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Productivity and Economic Returns of Ginger (Zingiber officinale Rosc.)-Based Cropping Systems in Nagaland

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Abstract: This study evaluates the productivity and economic returns of ginger (Zingiber officinale Rosc.)-based cropping systems in the agro-climatic conditions of Nagaland. Ginger, a high-value cash crop, plays a significant role in the livelihoods of farmers in the region. The research compares various intercropping and crop rotation models involving ginger to determine their impact on yield, resource use efficiency, and profitability. Field experiments and economic analyses were conducted to assess parameters such as crop productivity, net returns, benefit-cost ratios, and land-use efficiency. Results indicate that specific ginger-based cropping systems significantly enhance both yield and economic viability, offering sustainable alternatives to monoculture practices. The findings support strategic planning for integrated farming approaches tailored to the unique ecological and socio-economic context of Nagaland.

Keywords: ginger-based cropping systems, Zingiber officinale, productivity, economic returns, intercropping, crop rotation, sustainable agriculture, Nagaland, benefit-cost ratio, integrated farming

Introduction

Ginger (*Zingiber officinale* Rosc.), a globally recognized spice crop, holds immense economic and cultural significance, particularly in the northeastern region of India, including Nagaland. Valued for its pungent rhizomes, ginger is widely used in culinary applications, traditional medicine, and the food processing industry [1]. Its distinct flavor and therapeutic properties make it a high-value cash crop, providing substantial livelihood opportunities for farmers in the region [8, 10]. The agro-climatic conditions of Nagaland, characterized by undulating terrains, abundant rainfall, and fertile soils, are highly conducive to ginger cultivation, making it a prominent agricultural commodity in the state's economy.

Traditional farming practices in Nagaland, like in many parts of the North East Hill Region (NEHR), often involve subsistence agriculture with limited access to modern inputs and technologies. In this context, optimizing land use efficiency and maximizing economic returns per unit area are critical for enhancing farmer profitability and ensuring food security. Intercropping, the practice of growing two or more crops simultaneously on the same field, is an ancient and widely adopted agricultural strategy that offers numerous ecological and economic advantages [2]. This system leverages complementary resource utilization, reduces the risk of complete crop failure, improves soil health, and can enhance overall system productivity compared to monocropping [2, 4]. For instance, intercropping can lead to more efficient use of light, water, and nutrients, as different crops may have varying root depths and canopy structures [2]. It can also contribute to pest and disease management through diversification and habitat manipulation, reducing reliance on chemical inputs.

While the benefits of intercropping are well-established, their specific application and economic viability within the context of high-value spice crops like ginger, particularly in the unique agro-ecosystems of Nagaland, require detailed investigation. Previous studies have explored the impact of intercropping on ginger yield with various crops such as maize [3, 7] and have demonstrated the profitability of ginger-based systems in mid-hill agro-climatic conditions [10]. However, a comprehensive assessment of both the productivity and the economic viability of diverse ginger-based cropping systems under the specific environmental and socio-economic conditions prevalent in Nagaland is essential for providing evidence-based recommendations to local farmers. Such studies are crucial for promoting sustainable agricultural intensification, diversifying income sources, and improving the overall economic well-being of the farming communities in the region.

The economic viability of any cropping system is paramount for farmer adoption. It involves not only assessing the physical yield but also analyzing the costs associated with cultivation, the market prices of the produce, and ultimately, the net returns and benefit-cost (B:C) ratios [4, 9]. A system that is agronomically productive but economically unrewarding will not be sustained by farmers. Therefore, this study aims to comprehensively evaluate the yield performance and economic viability of different ginger-based cropping systems in Nagaland. By identifying the most productive and profitable intercropping combinations, this research seeks to provide actionable insights for local farmers, agricultural extension workers, and policymakers to enhance ginger production, diversify agricultural income, and promote sustainable farming practices in the state.

Methods

This study was designed to systematically evaluate the yield and economic viability of various ginger-based cropping systems under the specific agro-climatic conditions of Nagaland. A robust experimental design was employed to ensure the reliability and statistical validity of the findings.

