

COMMUNITY BENEFIT AWARD FINALIST 2011

Founded in 2005, Agri Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) is an organization that facilitates agricultural tourism in the Indian state of Maharashtra.

CASE STUDY

Agriculture represents the backbone of the Indian economy and nearly 85% of the population is directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture, but increasing competition in the sector means that other ways of supplementing incomes is needed to help provide a viable livelihood for rural villagers who are farmers, and their families. There is also concern that migration to urban areas, particularly among the young, will have a long-term negative impact on the agricultural sector and rural areas, so finding ways to encourage young Indians to remain or return to their villages and earn a viable living is also a focus of the ATDC's efforts.

Agriculture is a seasonal endeavor with unpredictable results that are dependent on weather, rain, and nature. But farmers need to provide for their families year-round, and thus need to diversify both their products and their services.



Founded by Mr. Pandurang Tarawe, who himself hails from a farming family, ATDC's goals are to develop and promote agricultural tourism (agri-tourism) as a potential vehicle for diversifying and stabilizing rural economies by creating jobs, increasing community income, providing a broader market base for local business, and attracting tourists to the area, thereby supporting the growth of small tourism industries. Through ATDC's projects, training, and support, farmers benefit from the development of tourism and tourism income to improve their livelihoods, traditional forms of art and music in rural areas are encouraged and supported, and urban Indians as well as foreign tourists have the opportunity to discover and appreciate Indian agricultural traditions.

The main goals of the programme are to benefit farmers, local communities, and tourism enterprises through the development of new consumer markets, increasing awareness of local agricultural products, enhancing understanding of the importance of maintaining agricultural lands, providing farm family members with opportunities for on-site employment so they do not have to migrate to urban areas, and strengthening the long-term sustainability of small farms.

ATDC offers free agri-tourism training programmes which equip farmers with the technical knowledge they need to diversify their products and establish small-holding tourism ventures. In addition, ATDC prepares feasibility reports of the villages and trains guides as well as the entire community for the development of agri-tourism business. In order to encourage farmers to take part in the project, ATDC has appointed a guidance assistance committee to offer them advice and technical know-how, and it provides farmers with consulting services to help them with the preparation of project reports and sales & marketing activities. It currently has 52 agri-tourism locations in Maharashtra, and has provided training to over 500 farmers in diversifying their activities into tourism. As a result, since the inception of the programme, farmers across the state have experienced a 25% growth in their income.



A major goal of the programme is to encourage farm family members to remain in, or return to, their home communities and to have viable employment and business opportunities through the agricultural sector. To that end, ATDC advocates a policy of employing local youth in its agri-tourism centres, and it has helped to undertake activities that will attract rural youth to remain in their villages, including being appointed as technical faculty for the Shri Rajashri Sahu Self Employment Scheme, which trains unemployed youth from various castes to become entrepreneurs.

More than 50 have been offered a job at the end of their training and 5 have started their own agri-tourism centres. In addition, ATDC specifically contracts women for food preparation services in the agri-tourism centres, through organised Women Self Help Groups, again helping to support small enterprise development for rural families.

To support the cultural heritage of Maharashtra's rural villages, ATDC conducts training programmes for local artisans, to keep traditional arts and crafts alive. To support this, handicrafts are then sold in souvenir shops for visiting tourists, plant nurseries and a medical plant garden have been built to educate visitors about traditional uses of plants, and cuttings sold to Indian visitors from urban areas, and a demonstration showcasing the transition of irrigation methods from traditional to modern, as well as changes in farming and transport, has been created. Tourists are additionally offered a range of activities, such as wine tasting tours and tractor or bullock cart rides.

ATDC has also established close networking links with Maharashtra state, which has led to additional infrastructure developments to support tourism. For example, in 2007, the state government promoted the integrated farming module scheme jointly with the ATDC, the agriculture department, the Pune District Committee, Pune District Co-operative Bank, Mahatma Pune Agriculture University, and the Pune District Council, and has assisted with the development of additional tourism accommodations, road networks, and electrification in support of these agri-tourism initiatives. Since 2008, ATDC has also organized the "Kriushi Paryatan Gaurav Puraskar," an awards programme which honours those who have helped to promote the concept of agri-tourism.

With this innovative approach to working with rural farmers through the development of agri-tourism, Agri Tourism Development Corporation has contributed to poverty alleviation and has developed a concept that is leading the way towards sustainable livelihoods for many farmers and their families in the state of Maharashtra.