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RURAL YOUTH AND AGRICULTURE IN LUCKNOW, PERCEPTIONS, TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE GAPS AND CAREER ASPIRATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed how rural youth relate to agriculture in selected villages of Mohanlalganj block, Lucknow district, Uttar Pradesh. A multi-stage sampling design yielded 105 respondents aged 15–35 years from five villages. Data were obtained through a pre-tested semi-structured interview schedule and examined using frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations. The sample was dominated by youth aged 22–31 years (52.38%) and males (67.62%); secondary education represented the largest educational group (37.14%). Among respondents reporting farming-family landholdings, 53.68% operated marginal holdings. Overall, 73.33% of respondents were classified as having a medium perception of agriculture and 65.71% had medium agricultural knowledge. Knowledge was relatively stronger for routine field operations and harvesting, whereas awareness was weaker for micro-irrigation, plant protection, specialized orchard practices, livestock health and post-harvest processing. The most frequently selected enterprise areas were agri-business/micro-enterprise (27.62%), commercial orchard management (26.67%) and agro-processing (25.71%). The results point to the need for youth-oriented extension that combines technical competence with enterprise development, value addition, market linkage and institutional support. As the analysis is descriptive and based on a selected block, the findings should be interpreted as local patterns rather than causal or district-wide estimates.

***Key words*:** rural youth; agricultural engagement; agricultural knowledge; perception; career aspirations; agri-entrepreneurship; agricultural extension; Lucknow; Uttar Pradesh.

Introduction

Rural youth are a critical human resource for agricultural continuity, livelihood diversification and rural enterprise development. Their relationship with farming is influenced by expected income, family background, access to knowledge and skills, opportunities outside agriculture, and the perceived status of farm work. Recent Indian studies likewise show that youth aspirations and entrepreneurial behaviour are closely connected with economic resources, training, knowledge and the wider opportunity structure (Nandi *et al*., 2022; Kumar *et al*., 2022; Singh *et al*., 2026).

For young people in rural areas, agriculture is increasingly evaluated alongside salaried employment, migration and non-farm enterprise. This makes extension more than a channel for production advice: it must also help young people understand enterprise opportunities, acquire practical skills and connect with markets and institutions. Evidence from youth-oriented extension research indicates that training and livelihood diversification can strengthen the attractiveness of agriculture (Kumar *et al*., 2022; Verma *et al*., 2023).

The present study therefore focuses on a local peri-urban agricultural setting where rural livelihoods coexist with expanding non-farm opportunities. The objective is not to generalize from one block to the whole district, but

to document patterns that can inform locally targeted extension planning. The study integrates four dimensions—socio-economic characteristics, perception of agriculture, technical knowledge and career aspirations—to provide a more connected picture of youth engagement.

The study addresses four questions:

(i) What are the socio-economic characteristics of sampled rural youth?

(ii) How do they evaluate agriculture as a livelihood and career?

(iii) Which technical domains show the largest knowledge deficits? and

(iv) Which enterprise and employment areas are most frequently preferred?

The study was guided by a youth-engagement perspective in which agricultural participation is viewed as an outcome of the interaction between individual characteristics, perceived attractiveness of agriculture, technical capability and available livelihood/enterprise opportunities. Within this framework, the study had four specific objectives:

1. To describe the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of rural youth in the selected area of Lucknow district.
2. To assess the perception of rural youth towards agriculture as a livelihood and career option.
3. To assess domain-specific agricultural knowledge and identify major technical knowledge gaps among rural youth.
4. To identify preferred agricultural enterprises and career/employment opportunities among rural youth.

Materials and Methods

Study Location and Sampling Framework

The study was conducted in Lucknow district of Uttar Pradesh, India. Mohanlalganj block was selected purposively because of its rural demographic composition and agricultural relevance. The study therefore represents selected rural youth in Mohanlalganj block and should not be generalized to the entire Lucknow district or Uttar Pradesh without further evidence.

