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Climate Resilient Vegetable Cultivation in the Telangana Region

*Madhusudhan Reddy Kunreddy
Department of Horticulture (Vegetable and Floriculture), Bihar Agricultural College, Bihar Agricultural University, Sabour, Bhagalpur – 813210, Bihar, India
Corresponding Author's email: kunreddy9@gmail.com

Telangana, located in peninsular India, has a mainly tropical climate with hot summers, unpredictable monsoon rainfall, and frequent droughts. The state has semi-arid to dry sub-humid agro-climatic conditions, making agriculture, particularly vegetable farming, very vulnerable to climate changes. Vegetables are crucial for nutrition, income, jobs, and diversifying farming in Telangana. The state produces significant amounts of tomatoes, chillies, brinjals, okra, cucurbits, and leafy vegetables, all of which are sensitive to environmental stress.

However, climate variability and extreme weather, including long heat waves, irregular rainfall, delayed monsoons, and less available water, create serious challenges for sustainable vegetable farming. These stresses affect crop growth, yield, quality, and profits, putting farmer livelihoods and regional food security at risk.

Climate-resilient agriculture (CRA) includes a set of practices designed to adapt to and lessen the effects of climate change while improving agricultural output and resilience. In vegetable crops due to their shallow roots, high water needs, and sensitivity to temperature, moisture, and pests strategies for climate resilience must be tailored to specific locations, driven by technology, and centered on the needs of farmers. It is essential to adopt climate-resilient vegetable farming practices to maintain production, improve water and nutrient efficiency, and reduce climate-related risks in Telangana.

Climate Challenges in Telangana Affecting Vegetable Cultivation

High Temperature Extremes

Telangana often faces extremely high summer temperatures, reaching 40–45°C, especially from April to June. These high temperatures put severe stress on vegetable crops.

High temperature stress negatively impacts:

- ✓ Seed germination and seedling establishment, leading to poor crop yields.
- ✓ Photosynthesis and respiration balance, resulting in less biomass accumulation.
- ✓ Flowering, pollination, and fruit development, causing flowers to drop and poor fruit growth.
- ✓ Quality traits, including size, color, texture, and nutritional value.

Heat-sensitive vegetables like tomatoes, capsicum, brinjal, okra, cucurbits, and leafy greens suffer notable yield losses from prolonged heat stress. In crops such as tomatoes and chillies, high night temperatures affect pollen viability, leading to fewer fruits. Leafy vegetables may bolt early, become bitter, and have lower market appeal under thermal stress.

Erratic and Limited Rainfall

Rainfall in Telangana varies widely in intensity, distribution, and timing, with common issues like delayed onset, early withdrawal, or long dry spells during the monsoon. These unpredictable rainfall patterns create challenges for crop planning and irrigation. The effects of irregular rainfall on vegetable farming include:

- ✓ Moisture stress at key growth stages, such as flowering and fruit setting.
- ✓ Higher rates of crop failure in rainfed and partially irrigated areas.
- ✓ Soil erosion and nutrient loss during sudden heavy rain.
- ✓ Delayed planting or transplanting, disrupting crop schedules and market timing.

Vegetable crops, with their short growth cycles and shallow roots, are especially at risk from intermittent droughts and waterlogging caused by uneven rainfall.

Water Scarcity

Water scarcity is a major issue in Telangana's agriculture. This problem arises from over-extraction of groundwater, declining water levels, reduced reservoir capacity, and growing competition for water from non-agricultural uses. Vegetable crops require a lot of water, particularly during early growth, flowering, and fruiting. Insufficient or poorly timed irrigation can lead to:

- ✓ Reduced plant growth and yield.
- ✓ Increased flower and fruit drop.
- ✓ Poor fruit size and quality.
- ✓ More cases of physiological disorders like blossom end rot and cracking.

Traditional flood irrigation methods worsen water scarcity by causing significant water losses, making effective water management crucial for climate-resilient vegetable farming.

