

ABSTRACT

Farming of food crops is a major source of livelihood for human existence. In Kenya, agriculture contribute about 33% to the GDP, with both food crops and commercial crops contributing at least 80% which translates to approximately 26.4 percent. In Makueni County, crop farming cover 72% of the land and accounts for about 42% of employment in the county. However, most farmers are resource poor despite their investment in farming enterprises. Makueni Sub County is semi-arid and farmers, who are majorly smallholders, grow drought tolerant varieties of food crops. Moreover, despite the perceived viability of these crops, low production and income are key challenges facing farmers and could be attributed to the wrong choice of enterprise. Current study thus sought to evaluate the factors affecting the choice of food crop enterprises among Makueni sub-county farmers to help them make the right agri-enterprise decisions thus improving their production and incomes. A descriptive survey design was used where the target population for the study was the 34,479 households in Kee, Kaiti and Wote locations in Makueni Sub County. An estimated sample size of 395 respondents was obtained using Taro Yamene's, 1973 formula at a 5% significance level. A semi structured questionnaire was used to collect primary data. The major focus was a combination of at least three crops farmers were producing as per crop selection priority during March to June 2021 cropping season. A stratified random sampling procedure was used to ensure inclusivity in all three locations by ensuring a proportionate sample per location. The sample population was purposively determined by narrowing specifically to farmers who produce maize, pigeon peas, beans and green grams in Makueni Sub County. Data analysis was done using SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics were used to characterize farmer households. Multinomial logistic regression was used to estimate the probability of a household adopting a production choice of three crop combinations for the socioeconomic and institutional variables for the study. Gross margin analysis was used to calculate the return from the choice of crop production enterprises a household was producing. Analyzed data showed that age (0.044), gender (0.001), access to extension services (0.043), farmer group membership (0.029) and farm size (0.030) significantly influence farmers' choice of crop production enterprises. Category one was used as the base category for the analysis of socioeconomic and institutional factors. Age had positive on the choice of category four relative to the base category while gender negatively influenced the choice relative to the reference category. Farm size had both positive and negative influence relative to base category for categories three and four. On the other hand, extension access influenced enterprise choices negatively relative to the base category. Group membership posed positive influence for categories three and four relative to the base category. 71% of the respondents produced maize, beans and pigeon peas under category one. Over 62% depended on both on-farm and off-farm income sources. Over 71% of the respondents had the perception that their income was inadequate to carry out farming activities. 73% of the respondents had the perception that membership to groups did not influence their choice of crop enterprises. Above 67% of the respondents felt that farm size influenced their choice of crop enterprises. Therefore, this study recommends that programs relating to access to information, extension services, credit facilities and group membership be made accessible to farmers. Policy makers on the other hand should come up with strategies that would help in bridging the gap in gender and land issues such as access and its continued decline in size among households.