A multi-stage sampling procedure was followed:

- **Stage 1 – Block selection:** Mohanlalganj block was purposively selected from the four tehsils/ sub-divisions of Lucknow district (Bakshi Ka Talab, Lucknow, Malihabad and Mohanlalganj).

Table 1: Socio-economic profile of the respondent rural youth (N = 105).

Variable Category	Sub-Group / Classification	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Age Group	Youngest (< 21 years)	25	23.81
	Younger (22–31 years)	55	52.38
	Young (32–35 years)	25	23.81
Gender	Male	71	67.62
	Female	34	32.38
Educational Attainment	Primary Level (5th–7th grade)	9	8.57
	Secondary Level (8th–10th grade)	39	37.14
	Higher Secondary (11th–12th grade)	34	32.38
	Graduate / Higher Education (≥ 13th grade)	23	21.90
Marital Status	Unmarried	57	54.29
	Married	48	45.71
Family Background	Farming Family	95	90.48
	Non-Farming Family	10	9.52
Land Holding Size (n=95)	Marginal (≤ 1.00 ha)	51	53.68
	Small (1.01–2.00 ha)	33	34.74
	Semi-Medium (2.01–4.00 ha)	11	11.58
Primary Livelihood Source	Owned Farm Operations	51	48.57
	Owned Farm + Contract Agricultural Labour	30	28.57
	Owned Farm + Fruit Processing Enterprise	14	13.33
	Fruit Harvesting & Commercial Processing	10	9.52
Institutional Credit Source	Primary Agriculture Cooperative Society (PACS)	62	59.05
	District Central Cooperative Bank (DCCB)	37	35.24
	Commercial / Nationalized Banks	5	4.76
	Informal Sources / Relatives	1	0.95

Table 2: Item-wise perception analysis of rural youth towards agriculture (N = 105).

Sl.	Perception Statement	SA	AF	NF	DF	SD
1	Agricultural activities can fulfill rural youth socio-economic needs.	47 (44.76)	35 (33.33)	0 (0.00)	23 (21.90)	0 (0.00)
2	Agriculture is potentially a major employer of youth labor.	25 (23.81)	59 (56.19)	5 (4.76)	16 (15.24)	0 (0.00)
3	Government support and incentives motivate youth participation.	50 (47.62)	55 (52.38)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)
4	Curriculum inclusion of agriculture at all educational levels motivates youth.	68 (64.76)	36 (34.29)	1 (0.95)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)
5	Agriculture can provide adequate economic incentives to rural youth.	20 (19.05)	58 (55.24)	7 (6.67)	20 (19.05)	0 (0.00)
6	Agriculture can yield high profits comparable to non-farm sectors.	21 (20.00)	36 (34.29)	4 (3.81)	43 (40.95)	1 (0.95)
7	Availability of off-farm income activities does not affect agricultural participation.	13 (12.38)	47 (44.76)	10 (9.52)	29 (27.62)	6 (5.71)
8	Youth involvement in agriculture directly improves rural socio-economic status.	32 (30.48)	58 (55.24)	0 (0.00)	13 (12.38)	2 (1.90)
SA: Strongly Agree f (%); AF: Agree f (%); NF: Neutral f (%); DF: Disagree f (%); SD: Strongly Disagree f (%)						

- **Stage 2 – Village selection:** Five villages—Atrauli, Daudnagar, Bhadesuwa, Hasanpur Kaneri and Barvaliya—were selected using simple random sampling.
- **Stage 3 – Respondent selection:** Twenty-one rural youth aged 15–35 years were selected from each selected village through simple random sampling without replacement, giving a total sample of 105 respondents. The sample included youth from farming and non-farming households.

