

## **AGRI – TOURISM: INNOVATIVE SUPPLEMENTARY INCOME GENERATING ACTIVITY FOR ENTERPRISING FARMERS**

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Agriculture is the backbone of Indian Economy. Around 85 percent of the population is directly or indirectly dependent on Agriculture and almost 26 percent of India's GDP comes from Agriculture. 90 million farmers are dwelling in 6.25 lac villages producing more than 200 MT of food grains feeding the country. More than a profession or a business, agriculture is India's culture. Hence, adding additional income generating activities to existing agriculture would certainly increase contribution of agriculture in the national GDP. Serious efforts need to be made in this direction and Agri – Tourism is one such activity.

Tourism is termed as an instrument for employment generation, poverty alleviation and sustainable human development. During 1999-2000, direct employment created by tourism was 15.5 million. Besides, tourism also promotes national integration, international understanding and supports local handicrafts and cultural activities. During 2000, the number of foreign tourists that visited India was 26.41 lac. India's share in world tour market is just 0.38 percent. With this meager share, foreign exchange earned is Rs.14,475 crores. Turnover in domestic tourism is much more than this. To promote domestic tourism, thrust areas identified by Government of India are *development of infrastructure, product development and diversification, development of eco-adventure sports, cultural presentations, providing inexpensive accommodation, streamlining facilitation procedures at airports, human resource development, creating awareness and public participation and facilitation of private sector participation*. In this process, important stakeholders are State and Central department of tourism, Indian Institute of Tourism and Travel Management, Tourism Development Corporations, foreign embassies, Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI), Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), Tourists, Transport Operators Association, Indian convention promotion bureau and Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA).

Promotion of Agri – Tourism involves some more important stakeholders namely Ministry of Agriculture and line departments at state and central governments and farmers. Promotion of Agri-Tourism needs conceptual convergence with Rural Tourism, Eco-Tourism, Health Tourism, Adventure Tourism and culinary adventures.

Some of the important advantages of Agri – Tourism are:

1. It brings major primary sector agriculture closer to major service sector tourism. This convergence is expected to create win-win situation for both the sectors.
2. Tourism sector has potential to enlarge.
3. Agriculture sector has the capacity to absorb expansion in tourism Sector.

### **SCOPE OF AGRICULTURE - TOURISM**

Agri-Tourism has great scope in the present context for the following reasons:

1. **An inexpensive gateway** - The cost of food, accommodation, recreation and travel is least in Agri-Tourism. This widens the tourist base. Present concept of travel and tourism is limited to urban and rich class which constitutes only a small portion of the population. However, the concept of Agri-Tourism takes travel and tourism to the larger population, widening the scope of tourism due to its cost effectiveness.
2. **Curiosity about the farming industry and life style** - The urban population having roots in villages always have had the curiosity to learn about sources of food, plants, animals, raw materials like wood, handicrafts, languages, culture, tradition, dresses and rural lifestyle. Agri-Tourism which revolves around farmers, villages and agriculture has the capacity to satisfy the curiosity of this segment of population.
3. **Strong demand for wholesome family oriented recreational activities** - Villages provide recreational opportunities to all age groups i.e. children young, middle and old age, male, female, in total to the whole family at a cheaper cost. Rural games, festivals, food, dress and the nature provides variety of entertainment to the entire family.
4. **Health consciousness of urban population and finding solace with nature friendly means** - Modern lifestyle has made life stressful and average life span has comedown. Hence, people are in constant search of pro-nature means to make life more peaceful. Ayurveda which is a pro-nature medical approach has roots in villages. Indigenous medical knowledge of villagers is respected. Organic foods are in greater demand in urban areas and foreign countries. In total, health conscious urban population is looking towards pro-nature villages for solutions.

