



## **Agri-Tourism Development Initiative by Shri.Pandurang Taware through Co-operative Movement in the State of Maharashtra**

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Farmers in village are engaged in farming activity through out the year. Their income from farm produce depend on good monsoon, good harvest and good marketing. It is experienced that the income from agriculture farming is only once or twice in the year, but the expenses are on weekly basis , it is very difficult for the farmer to sustain throughout the year, since the income is not sufficient. To make farming sustainable and feasible there was a urgent need of some experiment in additon to the traditional farming, after two years of consitent research and studies, Shri Pandurang Taware concluded that Tourism was one such expirement that will generate weekly income which can compensate weekly expenses of the farm.

In Maharashtra some horticulture farms like tea plantation, wineryard, coffee plantation, rubber plantation and agriculture farms have potential for agri-tourism. Agri-tourism is defined as travel, which combines, agriculture and rural setting with product of agriculture operation all within a tourism experience. Experince itself is the Agri tourism product besides Tourists can buy fresh agri produce and products directly from farmers without any middle agents. Urban population is increasing day by day. Today, urban children's world is restricted in the close doors of a school, home and centre around television, video game, computer, fast food and internet. Living in urban area, they have not enjoyed the beauty of mother nature. Agri Tourism Development Corporation, did the research in 2004, and found that 43% of urban population did not have any relative left in the village. 97% of urban population wants to experience the rustic beauty of village life. This gives an opportunity to develop tourism centre in the village based on agriculture activities. A humble attempt to impliment and start the Pilot Project of Agri Tourism by ATDC was made under leadership of Mr. Pandurang Taware in 2005 in



Malegaon near Baramati in Maharashtra, where the Agri Tourism was demonstrated on Agriculture Development Trust's farm. once within 2 years the pilot project became a huge success. In 2007 , ATDC launced Mahrashtra State Agri Tourism Vistar Yojana 2007 where in 52 farmers were selected to start Agri-tourism centers across the entire state of Maharashtra. Similary in 2008 – another 25 farmers were selcted , thus totally 72 agri tourism centers are operational currently in the entire state.

In the state where 80 % farmers have marginal land holdings , it was danger that these farmers may left out of the agri tourism benefits, thus Shri Pandurang Taware suggested the route of cluster agri tourism development under co-operative basis, thus the farmers started several agri tourism development co-operatives.

There was urgent need to bring all these agri and rural tourism co-operatives under one umbrellla and to have apex body that will guide, train, build capacity, promote, sell and market agri and rural tourism concept in urban cities , at the same time work in tendem with government departments to develop agri and rural tourism as the most desired supplimentary income and employment generation source to the agriculture communities in the state of the Maharashtra. Thus Maharashtra State Agri & Rural Tourism Co-operative Federation Ltd ( MART) was registered on 12<sup>th</sup> Dec 2008 , with main objective to coordinate the activity of planning, financing, marketing and liaison with various State and Central Agencies. The governing body of Federation has 12 representatives from agri & rural tourism co-operatives as well as 11 inividual farmers who runs agri and rural tourism center along with women directors from the individual farmers and 2 government nominated directors . The Agri-tourism co-operative societies get financed from National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD).The loan is utilized in creating infrastructure facilities in the village to support the tourism. Farmers main objective is aimed at utilizing the potential of agriculture farm by attracting tourists. Farmers carry-out normal agriculture practice during the week days and attend tourists in farm during the weekend days. This kind of arrangement did not interfere in the routine work of agriculture. Besides, the farmers generate additional income from the agriculture site using it for tourism purpose on the weekend. This has showed an source of additional income to farmers apart from allied agriculture activities like diary, , poultry