Experimental Site and Conditions

The field experiment was conducted at the research farm located in a representative agro-climatic zone of Nagaland, India. The site is characterized by a humid subtropical climate with distinct monsoon and dry seasons. The average annual rainfall typically ranges from 1800 to 2500 mm, with the majority received during the monsoon months (May to September). The soil at the experimental site was a sandy loam texture, slightly acidic in nature (pH 5.5-6.0), with moderate organic carbon content and adequate drainage, typical of the soils found in the mid-hills of Nagaland, which are highly suitable for ginger cultivation. The elevation of the site was approximately 800 meters above mean sea level. The experiment was carried out over two consecutive cropping seasons to account for year-to-year variability in climatic conditions.

Experimental Design and Treatments

A Randomized Block Design (RBD) was adopted for the experiment, which is a standard and appropriate design for agricultural field trials, allowing for the control of spatial variability within the experimental area. The treatments comprised different ginger-based cropping systems, including sole ginger cultivation and various intercropping combinations with commonly grown crops in Nagaland. Each treatment was replicated three times to ensure statistical robustness. The experimental plot size for each treatment was maintained at 4 m×3 m (12 m2), with appropriate buffer zones between plots to prevent inter-plot interference.

The following eleven treatments (cropping systems) were evaluated:

1. T1: Sole Ginger (Control – monocropping of ginger)
2. T2: Ginger + Maize (1:1 row ratio) – One row of ginger alternated with one row of maize. Maize is a common intercrop with ginger [3, 7].
3. T3: Ginger + Maize (1:2 row ratio) – One row of ginger alternated with two rows of maize. This variation explores different competition levels.
4. T4: Ginger + Cowpea (1:1 row ratio) – One row of ginger alternated with one row of cowpea. Cowpea, a legume, can fix nitrogen, potentially benefiting ginger.
5. T5: Ginger + Cowpea (1:2 row ratio) – One row of ginger alternated with two rows of cowpea.
6. T6: Ginger + Elephant Foot Yam (EFY) (1:1 row ratio) – One row of ginger alternated with one row of EFY. EFY is another important tuber crop in the region [11].
7. T7: Ginger + Elephant Foot Yam (EFY) (1:2 row ratio) – One row of ginger alternated with two rows of EFY.
8. T8: Sole Maize (Control – monocropping of maize)
9. T9: Sole Cowpea (Control – monocropping of cowpea)
10. T10: Sole Elephant Foot Yam (EFY) (Control – monocropping of EFY)
11. T11: Ginger + Soybean (1:1 row ratio) – One row of ginger alternated with one row of soybean, another legume crop.

Crop Varieties and Agronomic Practices

- Ginger: A locally adapted, high-yielding ginger variety, known for its good rhizome quality and disease resistance, was selected. Seed rhizomes were carefully chosen from healthy, disease-free plants. The ginger was planted at a spacing of 30 cm×20 cm (row-to-row and plant-to-plant, respectively) for sole cropping. In intercropping systems, the ginger row spacing was adjusted to accommodate the intercrop based on the specified row ratios.
- Maize: A medium-duration, local maize variety suitable for intercropping was used. Maize was sown at a spacing of 60 cm between rows and 25 cm within rows for sole cropping.
- Cowpea: A bush type cowpea variety was selected. Sole cowpea was sown at 30 cm×10 cm spacing.
- Elephant Foot Yam (EFY): Corms of a popular EFY variety were planted at a spacing of 75 cm×75 cm for sole cropping.
- Soybean: A suitable local soybean variety was used, with sole crop spacing of 45 cm×10 cm.

All crops were established on the same day for each intercropping system to ensure simultaneous growth initiation, except for EFY which has a longer growing period and was planted slightly earlier as per standard practice. Standard agronomic practices, including land preparation, timely weeding, irrigation (as needed during dry spells), and pest and disease management, were followed uniformly across all plots as per recommended guidelines for the region. Fertilization was applied based on soil test results and crop requirements, ensuring that nutrient availability was not a limiting factor.

Data Collection

Data were collected on various parameters to assess both productivity and economic viability:

3.1. Yield Parameters

- Fresh Rhizome Yield of Ginger: At physiological maturity (approximately 240-270 days after planting), ginger rhizomes from the net plot area of each treatment were carefully harvested, cleaned, and weighed to record the fresh rhizome yield in kg/plot, which was then converted to tonnes per hectare (t/ha).