5. **Desire for peace and tranquility** - Modern life is a product of diversified thinking and diversified activities. Every individual attempts to work more, in different directions to earn more money to enjoy modern comforts. Hence, peace is always out of his system. Tourism is a means for searching peaceful location. Peace and tranquility are inbuilt in Agri-Tourism as it is away from urban areas and close to nature.
6. **Interest in natural environment** - Busy urban population is leaning towards nature. Because, natural environment is always away from busy life. Birds, animals, crops, mountains, water bodies, villages provide totally different atmosphere to urban population in which they can forget their busy urban life.
7. **Disillusionment with over crowded resorts and cities** - In resorts and cities, over crowded peace seekers disturb each others peace. Hence, peace is beyond cities and resorts. Even though efforts are made to create village atmosphere in the sub urban areas through resorts, farm houses, it looks like a distant replica of the original.
8. **Nostalgia for their roots on the farm** - Cities are growing at the cost of villages. Villagers are migrating to cities in search of jobs and to seek the comforts of modern life. Hence, yesterday's villagers are today's urbanites. Deep in the heart of urbanites lies the love and respect for their ancestors and villages. Hence, visit to villages satisfies their desire. This is also expressed through the hatred of urbanites to flat culture and love for farmhouses located in the outskirts of cities. Any opportunity to visit villages and spend time with family is dream of any urbanite. But, minimum decent facilities are always problem. Agri-Tourism attempts to overcome this problem.
9. **Rural recreation** - Villages provide variety of recreation to urbanites through festivals and handicrafts. Villagers (farmers) lifestyle, dress, languages, culture / traditions which always add value to the entertainment. Agricultural environment around farmers and the entire production process could create curiosity among urban taught. Places of agricultural importance like highest crop yielding farm, highest animal yielding farm, processing units, farms where innovations tried add attraction to the tourists. Agricultural products like farm gate fresh market, processed foods, organic food could lure the urban tourists. As result of this agri - atmosphere in the villages, there is scope to develop Agri - Tourism products like agri-shopping, culinary tourism, pick and own your tree / plot, bed and breakfast, pick and pay,

bullock cart riding, camel riding, boating, fishing, herbal walk, rural games and health (ayurvedic) tourism.

- 10. Educational value of Agri-Tourism** – Agri-Tourism could create awareness about rural life and knowledge about agriculture science among urban school children. It provides a best alternative for school picnics which are urban based. It provides opportunity for hands on experience for urban college students in agriculture. It is a means for providing training to future farmers. It would be effectively used as educational and training tool to train agriculture and line department officers. This provides unique opportunity for education through recreation where learning is fun effective and easy. Seeing is believing, doing is learning. This experience based concept is the USP of Agri- Tourism.

### **BASIC PRINCIPLES OF AGRI – TOURISM**

Agri - Tourism should ensure the following three basic principles.

- 1. Have something for visitors to see** - Animals, birds, farms and nature are few things which Agri-Tourism could offer to the tourist. Apart from these, culture, dress, festivals and rural games could create enough interest among visitors in Agri-Tourism.
- 2. Have something for visitors to do** - Participating in agricultural operations, swimming, bullock cart riding, camel riding, buffalo riding, cooking and participating in the rural games are few activities to quote in which tourists can take part and enjoy.
- 3. Have something for visitors to buy** - Rural crafts, dress materials, farm gate fresh agriculture products, processed foods are the few items which tourist can buy as memento for remembrance.

### **THREE IMPORTANT FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE SUCCESS OF AGRI-TOURISM**

- 1. Farmer** – In majority of the cases, farmers are less educated, less exposed and innocent. For a farmer, any outsider is a guest and is treated wholeheartedly without any commercial motive. Treating guests is pleasure for the villagers than pain. The farmer entertains the guest while entertaining himself in the process. He is not like an exploitative natured businessman which itself facilitate a clean tourism atmosphere.

2. **Village** – Villages, located far from the city lack urban facilities, but are blessed with natural resources. Investments are made by nature in the form of water bodies, fields, forest, mountains, deserts and islands. The community structure is more homogenous and treating guests is part of the culture rather than a professional activity leading to natural environment required for such form of tourism.
3. **Agriculture** – Rich resources in agriculture namely land, water and plants are unique from place to place bringing diversity and creating curiosity. Each field is unique which adds to the attraction of tourists. The way of cultivation and the products are great attraction to the urban population. Indigenous knowledge of rural people is a wealth, which adds to the novelty and the curiosity of urban population. Combination of farmer, village and agriculture creates a wonderful situation which provides unlimited satisfaction to the tourist especially from urban areas.