Measurement Tools and Variables

Data were collected through a pre-tested, semi-structured interview schedule administered face-to-face. The schedule contained four analytical components:

1. **Socio-economic profile:** age, gender, education, marital status, family background, landholding, primary livelihood and institutional credit source were recorded using the categories reported in Table 1.
2. **Perception towards agriculture:** eight statements were measured on a five-point Likert-type response scale from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1). Respondents were subsequently grouped into low, medium and high perception categories using the score classification adopted in the study instrument.
3. **Agricultural knowledge:** knowledge was assessed using dichotomous responses (1 = aware/yes; 0 = unaware/no) across field crop management, orchard/horticulture management, livestock and animal husbandry, post-harvest/value addition and agricultural marketing.
4. **Career aspirations:** respondents identified preferred agricultural employment/enterprise areas. The reported percentages in Table 10 exceed 100% in aggregate, indicating a multiple-response format; therefore, these figures should not be interpreted as mutually exclusive choices.

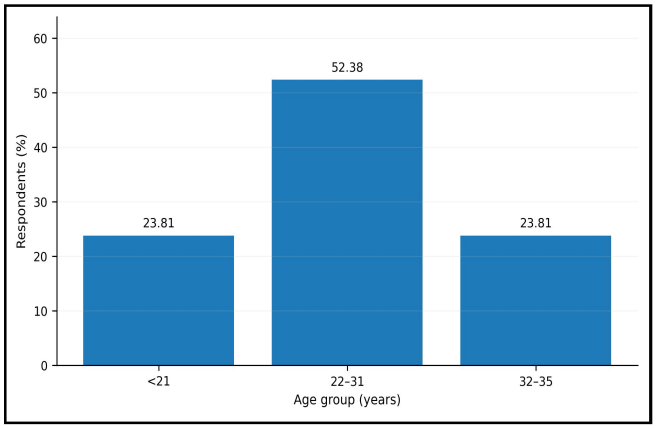


Fig. 1: Age distribution of sampled rural youth.

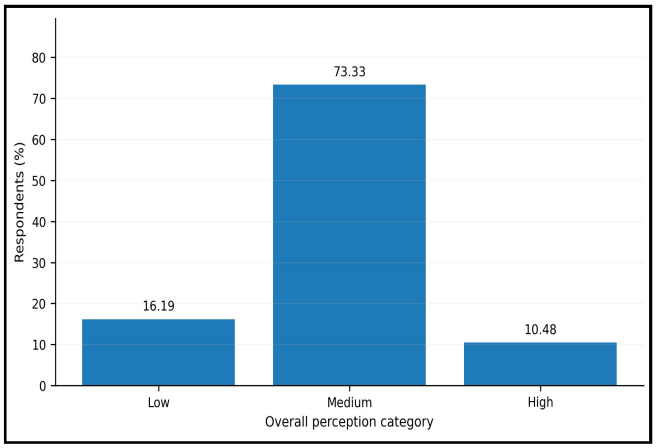


Fig. 2: Overall perception of agriculture among rural youth.

Table 3: Overall perception categorization of rural youth (N = 105).

Perception Category	SR	FF	(%)	M	S.D. (σ)
Low Perception	Up to 26	17	16.19		
Medium Perception	27 – 35	77	73.33		
High Perception	36 & above	11	10.48		
Total / Overall	N = 105	105	100.00	30.84	3.62
SR: Score Range; FF: Frequency (f); M: Mean (X)					

Primary data were coded and summarized using frequencies, percentages, arithmetic mean and standard deviation. The numerical values reported in this manuscript were checked for internal consistency against N = 105; category frequencies and percentages are arithmetically compatible with the reported denominators. The career-aspiration item is treated as multiple response because its percentages are non-mutually exclusive. Because respondent-level observations were not available in the manuscript, inferential statistics, reliability coefficients and regression estimates have not been invented.

Results and Discussion

Socio-Economic Profile of Rural Youth

The socio-economic profile provides the contextual basis for interpreting youth perceptions, knowledge and aspirations. The sample consisted of 105 rural youth from five selected villages of Mohanlalganj block, Lucknow district.

Within the sample, 52.38% of respondents were aged 22–31 years and 67.62% were male. Secondary education was the largest single category (37.14%), while 90.48% reported a farming-family background. Of the 95 respondents for whom landholding information was recorded, 53.68% operated marginal holdings. Nearly half (48.57%) identified owned-farm operations as their main livelihood, with the remainder reporting mixed farm, labour or processing activities. These figures describe the sampled population and should not be interpreted as district-level prevalence estimates.

