation creates a microclimate which supports pest and disease outbreaks. The main pests found in this area include whiteflies together with aphids and thrips and mites and the main diseases include damping-off powdery mildew and leaf curl virus.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) strategies serve as the foundation for successful pest control. The system uses insect-proof netting together with yellow and blue sticky traps and biological control agents and proper sanitation procedures which all operate inside the building.

4.9 Harvesting and Yield

Capsicum plants start to produce their first yields after 60 to75 days from their transplanting date. The market decides whether harvesting happens at the mature green stage or when the fruit reaches complete color development.

Protected cultivation produces better crop yields than open-field farming methods. Open-field farming produces crop yields between 20 and 30 tonnes per hectare whereas protected cultivation under optimal management can reach crop yields between 80 and 150 tonnes per hectare.

5. Opportunities in Protected Capsicum Cultivation

Protected cultivation presents multiple ways to improve both agricultural output and financial returns for farmers. The farming method provides three to five times better results than traditional open-field farming.

The ability to produce capsicum throughout the year allows farmers to target off-season markets and obtain premium prices. Protected cultivation produces superior quality produce which maintains consistent size and shape and color attributes that meet export standards.

The agricultural system achieves efficient resource management through its ability to save both water and nutrient resources which leads to reduced costs and decreased environmental harm. Protected cultivation also creates job opportunities through its requirement for workers in nursery management and crop production and post-harvest processing activities.

The combination of modern technologies which include hydroponics and automation and climate control systems leads to improved operational efficiency and enables the development of advanced agricultural methods.

6. Challenges in Protected Capsicum Cultivation

Protected cultivation presents multiple difficulties which obstruct its benefits to the agricultural sector. Farmers find it difficult to establish their operations because they need to spend large amounts of money before they can start building polyhouses and installing irrigation and fertigation systems.

Successful operation of protected cultivation systems requires operators to possess expert knowledge and technical skills which include both climate control and nutrient management and pest management work. If the enclosed environment fails to receive proper handling procedures then it begins to create conditions which enable pests and diseases to spread throughout the area.

When the market experiences price volatility it creates challenges for businesses because their profitability depends on matching product supply with customer demand. The total maintenance expenses increase through expenses which include replacing plastic covers and equipment.

Farm productivity declines because farmers face difficulties in obtaining essential resources which include hybrid seeds and bio-agents and fertilizers. Protected structures require dependable water and energy supplies which enable their systems to function correctly.

7. Economic Considerations

Protected capsicum cultivation involves a high cost of cultivation; however, it offers higher returns compared to conventional farming. The payback period for investment typically ranges from two to four years, depending on management practices and market conditions.

The Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH) program and National Horticulture Board (NHB) program provide government subsidies which help farmers through financial support that decreases their expenses. Farmers need to establish effective planning systems together with market connections which will enable them to achieve the highest profit levels.

8. Future Prospects

The development of capsicum cultivation under protected conditions depends on two main factors which consist of technological progress and rising demand from markets. The agricultural sector will achieve better operational results through precision and smart farming technologies which include climate control systems driven by sensors and automated systems for nutrient delivery.

Hydroponic systems and cocopeat-based cultivation systems and all other soilless cultivation systems enable better control of nutrients which results in increased crop production. The method of protected crop cultivation enables farmers to safeguard their harvests from intense weather events which are caused by climate change.

The practice of protected agriculture has grown in cities and their surrounding areas through the development of rooftop and vertical farming systems which create new methods for producing food in an environmentally sustainable manner. The establishment of protected cultivation systems will receive more support through ongoing governmental programs and policy development initiatives.

9. Way Forward

The successful implementation of protected capsicum cultivation requires organizations to develop training programs which will improve farmer capabilities. The development of affordable polyhouse systems will enable small-scale farmers to utilize protected agricultural methods for their farming operations.

Farmers will achieve higher selling prices for their crops through enhancements made to supply networks and market connections. The establishment of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) will result in better marketing abilities and stronger negotiating capabilities for farmers.

The research and development process for protected agricultural plants and their production methods requires more funding which will boost both productivity levels and sustainable agricultural practices.

CONCLUSION

The protected cultivation of capsicum demonstrates an effective agricultural method which improves crop yield and product quality while increasing farm profitability. The system provides multiple benefits because it enables farmers to grow crops outside their usual growing season while using resources effectively and producing goods for international trade. The system requires solutions because it faces three major problems which involve expensive funding needs and operational difficulties and unpredictable market conditions.

The establishment of environmentally sustainable protected capsicum farming requires farmers to receive training about new agricultural technologies together with government support and new farming methods. The system will enhance farmers' income and nutritional safety and sustainable agricultural progress when it gets executed correctly.

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