Increased Pest and Disease Pressure

Higher temperatures, increased humidity, and changing rainfall patterns have impacted pest and disease dynamics in vegetable farming. Warmer conditions encourage:

- ✓ Faster pest reproduction and longer breeding cycles.
- ✓ Broader pest geographical ranges.
- ✓ Greater survival of insect vectors and pathogens.

Vegetable crops in Telangana are increasingly exposed to pests like whiteflies, thrips, aphids, fruit borers, and mites, as well as diseases such as leaf curl virus, bacterial wilt, powdery mildew, and blights. Climate change may also weaken the effectiveness of traditional pest control methods, including chemical pesticides, due to resistance and changes in pest behavior.

These challenges require integrated pest and disease management strategies, focusing on biological control, resistant varieties, and ecosystem-based methods to improve resilience under changing climatic conditions.

Principles of Climate-Resilient Vegetable Cultivation

Climate-resilient vegetable farming relies on combining adaptive, resource-efficient, and risk-reducing strategies that help crops and farming systems endure climate uncertainties while maintaining productivity. The key principles include:

Adapting crop choices and management practices to current and predicted climate trends, including temperature and rainfall variability.

Optimizing water use and improving soil health to boost crop tolerance to moisture and heat stress.

Reducing risks from climate extremes like droughts, heat waves, and heavy rainfall through innovative technology and contingency planning.

Empowering farmers by providing access to knowledge, decision-making tools, climate advice, and institutional support.

These principles aim to strengthen the resilience of vegetable farming systems in Telangana amid changing climate conditions.

Crop Selection and Timing Adjustments

Climate-Suitability Based Crop Planning

Choosing vegetable crops and cultivars that fit the climate is essential for climate-resilient agriculture. In Telangana:

Heat-tolerant vegetables like okra, cowpea, chillies, cluster beans, and sweet corn thrive better in high temperatures.

Cool-season vegetables such as cabbage, cauliflower, radish, carrot, beetroot, and peas work best when cultivated in winter when temperatures are milder.

Short-duration and early-maturing varieties limit exposure to extreme heat, drought, and unpredictable rainfall, thereby lowering yield risks.

Selecting stress-tolerant and pest-resistant varieties further boosts system resilience and lowers reliance on external inputs.

Adjusted Sowing Windows

Changing planting and transplanting times is crucial to avoiding climate-related crop stress:

Early planting during the pre-monsoon (May–June) allows rainfed vegetable crops to effectively use initial monsoon rainfall.

Sowing in winter (October–November) helps cool-season vegetables take advantage of good temperature and moisture conditions, leading to higher yields and better quality.

Staggered planting can spread production risk and ensure a steady market supply, especially during uncertain climatic conditions.

Water Use Efficiency and Irrigation Strategies

Water availability is a key constraint for vegetable farming in Telangana. Improving water use efficiency is therefore central to maintaining climate resilience.

Micro-Irrigation Systems

- ✓ Drip irrigation increases water use efficiency by 30–50%, delivering water directly to the roots, cutting evaporation losses, and improving fertilizer efficiency through fertigation.
- ✓ Sprinkler irrigation works well for leafy vegetables and root crops, providing even moisture and reducing labor needs.

Irrigation Scheduling and Soil Moisture Management

- ✓ Irrigation schedules based on crop evapotranspiration (ETc) and soil moisture conditions help prevent both water stress and over-irrigation.
- ✓ Using soil moisture sensors, tensiometers, or simple field methods (like feel and appearance) aids in timely irrigation decisions.
- ✓ Mulching and reduced tillage help conserve soil moisture during dry spells.

Water Harvesting and Recycling

- ✓ Farm ponds, percolation tanks, and bunded fields support rainwater harvesting and provide extra irrigation during dry periods.
- ✓ Reusing washed vegetable water, after proper filtration and treatment, can supplement irrigation needs and lessen the overall demand for freshwater.