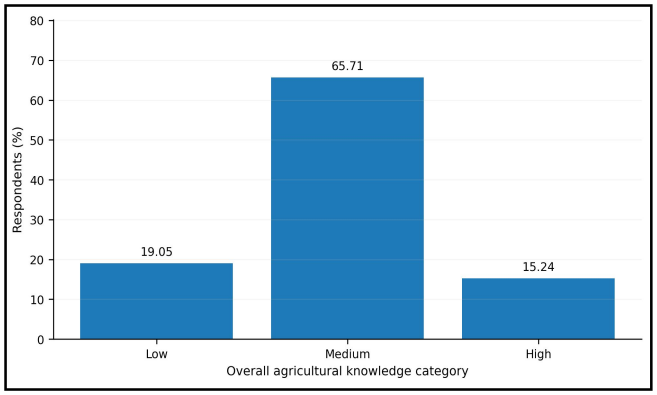


Fig. 3: Overall agricultural knowledge of rural youth.

Table 4: Overall agricultural knowledge categorization (N = 105).

Knowledge Category	SR	FF	(%)	M	S.D. (σ)
Low Knowledge	Up to 17	20	19.05		
Medium Knowledge	18 – 46	69	65.71		
High Knowledge	47 & above	16	15.24		
Total / Overall	N = 105	105	100.00	31.25	6.48
SR: Score Range; FF: Frequency (f); M: Mean (X)					

The profile indicates considerable heterogeneity in the relationship between youth and agriculture. For extension planning, this means that a single training package may be inadequate: smallholders may need enterprise diversification and market support, whereas actively farming youth may require stronger technical, mechanization, plant-protection and business-management skills.

Perception of Rural Youth Towards Agriculture

Perception was examined to understand how rural youth evaluate agriculture as a livelihood and career option. The eight statements capture economic expectations, employment potential, institutional support, educational exposure and the perceived socio-economic contribution of agriculture.

The perception results show a combination of positive institutional expectations and reservations about economic returns. A total of 100% agreed or strongly agreed that government support and incentives can motivate youth participation, while 99.05% agreed or strongly agreed that agricultural education can motivate youth. In contrast, 40.95% disagreed and 0.95% strongly disagreed that agriculture can generate profits comparable with non-farm sectors. The overall distribution was concentrated in the medium category (73.33%). Taken together, the pattern suggests that institutional encouragement is

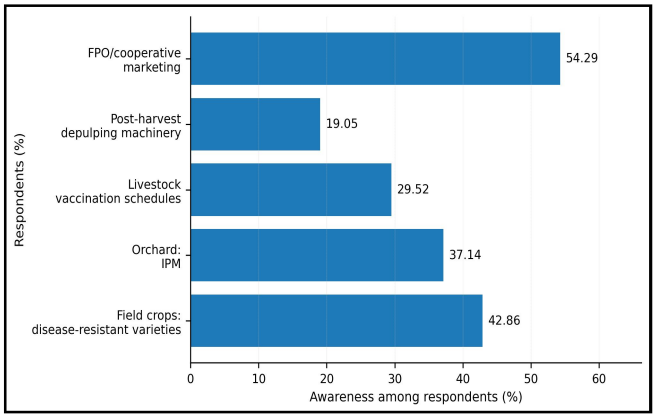


Fig. 4: Priority low-awareness indicators across knowledge domains. *Note: Indicators were selected to represent the lowest or most strategically important awareness levels within each domain.*

Table 5: Knowledge mapping across general field crop practices (N = 105).