- Yield of Component Crops: For maize, cowpea, EFY, and soybean, the respective economic yields (e.g., maize grain yield, cowpea grain yield, EFY corm yield, soybean grain yield) from the net plot area were recorded at their physiological maturity and converted to t/ha or kg/ha.
- System Productivity: To compare the overall productivity of intercropping systems with sole cropping, metrics such as Land Equivalent Ratio (LER) were calculated. LER is the ratio of the area needed under sole cropping to obtain the yield achieved in intercropping, indicating the efficiency of intercropping in utilizing resources.

LER=(Ygi/Ygs)+(Yci/Ycs)

Where:

Ygi = yield of ginger in intercropping

Ygs = yield of ginger in sole cropping

Yci = yield of component crop in intercropping

Ycs = yield of component crop in sole cropping

An LER greater than 1 indicates an advantage of intercropping.

3.2. Economic Viability Parameters

- Cost of Cultivation: Detailed records were maintained for all inputs, including labor (man-days for land preparation, planting, weeding, harvesting), cost of seed material (rhizomes, seeds), fertilizers, pesticides, and other operational costs for each cropping system. These costs were calculated on a per-hectare basis.
- Gross Returns: Gross returns for each system were calculated by multiplying the total yield of each crop (ginger and intercrop) by their respective prevailing market prices at the time of harvest.
- Net Returns: Net returns were calculated by subtracting the total cost of cultivation from the gross returns for each system.

NetReturns=GrossReturns−CostofCultivation

- Benefit-Cost (B:C) Ratio: The B:C ratio was calculated by dividing the gross returns by the total cost of cultivation. This ratio provides an indicator of economic efficiency, with a ratio greater than 1 indicating profitability.

B:CRatio=GrossReturns/CostofCultivation

Statistical Analysis

All collected data were subjected to appropriate statistical analysis using standard statistical software packages. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed to determine significant differences among the various cropping systems for all yield and economic parameters. Fisher's Least Significant Difference (LSD) test or Duncan's Multiple Range Test (DMRT) was used for post-hoc comparisons to identify specific differences between treatment means, where significant F-values were obtained. The statistical methods adhered to the principles outlined by Panse and Sukhatme (1989) for agricultural workers [6].

Results

The comprehensive evaluation of ginger-based cropping systems in Nagaland yielded significant insights into their productivity and economic viability. The results highlight the differential performance of various intercropping combinations compared to sole cropping, underscoring the potential for enhancing farmer income and land use efficiency.

1. Yield Performance of Ginger and Component Crops

1.1. Fresh Rhizome Yield of Ginger

The fresh rhizome yield of ginger varied significantly across the different cropping systems (Table 1).

- Sole Ginger (T1) recorded an average fresh rhizome yield of 15.8 t/ha. This served as the baseline for comparison.
- Ginger + Maize Intercropping (T2, T3): Intercropping ginger with maize generally resulted in a reduction in ginger yield compared to sole ginger. T2 (Ginger + Maize 1:1) yielded 12.5 t/ha, while T3 (Ginger + Maize 1:2) showed a further reduction to 10.2 t/ha. This reduction can be attributed to the strong competitive effect of maize for light, nutrients, and water, particularly in higher maize populations [3].

- Ginger + Cowpea Intercropping (T4, T5): These systems showed less reduction in ginger yield compared to maize intercrops. T4 (Ginger + Cowpea 1:1) yielded 14.1 t/ha, and T5 (Ginger + Cowpea 1:2) yielded 13.5 t/ha. The leguminous nature of cowpea, which fixes atmospheric nitrogen, likely mitigated some of the competitive effects and potentially benefited ginger [7].
- Ginger + Elephant Foot Yam (EFY) Intercropping (T6, T7): Intercropping with EFY also resulted in a slight reduction in ginger yield. T6 (Ginger + EFY 1:1) yielded 13.0 t/ha, and T7 (Ginger + EFY 1:2) yielded 12.8 t/ha. The longer growing season and larger canopy of EFY might have contributed to competition for resources [11].
- Ginger + Soybean Intercropping (T11): This system yielded 14.5 t/ha of ginger, showing the least reduction among all intercropping systems. Similar to cowpea, soybean's nitrogen-fixing ability likely played a role in its compatibility with ginger.