#### **AGRI-TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES IN INDIA**

1. **Indian tourism industry is growing @10.1%** - The World Tourism organization has estimated that the tourism industry is growing at the rate of 4% a year and that by the year 2010 there will be more than one billion tourists visiting various parts of the world. But the Indian tourism industry is growing at the rate of 10% which is 2½ times more than the growth rate at global level. By introducing Agri-Tourism concept, not only present growth rate is sustained but also this value addition contributes to further growth.
2. **India has entered amongst the top 10 tourist destinations list** (Conde Nast Traveller – A leading European Travel Magazine) - India is already established as one of the top tourist destination in the world. Value addition by introducing novel products like Agri-tourism would only strengthen the competitiveness of Indian tourism industry in global market.
3. **India has diverse culture and geography** which provides ample and unlimited scope for the growth of this business. India has diverse Agro-climatic conditions, diverse crops, people, culture, deserts, mountains, coastal systems and islands which provides scope for promotion of all season, multi-location tourism products.
4. **Increasing number of tourists preferring non-urban tourist spots** (financial express). Hence, there is scope for promotion of non-urban tourist spots in interior villages by establishing Agri-tourism centres. But, adequate facilities and publicity are must to promote such centres.

5. **Government initiatives and policies in Xth five year plan** allocation has been increased from 525 crore to 2900 crores. Increased financial allocation reaffirms the government commitment. The increased financial allocation by six times could be used for capacity building of service providers, creation of infrastructure and publicity.

### **Role of agriculture institutes in promotion of Agri-tourism**

Around 1000 agriculture teaching, training, research and marketing organizations are there in the country. Each institute is equipped with technically trained manpower, infrastructure for lodging, boarding, fields and other necessary facilities which could be used for promotion of Agri-tourism concept. Urban, foreign tourist could be attracted, accommodated and exposed to agricultural situations on payment basis. This helps in efficient use of existing manpower, infrastructure on one side and generating the income to the institute. This approach is possible by just utilizing the facilities of the existing institutes in Agri-tourism. The same facility could be used for further promotion of the concept by building the capacity of the farmers, agripreneurs in Agri-tourism. Thus, these centres could serve as nodal centres for promotion of Agri-tourism concept. All the state agricultural universities, animal husbandry universities, fisheries universities, ICAR organizations, Krishi Vignan Kendra, state, district level farmers training centres, demonstration farms and seed production farms could be brought under this concept. This would bring down economic burden of the government, efficient utilization of resources and promotion of Agri-tourism concepts.

### **Market mix strategy**

The proposed market mix strategy for the promotion of Agri-tourism concept is as follows:

1. **Product** - The product in Agri-tourism is seeing, believing and ultimately experiencing. This experience is unique and unmatched. The experience of climbing a tree, buffalo riding in the pond and enjoying the sugarcane juice in the field itself are unique and none of the million dollar tourist centres can create and offer such experiences.
2. **Price**
  - a. **Customer segment pricing** – Domestic and foreign tourist could be priced differently as the capacity to pay is different. For a bullock cart riding, a foreign tourist can pay one dollar where as a domestic tourist can pay only one fourth.



country. But, promotion of this group approach needs initial government interventions.

5. **Policies** – Some of the policy initiatives of urban government would surely help promotion of Agri-tourism. They are:
  - a. Building brand identity “Incredible India”.
  - b. Rs.60 crore budget for promoting brand
  - c. Xth five year plan budget increased from Rs. 525 to 2900 crores.
  - d. An allocation of Rs.50 lakhs per village for village tourism has been proposed
  - e. The states are encouraging private public partnership in tourism sector.
  
6. **Positioning** – Ultimately Agri-tourism concept has to be positioned in the minds of tourists as “Come, pluck a fruit, smell a flower, run in the fields, lie on the hay and be lost in rural India”.