Sub-Domain Area	Specific Technical Practice	Aware / Yes f (%)	Unaware / No f (%)
I. Land Improvement	Land leveling, field plotting, and grading	84 (80.00)	21 (20.00)
	Establishment of biological bunds	84 (80.00)	21 (20.00)
	In-situ rain/water conservation techniques	86 (81.90)	19 (18.10)
II. Irrigation Systems	Electric/Diesel motor pump operation	68 (64.76)	37 (35.24)
	PVC pipeline distribution networks	60 (57.14)	45 (42.86)
	Micro-drip irrigation systems	50 (47.62)	55 (52.38)
	Overhead sprinkler irrigation systems	49 (46.67)	56 (53.33)
	Micro-sprinkler systems	48 (45.71)	57 (54.29)
III. Pre-Farming	Deep summer ploughing post-harvest	92 (87.62)	13 (12.38)
	Mechanized primary tillage (Tractor/Power Tiller)	92 (87.62)	13 (12.38)
	Basal application of FYM / Compost	93 (88.57)	12 (11.43)
IV. Seed Technology	High-yielding hybrids and improved cultivars	70 (66.67)	35 (33.33)
	Recommended seed rate calculations	65 (61.90)	40 (38.10)
	Chemical/Biological seed treatment methods	68 (64.76)	37 (35.24)
V. Crop Establishment	Optimum seedling age for field transplantation	80 (76.19)	25 (23.81)
	Standardized row-to-row and plant-to-plant spacing	80 (76.19)	25 (23.81)
	Systemic line planting methods	81 (77.14)	24 (22.86)
VI. Nutrient Management	Balanced NPK fertilization doses	65 (61.90)	40 (38.10)
	Green manuring (Sesbania / Crotalaria)	69 (65.71)	36 (34.29)
	Organic composting methods	68 (64.76)	37 (35.24)
	Vermicomposting techniques	72 (68.57)	33 (31.43)
VII. Plant Protection	Recommended dosage of synthetic pesticides	57 (54.29)	48 (45.71)
	Application protocols for fungicides	55 (52.38)	50 (47.62)
	Knapsack sprayer / Dusting machinery operation	57 (54.29)	48 (45.71)
	Pest and disease-resistant crop varieties	45 (42.86)	60 (57.14)
VIII. Harvest & Threshing	Maturity indices and optimal harvest timing	88 (83.81)	17 (16.19)
	Mechanized harvesting implements	89 (84.76)	16 (15.24)
	Power thresher and combine operation	89 (84.76)	16 (15.24)

viewed positively, but perceived profitability remains an important consideration in youth career orientation.

Domain-Specific Agricultural Knowledge Level

Agricultural knowledge was assessed across five domains to identify areas in which extension and capacity-building interventions may be prioritized.

To compare the relative strength of knowledge across technical domains, the item-level awareness percentages were summarized as descriptive domain means (Table 10).

The aggregate knowledge classification placed 65.71% of respondents in the medium category, with 19.05% in the low category and 15.24% in the high category. The item-level results provide a more informative picture than the overall score alone: awareness was generally higher for routine crop operations and lower for specialized technologies and value-addition practices.

Field-crop knowledge was strongest for basal FYM/ compost application (88.57%), mechanized tillage (87.62%) and harvesting/threshing operations (84.76%). The weakest items were disease-resistant variety selection (42.86%), micro-sprinkler systems (45.71%), overhead sprinklers (46.67%) and micro-drip irrigation (47.62%).

Within orchard management, awareness of mango blossom protection (80.95%) and specialized mango

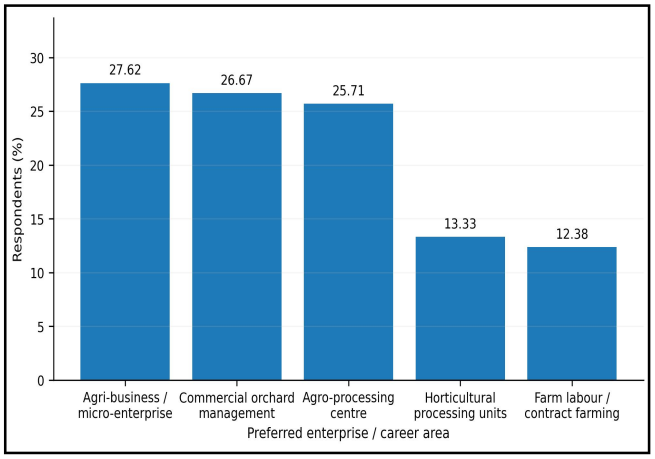


Fig. 5: Leading agricultural career and enterprise preferences.