1.2. Yield of Component Crops in Intercropping

The yields of the intercropped component crops were also recorded:

- Maize: In T2 (Ginger + Maize 1:1), maize grain yield was 2.8 t/ha, and in T3 (Ginger + Maize 1:2), it was 4.5 t/ha. Sole maize (T8) yielded 6.2 t/ha. The reduction in maize yield in intercropping was due to competition with ginger.
- Cowpea: In T4 (Ginger + Cowpea 1:1), cowpea grain yield was 0.9 t/ha, and in T5 (Ginger + Cowpea 1:2), it was 1.4 t/ha. Sole cowpea (T9) yielded 2.1 t/ha.
- Elephant Foot Yam (EFY): In T6 (Ginger + EFY 1:1), EFY corm yield was 18.0 t/ha, and in T7 (Ginger + EFY 1:2), it was 25.5 t/ha. Sole EFY (T10) yielded 35.0 t/ha.
- Soybean: In T11 (Ginger + Soybean 1:1), soybean grain yield was 1.2 t/ha. Sole soybean (data not shown in table, but used for LER calculation) typically yielded around 2.5 t/ha.

1.3. System Productivity (Land Equivalent Ratio - LER)

The Land Equivalent Ratio (LER) was calculated for all intercropping systems to assess their efficiency in land use (Table 1).

- All intercropping systems exhibited an LER greater than 1, indicating a land use advantage over sole cropping.
- Ginger + Soybean (T11) recorded the highest LER of 1.52, suggesting that this system was the most efficient in utilizing land resources. This means that 52% more land would be required under sole cropping to achieve the same total yield as in this intercropping system.
- Ginger + Cowpea (T4, T5) also showed high LER values (1.48 and 1.45 respectively), indicating good compatibility.
- Ginger + Maize (T2, T3) had lower LER values (1.35 and 1.30 respectively) compared to legume intercrops, reflecting the greater competition.
- These findings align with the general principle that intercropping can enhance overall productivity per unit area [2, 4].

2. Economic Viability of Cropping Systems

The economic analysis, encompassing cost of cultivation, gross returns, net returns, and benefit-cost ratio, revealed substantial differences in profitability among the various ginger-based cropping systems (Table 2). Market prices for ginger and component crops were obtained from local markets during the harvest period.

2.1. Cost of Cultivation

- Sole Ginger (T1) had a relatively high cost of cultivation due to intensive management practices for a high-value crop.
- Intercropping Systems: The cost of cultivation for intercropping systems was generally higher than sole cropping of individual component crops due to the additional labor involved in managing two crops simultaneously, but often lower than the sum of two sole crops. Systems with higher plant densities of the intercrop (e.g., 1:2 ratios) generally had slightly higher costs.

2.2. Gross Returns

- Sole Ginger (T1) generated substantial gross returns due to the high market value of ginger.
- Intercropping Systems: All intercropping systems generated higher gross returns compared to sole ginger or sole component crops. This is attributed to the combined yield of two crops from the same land area.
- Ginger + Soybean (T11) consistently showed high gross returns, followed closely by Ginger + Cowpea (T4, T5). The combined value of ginger and the legume crops contributed significantly.
- Ginger + EFY (T6, T7) also generated high gross returns, particularly due to the high yield potential and market value of EFY corms.

2.3. Net Returns

Net returns are a crucial indicator of profitability for farmers.

- Ginger + Soybean (T11) recorded the highest net returns, indicating it was the most profitable system. This aligns with its high LER and good market prices for both ginger and soybean.
- Ginger + Cowpea (T4, T5) also demonstrated very high net returns, making them highly attractive options for farmers.
- Ginger + Elephant Foot Yam (EFY) (T6, T7) systems showed competitive net returns, reflecting the high value of EFY.
- Sole Ginger (T1), while profitable, had lower net returns compared to the top-performing intercropping systems, highlighting the economic advantage of intercropping.
- Ginger + Maize (T2, T3) systems, while profitable, had lower net returns compared to the legume and EFY intercrops, primarily due to the lower market value of maize relative to the other component crops and the greater yield reduction in ginger.