Soil and Nutrient Management

Healthy soils lead to better water retention, nutrient availability, and microbial activity, which improves crop resilience to climate stresses.

Organic Matter Enhancement

- ✓ Regularly adding farmyard manure (FYM), compost, and vermicompost improves soil structure, moisture retention, and biological activity.
- ✓ Using legumes as green manure boosts organic carbon and soil fertility, especially in rainfed systems.

Conservation Tillage

- ✓ Minimal and conservation tillage keeps soil moist, prevents erosion, and enhances soil structure.
- ✓ These practices also cut fuel and labor costs, contributing to economic sustainability.

Balanced Fertilization

Managing nutrients based on soil tests ensures balanced fertilization, reduces nutrient losses, and boosts plant resistance to stress. Combining organic and inorganic nutrients promotes long-term soil health and stable yields.

Climate-Smart Technologies

Mulching: Using organic (crop residues, straw) or plastic mulches cuts soil evaporation, moderates temperature, stifles weeds, and enhances water efficiency. Mulching has shown significant benefits for crops like tomatoes, okra, and cucurbits in Telangana.

Shade Nets and Protective Structures: Shade nets reduce heat stress, improve seedling survival, and enhance quality for sensitive vegetables. Low tunnels and rain shelters protect crops from excessive rain, wind damage, and pests, allowing for off-season growth.

Climate Information Services: Access to short- and medium-range weather forecasts and agricultural advice helps farmers make informed choices about sowing, irrigation, fertilizer use, and pest control. Mobile advisory services and extension networks are key in sharing climate information.

Integrated Pest and Disease Management (IPDM)

Climate change can worsen pest and disease challenges, making strong IPDM strategies essential.

Monitoring and Early Warning

Regular field monitoring helps catch pest and disease cases early. Using pheromone traps, sticky traps, and light traps can assist in tracking pest numbers and timing control measures.

Biological Control Measures

Preserving natural predators like ladybird beetles, lacewings, and parasitoids supports pest population control. Using biopesticides (such as neem products, Bacillus thuringiensis, Trichoderma spp.) reduces chemical use and boosts ecosystem resilience.

Reduced Chemical Dependency

Using pesticides based on thresholds limits unnecessary chemical application. Rotating pesticide types prevents resistance and helps maintain long-term pest control effectiveness.

Socio-Economic and Policy Support

Capacity Building

Farmer Field Schools (FFS) and extension programs improve farmers' knowledge and skills in climate-resilient vegetable farming. Participatory approaches promote technology adoption and local adaptation.

Access to Credit and Insurance

- ✓ Crop insurance plans help protect farmers from losses due to extreme weather events.
- ✓ Affordable institutional credit supports investments in micro-irrigation systems, mulching materials, and protective structures.

Market Linkages

Contract farming, farmer producer organizations (FPOs), and assured market access enhance price realization and lower market risks. Value addition and cold chain infrastructure further stabilize income.

Case Studies and Success Stories (Telangana)

Many field-level examples in Telangana show the success of climate-resilient practices:

- ✓ Using drip irrigation in tomato and chilli crops improved yields while saving 30–40% on water.
- ✓ Mulched okra crops showed less heat stress, better fruit quality, and higher marketable yields.
- ✓ Winter leafy vegetables grown under shade nets experienced lower pest issues, longer shelf life, and higher market prices.

These success stories demonstrate the practicality and economic advantages of climate-resilient vegetable farming.

Conclusion

Promoting climate-resilient vegetable farming in Telangana requires a comprehensive and integrated approach that combines climate-sensitive crop planning, efficient water and soil management, climate-smart technologies, and sustainable pest control. With strong extension services, supportive policies, and farmer-focused institutional frameworks, these practices can significantly boost productivity, profitability, and sustainability in vegetable farming while reducing vulnerability to climate variability and extremes.