Table 6: Knowledge regarding orchard management practices (N = 105).

Technical Practice Area	AY	UN
Canopy rejuvenation and tree pruning protocols	45 (42.86)	60 (57.14)
Management and restoration of senile orchards	53 (50.48)	52 (49.52)
Standardized horticultural planting geometry	55 (52.38)	50 (47.62)
Pest/Disease identification and Integrated Pest Management (IPM)	39 (37.14)	66 (62.86)
Recommended fertilizer and fertilizer dosing	47 (44.76)	58 (55.24)
Mango blossom protection (Midge/Hopper management)	85 (80.95)	20 (19.05)
Use of specialized mango harvesting tools	84 (80.00)	21 (20.00)
AY: Aware / Yes f (%); UN: Unaware / No f (%)		

harvesting tools (80.00%) was relatively high. In contrast, integrated pest management (37.14%), canopy rejuvenation and pruning (42.86%), and fertilizer recommendations (44.76%) were less familiar. This contrast suggests that general familiarity with a locally important crop does not necessarily imply proficiency in specialized management.

The largest deficits were observed in livestock health and post-harvest activities. Only 29.52% reported awareness of preventive livestock vaccination schedules, while awareness of scientific housing was 33.33% and silage production/storage was 32.38%. Post-harvest

Table 7: Knowledge regarding livestock and animal husbandry (N = 105).

Technical Practice Area	AY	UN
High-yielding breeds of cattle and buffaloes	38 (36.19)	67 (63.81)
Commercial poultry breeds and management	42 (40.00)	63 (60.00)
Scientific cattle/poultry shed housing design	35 (33.33)	70 (66.67)
Preventive livestock vaccination schedules (FMD, HS, BQ)	31 (29.52)	74 (70.48)
Hygienic and machine milking methods	49 (46.67)	56 (53.33)
Urea-treated paddy straw feed processing	40 (38.10)	65 (61.90)
Cultivation of high-nutritive green fodder crops	47 (44.76)	58 (55.24)
Silage production and fodder storage methods	34 (32.38)	71 (67.62)
Power chaff cutter operation	24 (22.86)	81 (77.14)
AY: Aware / Yes f (%); UN: Unaware / No f (%)		

Table 8: Knowledge regarding post-harvest technology and value addition (N = 105).

Technical Practice Area	AY	UN
Industrial preparation of processed fruit products (Pulp, Jam, Jelly)	24 (22.86)	81 (77.14)
Permitted food preservatives and chemical stability	22 (20.95)	83 (79.05)
Solar drying and dehydrated fruit techniques	25 (23.81)	80 (76.19)
Mechanical fruit-juice extraction machinery	24 (22.86)	81 (77.14)
Seed/Stone mechanical depulping machinery	20 (19.05)	85 (80.95)
Commercial fruit juice extraction systems	24 (22.86)	81 (77.14)
AY: Aware / Yes f (%); UN: Unaware / No f (%)		

awareness was consistently low, ranging from 19.05% to 23.81%. These areas are especially relevant to youth enterprise development because they can support higher-value and allied agricultural activities.

Perceived Career Opportunities and Aspirations

Career aspirations provide an important bridge between knowledge development and youth engagement. Because respondents could indicate more than one preferred area, the percentages in Table 11 represent the proportion of respondents selecting each option and are not expected to sum to 100%.

Agri-business/micro-enterprise (27.62%), commercial orchard management (26.67%) and agro-processing centres (25.71%) were the three most frequently selected options. Because respondents could select more than one option, the percentages are not mutually exclusive. The pattern nevertheless indicates interest in enterprise-oriented activities rather than a sole dependence on conventional farm labour. Extension programmes can use this interest as an entry point for business planning, value addition, financial literacy and market linkage.