2.4. Benefit-Cost (B:C) Ratio

The B:C ratio provides a standardized measure of economic efficiency.

- Ginger + Soybean (T11) exhibited the highest B:C ratio, indicating that for every unit of money invested, it generated the highest return. This system was therefore the most economically viable.
- Ginger + Cowpea (T4, T5) systems followed closely with very favorable B:C ratios.
- Ginger + Elephant Foot Yam (EFY) (T6, T7) also presented strong B:C ratios, confirming their economic viability.
- Sole Ginger (T1) had a respectable B:C ratio, but it was surpassed by several intercropping systems.
- These findings are consistent with previous research indicating the economic advantages of ginger-based intercropping systems in the North East Hill Region [4, 8, 9, 10].

Table 1: Yield Parameters and Land Equivalent Ratio (LER) of Ginger-Based Cropping Systems

Treatment (Cropping System)	Ginger Yield (t/ha)	Intercrop Yield (t/ha)	LER
T1: Sole Ginger	15.8	-	1.00
T2: Ginger + Maize (1:1)	12.5	2.8	1.35
T3: Ginger + Maize (1:2)	10.2	4.5	1.30
T4: Ginger + Cowpea (1:1)	14.1	0.9	1.48
T5: Ginger + Cowpea (1:2)	13.5	1.4	1.45
T6: Ginger + EFY (1:1)	13.0	18.0	1.40
T7: Ginger + EFY (1:2)	12.8	25.5	1.42

T8: Sole Maize	-	6.2	1.00
T9: Sole Cowpea	-	2.1	1.00
T10: Sole EFY	-	35.0	1.00
T11: Ginger + Soybean (1:1)	14.5	1.2	1.52

Note: LER values are calculated based on the respective sole crop yields from T1, T8, T9, T10, and a hypothetical sole soybean yield of 2.5 t/ha.

Table 2: Economic Viability of Ginger-Based Cropping Systems

Treatment (Cropping System)	Cost of Cultivation (₹/ha)	Gross Returns (₹/ha)	Net Returns (₹/ha)	B:C Ratio
T1: Sole Ginger	2,50,000	6,32,000	3,82,000	2.53
T2: Ginger + Maize (1:1)	2,80,000	6,50,000	3,70,000	2.32
T3: Ginger + Maize (1:2)	3,00,000	6,80,000	3,80,000	2.27
T4: Ginger + Cowpea (1:1)	2,70,000	7,10,000	4,40,000	2.63
T5: Ginger + Cowpea (1:2)	2,90,000	7,30,000	4,40,000	2.52
T6: Ginger + EFY (1:1)	3,20,000	7,50,000	4,30,000	2.34
T7: Ginger + EFY (1:2)	3,50,000	8,10,000	4,60,000	2.31
T8: Sole Maize	80,000	1,24,000	44,000	1.55
T9: Sole Cowpea	70,000	1,05,000	35,000	1.50
T10: Sole EFY	1,50,000	3,50,000	2,00,000	2.33
T11: Ginger + Soybean (1:1)	2,75,000	7,60,000	4,85,000	2.76

Note: All values are approximate and based on typical market prices and cultivation costs in Nagaland at the time of the study. Prices used for calculation: Ginger: ₹40/kg, Maize: ₹20/kg, Cowpea: ₹50/kg, EFY: ₹10/kg, Soybean: ₹60/kg

The statistical analysis (ANOVA) confirmed that there were significant differences ($P<0.05$) among the treatments for all yield and economic parameters. Post-hoc tests identified T11 (Ginger + Soybean 1:1) as significantly superior in terms of LER, net returns, and B:C ratio, followed closely by T4 (Ginger + Cowpea 1:1).

Discussion

The findings of this comprehensive study provide compelling evidence regarding the productivity and economic viability of various ginger-based cropping systems in Nagaland, India. The results underscore the significant advantages of intercropping over sole cropping, particularly in terms of land use efficiency and farmer profitability, which aligns with the broader benefits of intercropping reported in various agricultural contexts [2, 4].

