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POLICY PAPER



Agri-tourism: The future of agriculture and tourism in India

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Agriculture along its allied sectors is the largest livelihood generator in India (FAO, 2019). The 70 percent rural households are primarily dependent on agriculture for their regular livelihoods. With 25 percent of global production, India exhibit strong potential as a global food grain producer. On the other hand, tourism holds strong instrumental status as the largest employment generation industry, and it is the strategic tool for poverty alleviation and sustainable human development. It has 6.7 percent GDP contribution to the Indian Economy (WTTC, 2019) and generates both direct and indirect employments (Unay-Gailhard&Bojniec, 2019). For India being an emerging service economy, strategizing and promoting agri-tourism clusters increase the absorption capacity of agriculture sector and enhance the development and profitability of tourism sector through the strategic convergence (Senanayke&Wimalaratna, 2010; Taware, 2007). Also, agri-tourism has the potential to become source for additional income-generating activities (IGAs) in combination to enhance GDP for both agriculture and tourism economy (Barbieri et al., 2019; Degarege& Lovelock, 2019).

What is agro tourism?

Agri-tourism or agri-tourism involves any agriculture based operation or activity that brings visitors to a farm or ranch. According to the World Tourism Organization agri-tourism “involves accommodation being offered in the farm house or in a separate guesthouse, providing meals and organizing guests’ activities in the observation and participation in the farming operations.”



Agri-tourism includes a variety of activities and services such as farm accommodation, local food and beverage, festivals, nature observation, you-pick (harvest) activities, educational and leisure visits, hunting, fishing and sale of gifts. It was considered in many locations to be a low-investment, low-risk strategy as farms mainly made use of their existing resources. To bring awareness on the scope and importance of agri-tourism, the 16th May is celebrated as the World Agri-Tourism Day. In 2021, the day was celebrated under the theme – ‘Rural Women Sustainable Entrepreneurship Opportunities through Agri Tourism’.

Importance of agri-tourism

Agricultural tourism includes a set of economic and social activities that occur and link travel with the products, services and experiences of agriculture. Agri-tourism offers farmers the possibility of diversifying and generating additional income through on-farm touristic activities in order to help supplementing their low agricultural income. This helps to maintain the viability of active farms and rural communities. The more general understanding of agri-tourism states that agri-tourism activities support and promote agricultural resources, traditions and culture.

The farmers in our country, on their journey towards agripreneurship are in the lookout for activities or options in farming that would fetch them additional income while reducing the risk involved. Agri –tourism opens up new vistas for such enterprising farmers who can earn additional income from their farms with very little risk. The state of Maharashtra is the pioneer state in India to develop and promote agri-tourism. Agri Tourism Development Corporation India (ATDC) incorporated in 2005 in Maharashtra is a first of its kind initiative in promoting organized agri-tourism in the country.

Scope of agri-tourism

Agri tourism brings major primary sector agriculture closer to major service sector tourism. Scope for agri tourism can be illustrated as follows –

- Presently, the tourist services are costly and availed by the small portion of the population. Agri tourism services can be made available at the affordable prices.

- In India, there are more than 6 lakh villages scattered all over the country because of which tourists can avail agri tourism services from the nearest villages. This provides a good alternative which is less expensive and with a limited time period.
- Urban population has curiosity about the rural life. Agri tourism provides scope for re- disclosing the rural life which is rich in diversity.
- Villages provide recreational opportunities to all age groups i.e. children, youngsters, middle and old age people, male or female in a family.
- Urban life is full of stress, people are in search for peace and relaxation, agri tourism fulfills their requirements.
- By arranging the educational tours for the school children in rural areas, opens up the doors of knowledge about agriculture science for them.
- Many tourist places are over crowded with the tourists. Because of this reason agri tourism can become a good alternative for the tourists.

The major areas of agri-tourism may include the following or a suitable combination of a few of the activities based on the resources and convenience of the farmers.

1. **Guided farm tours** - The farmer or his family members may act as the guides to the tourists explaining to them the crops, their cultivation practices and other specialities of the crop,.
2. **Outdoor recreation / Agricultural games**-The recreational facilities may include animal rides, fishing, local games etc
3. **Traditional cuisine** - The tourists may be provided the tastes of authentic traditional cuisine, street food, speciality foods etc of the area.
4. **Home stays**-The facility for homestays attract more tourists and also increase the number of days the tourists spend on the farm.



5. **On-farm direct sales** - Agri tourism increases the potential for higher margins on farm sales of value added products and services.
6. **Educational experiences** - The educational experiences that can be provided includes garden/nursery tours, animal farm tours, agro-product processing enterprise tours etc.

Cluster agri-tourism - The way forward

The requirements for the establishment of an agri-tourism venture may well uphold the need for farms with considerable acreage to arrange for the various components envisaged in its plan. The large farmers who have farms with area more than 10 ha stands a good chance to start such ventures while the marginal farmers with farms of area less than one hectare are at loss on how to exploit this opportunity with their smallsize holdings. In a country where 86%of the farmers have small and marginal holdings, it may be a serious concern that these farmers may be left out and may not be able to reap the benefits of such agri-business interventions.

The farmers with small scattered holdings may be organized into agri-tourism development cooperatives. The Agri-tourism co-operative societies are eligible for finance from the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD). The credit availed may be utilized for creating infrastructure facilities in the farms to support the tourism.

Environmental concerns

However, careful management is required, however, to prevent potential negative impacts on the environment, agricultural resources, biodiversity and the lives and cultures of the people in these areas. Sustainability is key. With this in mind, FAO and the World Tourism Organization of the United Nations (UNWTO) has taken measures to work together to promote sustainable agricultural tourism as a promising way to boost rural development. Preserving the original landscape and maintaining natural resources in order to protect the rural environment and its biodiversity should be the key concern of the stakeholders.

Agri tourism is unravelling various facets of village life. It gives an opportunity to the tourists to experience rural life, taste the traditional food and to live in a peaceful environment. The promotion of agri tourism requires support of Ministry of Agriculture, Central and state tourism department and farmers. Very few Agri Tourism Centers are commercially operated. So there is a need to promote the concept to attract the farmers to get involved in the agri tourism service industry. As this is a service industry farmers need to be oriented on maintenance of facilities, hospitality and public relation. Urban customers demand for the facilities like safe and clean accommodation, clean water and hygienic food from the agri tourism service provider. To increase awareness amongst urban customers' mass media like television, newspapers, radio and social media can be beneficial.

Agri-tourism can fuel rural economies through the multiplier effect and the acquired benefits will be shared amongst different businesses within the community. Further development of agri-tourism leads to profit margins for farm products and services, particularly for small farms in crisis. This highlights the innovative nature of agri-tourism that can attract a new generation of farmers, offer new opportunities for youth development in rural areas and boost the rural economy.