Data availability: The manuscript reports aggregate results from the field survey. The respondent-level dataset

Table 9: Knowledge regarding agricultural marketing systems (N = 105).

Marketing Component	AY	UN
Cooperative marketing organizations & Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)	57 (54.29)	48 (45.71)
Scientific grading, sorting, and packaging of farm produce	61 (58.10)	44 (41.90)
Modern warehouse storage and cold chain management	60 (57.14)	45 (42.86)
AY: Aware / Yes f (%); UN: Unaware / No f (%)		

Table 10: Item-level mean awareness by agricultural knowledge domain.

Knowledge domain	Number of items	Mean awareness (%)
General field crop practices	28	68.16
Orchard management	7	55.51
Livestock & animal husbandry	9	35.98
Post-harvest & value addition	6	22.06
Agricultural marketing	3	56.51

and questionnaire should be retained by the authors and made available in accordance with the target journal's data-sharing policy.

Strategic and Policy Implications

The findings support a locally grounded extension strategy for rural youth in Mohanlalganj block. Four priorities emerge:

1. **Skills linked to identified knowledge gaps:** practical demonstrations and modular training should prioritize micro-irrigation, plant protection/ IPM, livestock vaccination and housing, orchard management and post-harvest/value-addition practices.
2. **Enterprise-oriented extension:** training should connect technical skills with business planning, input-output economics, value-chain opportunities and market information so that agriculture is presented as a portfolio of enterprises rather than only crop production.
3. **Institutional convergence:** KVKs, agricultural universities, line departments, financial institutions and youth-oriented programmes such as ARYA and ACABC can be linked through coordinated referral and training pathways. The present study does not evaluate the effectiveness of these programmes; they are proposed as potential delivery mechanisms.
4. **Local market and value-chain linkage:** youth interested in agri-business, orchard management and processing need exposure to grading, packaging, FPOs, storage, processing, branding and market channels. Any commodity-specific intervention should be based on local production potential and verified with field-level evidence.

Table 11: Occupational aspirations and preferred job areas among rural youth (N = 105).

Rank	Job / Enterprise Domain	F	P
I	Agri-Business / Micro-Enterprise	29	27.62
II	Commercial Orchard Management	28	26.67
III	Agro-Processing Centre	27	25.71
IV	Horticultural Processing Units	14	13.33
V	Farm Labour / Contract Farming	13	12.38
VI	Dairy & Commercial Poultry Enterprise	12	11.43
VI	Self-Help Group (SHG) Micro-Ventures	12	11.43
VIII	Commercial Nursery / Floriculture	11	10.48
IX	Research Station / Agricultural University Assistance	7	6.67
X	Small Ruminant / Goat Farming	6	5.71
XI	Krishi Seva Kendra / Input Retail Outlet	4	3.81
XII	Organic Vegetable Cultivation	3	2.86
F: Frequency (f); P: Percentage (%)			

Conclusion

The study documents the characteristics, perceptions, knowledge profile and career preferences of rural youth in selected villages of Mohanlalganj block, Lucknow district. Most respondents showed medium perception (73.33%) and medium agricultural knowledge (65.71%). Routine field operations were comparatively familiar, whereas specialized irrigation, plant protection, orchard management, livestock health and post-harvest practices showed clear gaps. Agri-business, orchard management and agro-processing were the leading reported enterprise preferences. The evidence supports an extension approach that combines technical training with entrepreneurship, market orientation and institutional linkage. The study is limited by its single-block setting, sample size of 105 and descriptive analysis. Future studies should use respondent-level datasets and multi-block samples to test associations between socio-economic characteristics, extension exposure, knowledge, perception and career aspirations.

Study limitations

The study is limited by its single-block setting, sample size of 105 respondents, and descriptive analytical design. The manuscript contains aggregate results rather than respondent-level observations; therefore, inferential tests, reliability coefficients and regression estimates have not been introduced. The findings should be interpreted as local patterns for selected villages of Mohanlalganj block rather than district- or state-level estimates.

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