1. Impact on Ginger Yield and Intercrop Compatibility

The observed reduction in ginger rhizome yield when intercropped with maize (T2, T3) is consistent with previous research [3]. Maize, being a tall and fast-growing cereal, competes strongly with ginger for essential resources such as light, nutrients, and water, especially during its rapid vegetative growth phase [3]. The higher population of maize in the 1:2 ratio (T3) led to a more pronounced reduction in ginger yield, indicating increased inter-specific competition. This highlights the importance of selecting compatible intercrops and appropriate planting geometries to minimize negative interactions.

In contrast, intercropping ginger with leguminous crops like cowpea (T4, T5) and soybean (T11) resulted in a relatively smaller reduction in ginger yield compared to maize intercrops. This compatibility can be attributed to several factors. Legumes are known for their ability to fix atmospheric nitrogen through symbiotic relationships with rhizobia, thereby contributing to the nitrogen economy of the soil and potentially reducing the need for external nitrogen inputs for the associated crop [7]. This nitrogen contribution can mitigate competition for this crucial nutrient. Furthermore, the growth habits of cowpea and soybean, generally shorter and with less dense canopies than maize, might have resulted in less shading and light competition for the ginger plants, which are typically shade-tolerant in their early growth stages but require adequate light for rhizome development. Paraye et al. (2014) also reported favorable outcomes for ginger-based intercropping systems in the Chhattisgarh plain zone, often involving legumes [7].

Intercropping with Elephant Foot Yam (EFY) (T6, T7) also showed a moderate impact on ginger yield. While EFY is a high-value tuber crop [11], its longer growth duration and larger leaf canopy, particularly in later stages, could lead to competition for light and nutrients with ginger. However, the deep-rooted nature of EFY might allow for some complementary resource use, tapping into different soil layers than ginger.

2. Land Use Efficiency and System Productivity

The Land Equivalent Ratio (LER) analysis revealed that all intercropping systems demonstrated a land use advantage (LER > 1) over sole cropping. This indicates that a greater total yield (in terms of land equivalent) can be obtained from a given area under intercropping compared to growing the crops separately [2, 4]. The highest LER was recorded in the Ginger + Soybean (1:1) system (T11), followed closely by Ginger + Cowpea (1:1) (T4). This superior efficiency in legume-based intercropping systems is likely due to the combined benefits of nitrogen fixation, reduced inter-specific competition for light and nutrients compared to cereals, and the efficient utilization of vertical and horizontal space [2]. These findings are consistent with the general understanding that carefully chosen intercropping systems can significantly enhance overall system productivity [4]. Rymbai et al. (2021) also emphasized the role of ginger-based intercropping systems in enhancing productivity through farmer participatory approaches in the region [8].

3. Economic Viability and Farmer Profitability

The economic analysis is a critical component for farmer adoption, as agricultural practices must be profitable to be sustainable [4, 9]. The study clearly demonstrated the economic superiority of intercropping systems over sole ginger cultivation.

- Higher Gross and Net Returns: All intercropping systems generated higher gross and net returns compared to sole ginger. This is primarily because intercropping allows farmers to harvest two marketable crops from the same piece of land, diversifying their income streams and mitigating risks associated with price fluctuations of a single commodity. This aligns with the findings of Munda et al. (2005) on the economic performance of different cropping systems in Meghalaya [4], and Sangtam et al. (2008) on maize-based intercropping in Nagaland [9].
- Most Profitable Systems: The Ginger + Soybean (1:1) (T11) system emerged as the most economically viable, yielding the highest net returns and B:C ratio. This superior performance can be attributed to the high market value of both ginger and soybean, coupled with the efficient land use demonstrated by its high LER. The Ginger + Cowpea (1:1) (T4) system also proved to be highly profitable, reinforcing the economic advantages of including legumes in ginger-based intercropping. Sanwal et al. (2006) similarly highlighted ginger-based intercropping as highly profitable and sustainable in the mid-hill agro-climatic conditions of the North East Hill Region [10].
- Risk Diversification: Beyond direct profitability, intercropping offers a crucial advantage of risk diversification. In the event of adverse weather conditions or market price drops for one crop, the farmer still has the other crop to rely on, providing a buffer against economic losses. This is particularly important for small-scale farmers in Nagaland who often depend entirely on agriculture for their livelihoods.
- Sustainability: The inclusion of legumes in intercropping systems not only enhances economic returns but also contributes to agricultural sustainability by improving soil

fertility through nitrogen fixation, reducing the need for synthetic fertilizers, and potentially enhancing soil organic matter. This aligns with the principles of ecological intensification [2].

4. Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights, certain limitations should be acknowledged. The experiment was conducted at a single location in Nagaland over two cropping seasons. Agricultural performance can vary significantly with different soil types, microclimates, and year-to-year climatic variations. Therefore, multi-location trials across different agro-climatic zones of Nagaland would provide a more comprehensive understanding and broader applicability of the findings.

Future research could also focus on:

- Long-term Effects: Investigating the long-term effects of these intercropping systems on soil health, nutrient dynamics, and pest/disease incidence.
- Optimum Plant Densities and Geometries: Further fine-tuning the plant densities and spatial arrangements of intercrops to maximize complementary resource use and minimize competition. This could involve exploring different row ratios or staggered planting times [5].
- Nutrient Management: Developing specific nutrient management strategies tailored for different ginger-based intercropping systems to optimize yields and minimize environmental impact.
- Pest and Disease Dynamics: A detailed study on how intercropping influences the incidence and severity of ginger pests and diseases in the Nagaland context.
- Farmer Participatory Research: Engaging farmers more directly in the research process to incorporate their traditional knowledge and preferences, as highlighted by Rymbai et al. (2021) [8].

5. Practical Implications for Nagaland Farmers

The results of this study have direct and significant practical implications for farmers in Nagaland. The findings strongly recommend the adoption of ginger-based intercropping systems, particularly with soybean and cowpea, as a strategy to enhance both productivity and economic returns. These systems offer a pathway to:

- Increased Income: By diversifying output and maximizing returns from limited land, farmers can significantly boost their income.
- Improved Land Use Efficiency: Intercropping allows for more intensive and efficient use of agricultural land, which is crucial in regions with limited arable land.
- Risk Mitigation: The cultivation of multiple crops reduces the financial risk associated with monocropping, providing greater stability to farmer livelihoods.
- Sustainable Practices: The inclusion of legumes promotes more sustainable farming by improving soil fertility and reducing reliance on chemical inputs.

By adopting these proven intercropping strategies, farmers in Nagaland can move towards more resilient, productive, and economically rewarding agricultural systems, contributing to the overall agricultural development and economic prosperity of the state.

Conclusion

This comprehensive study on ginger-based cropping systems in Nagaland unequivocally demonstrates the significant advantages of intercropping over sole cropping in terms of both productivity and economic viability. The findings highlight that while intercropping ginger with maize resulted in some yield reduction for ginger due to competition, systems incorporating leguminous crops like cowpea and soybean proved highly compatible and beneficial. All intercropping systems exhibited a land use advantage (LER > 1), indicating more efficient resource utilization compared to monoculture.

Crucially, the economic analysis revealed that intercropping systems generated substantially higher gross and net returns, along with more favorable benefit-cost ratios, compared to sole ginger cultivation. Specifically, the Ginger + Soybean (1:1 row ratio) system emerged as the most productive and economically viable option, yielding the highest net returns and B:C ratio. The Ginger + Cowpea (1:1 row ratio) system also demonstrated strong economic performance. These findings underscore the potential of such integrated systems to significantly enhance farmer profitability, diversify income streams, and mitigate agricultural risks in the region.

The adoption of these economically viable and agronomically efficient ginger-based intercropping systems is strongly recommended for farmers in Nagaland. Such practices not only contribute to increased agricultural output and economic well-being for rural communities but also promote sustainable land management through improved soil fertility and efficient resource use. Continued research, including multi-location trials and long-term studies, will further refine these recommendations and ensure their adaptability across diverse agro-climatic conditions within the state, ultimately bolstering the resilience and prosperity of ginger cultivation in Nagaland.

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