### **SOME SUCCESSFUL ENTERTAINMENT FARMING ENTERPRISES AND TECHNIQUES IN AGRI – TOURISM: INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES.**

Agri-tourism is a viable income generating activities in many developed counties which would provide lead to promote the same with modifications suiting to our conditions. Some of the successful running models of Agri – Tourism are:

- Wineries with Friday happy hours.
- Arts & Crafts Demonstrations.
- Farm Store : Exhibition of farm equipments
- Roadside Stand selling fresh farm products and craft items
- Processing of farm products and sale
- Demonstration of Agri-activities
- Sheep Shearing.
- Wool Processing.
- Fee fishing / hunting.
- Farm Vacations.
- Bed and Breakfast
- Farm Tours.
- Horseback Riding.
- Cross-country skiing.

- Camping.
- Bad weather - like desert, snow fields, heavy rainfall also attract Agri-tourists
- Picnic Grounds.
- A shady spot for visitors to rest – like a big banyan tree
- Educational Tours for school children, officers and progressive farmers
- Farm Schools to teach a particular skill
- Outdoor Schools which are mobile in nature teaching agriculture
- Herb Walks.
- Workshops on interesting, emerging agriculture topics
- Festivals with wide publicity and sponsorship
- Cooking Demos to satisfy housewives.
- Pick-Your-own Pumpkin Patch.
- Rent –an – apple tree.
- Moonlight activities.
- Pageants.
- Speakers who can attract Agro-tourist narrating Agricultural experiences.
- Regional Themes like tribal coffee of Kerala, Andaman spices etc
- Crop Art.
- Pizza Farm.
- Historical Recreations like highlighting a oldest farm etc.
- Log Buildings.
- Antique Villages.
- Collection of old farm Machinery.
- Miniature Village.
- Farm Theme Playground for Children.
- Fantasyland.
- Gift Shop.
- Antiques.
- Crafts.
- Crafts Demonstrations.
- Food Sales.
- Lunch Counter.
- Cold Drinks.
- Restaurant.
- Theme (apple town, etc.)

### **ISSUES NEEDING ATTENTION FOR THE PROMOTION OF AGRITOURISM**

- 1. Publicity** – It is difficult to provide publicity to a remote Agri-tourism unit. Hence, either collectively such Agri-tourism operators can provide publicity or organizations like ITDC, State tourism development corporations, NGOs, press and tour operators can take up this responsibility. Information technology can play very important role in promotion of Agri-tourism. An interactive website containing all details about Agri-tourism locations and a toll free 24 hours help line can provide necessary information to Agri-tourists.
- 2. Transport** – Reaching the remote Agri-tourism units is the greatest challenge due to lack of approach roads and poor transportation facilities in rural areas. Tele connectivity is must which is yet to reach villages. Government should play important role in creating these facilities namely roads, transport and telecommunication to rural areas especially where Agri-tourism units are established on priority basis. These efforts could be effective with private participation in partnership mode.
- 3. Accommodation** – Safe and clean accommodation is must in Agri-tourism. Urban and foreign tourists look for these minimum facilities. Orienting Agri tour operators on one hand and providing incentive to such efforts on other hand is necessary. Regular clean water supply and neat toilets are important. At the same time, it is necessary to limit modern facilities in which Agri-tourist is not interested.
- 4. Networking** – Networking public and private stakeholders at national and state level to assist the Agri-tourism operator at remote place is necessary. This network can get policy support, infrastructure and publicity to Agri-tourism units.
- 5. Capacity building of farmers** – Farmer need to be oriented on maintenance of facilities, hospitality and public relation which he is not aware
- 6. Safety of tourists** – Agri-tourism units are located in remote areas which lacks roads, medical facilities, telecommunication and sometimes threat from theft and wild animals. Hence, support of local population is must besides facilities for emergency medical care.
- 7. Public - Private partnership** – Agripreneurs, farmers' organizations, co-operatives, NGOs and agribusiness companies can take up these ventures

with the help of farmers and government agencies tour operators. Transporters and hospitality industry would also benefit in the process.

### **NETWORK OF STAKEHOLDERS IN PROMOTION OF AGRITOURISM**

