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## **Agri-tourism in Bihar creating a win-win situation through the intersection of tourism and agriculture**

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### **Abstract**

Agriculture is a mainstay of the Indian economy being deeply rooted in the Indian Culture. The concept of agri-tourism is not very new; however, it is gaining importance and growing in the recent years. Agri-tourism provides the urban tourists and experience of rural life by opening up the farms to them. It is regarded as the intersection of tourism and agriculture. It has a potential to reduce the uncertainty of farming or agri-entrepreneurship/ agri-business by generating additional income and creating job opportunities to the farm families. It is environmentally conscious, socially responsible, culturally compatible, ethical valuable, market competitive and economically profitable. The overall potential for agri-tourism can only be achieved if strategies to address and overcome the challenges are developed and implemented.

**Keywords:** A win-win situation, agri-entrepreneurship, agri-tourism, Indian economy, state of Bihar

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### **Introduction**

Indian population has increased five times than that existed at the time of independence, but the land area is as it is. On the other side, the agricultural land got decreased, currently, only one fourth of the land is available for per person as compared to the time of independence. Agriculture business is becoming more and more costly and many farmers cannot afford it. In addition to this, the gradual decrease in fertility of land that is giving marginally diminishing yields. So, to overcome this continuously increasing gap farmers must think of an alternative business of any type to support their overall income from land, or else they shall be forced to live out a life of below poverty line with lots of scarcity of resources. In order to work in this direction some farmers must be encouraged to start small and viable business like Agri-Tourism units on the farm in their villages.

Agri-tourism refers to a commercial practice that combines agricultural activities with tourism for the entertainment and recreation of tourists. It provides the farmers with an opportunity to generate additional income and a channel for direct marketing to consumers. Agri-tourism also offers communities the potential to increase their local tax bases. Besides this, it helps to preserve agricultural lands and allows states to develop business enterprises. Currently, it is gaining immense traction across India on account of its ability to revitalize rural economies, provide employment opportunities to local residents, and educates the masses about agricultural practices.

Agri-tourism has a potential to provide a means to reduce the uncertainty of farming or agricultural businesses by supplementing additional income and creating a job opportunity to the farmers. Farmers in many regions have realized the importance and desire to diversify their agricultural businesses into Agri-tourism, mainly to create a value-added product that meet the needs of the tourists. However, starting and managing Agri-tourism business can be a challenging and risky for farmers and agricultural entrepreneurs in the absence of a good planning and understanding of management practices.

### **Agri-Tourism: The Intersection of Tourism and Agriculture**

Agri-tourism is being promoted for the development of rural areas in the developed countries of the world since past decades and it is being considered as a vital factor which can positively influence economic, environmental, demographic and sociological aspects. It is being encouraged in the areas having high biodiversity and landscape diversity. Agriculture is a mainstay of the Indian economy being deeply rooted in the Indian culture. The concept of agri-tourism is not very new; however, it is gaining importance and growing in the recent years. Agri-tourism provides the urban tourists an experience of rural life by opening up the farms to them. Agri-tourism combines agriculture-based activities and tourism aspects that brings visitors to the farms, where they not only enjoy the vacation and leisure but also understand and appreciate the activities performed by the farmers, who in turn get an opportunity to maximise their profit and employment potentials on farm products and services.

Agri-tourism is presently getting popularity as producers emphasise diversification in agriculture and an increase in profit; urban visitors prefer the touring to rural areas to experience the peaceful rural environment. Farm visits, farm stays and trail visits have been a preferences of many tourists in recent times to experience something different as compared to traditional sightseeing at the places of tourists' interest. The rural economy gets

substantial boost from the union of agriculture with tourism sector resulting in Agritourism. The term 'agri-tourism' is alternatively used as agro-tourism, farm tourism, agricultural tourism, agritainment. It is also viewed as a part of rural tourism. To promote agri-tourism, its concept needs convergence with the concepts of rural tourism, eco-tourism, health tourism, and adventure tourism. In India, agri-tourism stands on three pillars, viz. Farm recreation, farm stays and marketing of local farm produce. With diversified agro-ecosystems, rich heritage in artefacts, historical facts, natural resources and infrastructure; Agritourism has been considered as a potential option to boost agrarian economy in India.

Agri-tourism is regarded as the intersection of tourism and agriculture. In other words, agri-tourism can be defined as the conjunction between a working farm territory aided with remunerative tourism unit, which is broadly a segment of rural enterprise. Basic principles of Agritourism are to have something for the tourists to see, to do and to purchase. The farms have a series of activities involving production, post production and processing activities, which are linked to the tourism sector that attracts visiting tourists to such ventures or activities. These activities and ventures have a dual purpose, one being educating the tourists about the local practices of farm with certain entertainment for them and the other involves source of income generation for the host farmer.

Blending of certain facets of tourism with agri-entrepreneurship helps to attract the tourists to visit these ventures or working farms. The main focus is on increasing farm income along with providing recreation, entertainment, and/or educational experiences to visitors. Agri-tourism combines the aspects of agriculture and tourism industries, providing the social and educational benefits to visitors and an opportunity for farmers to maximize their profit and employment potentials on farm products and services. Moreover, it offers a unique experience of rural environment and landscapes (Singh, 2021) <sup>[7]</sup>. Agro-tourism is a better way to know about the traditional agricultural farming activities which brings us very close to mother-nature. Agritourism is an activity that links the economic, social and environmental components of sustainability, strongly related to local communities and their attitudes towards tourism (Muresan *et al.*, 2016).

### **Importance of Agri-Tourism**

Agri-tourism is a niche and an emerging market segment of the tourism industry. The agri-tourism market globally was valued at \$ 42.46 billion in 2019 and is expected to reach \$ 62.98 billion by 2027, regarding a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 13.4% between 2020 and 2027. It is another realm of tourism sector that has potential to grow immensely across the globe, including India. Agriculture makes significant contribution to India's GDP and thus the backbone of Indian Economy. Agri-tourism would increase the share of agriculture in national GDP thereby providing additional source of income along with conventional agricultural and tourism industry.

Agri-tourism has a potential to reduce the uncertainty of farming. Agri-entrepreneurship/ agri-business can generate additional income and create job opportunities to the farm families. Farmers in many regions have realised the importance and desire to diversify their farming and/or agri-businesses into agritourism to create attention of the tourists and meet their needs. A number of financial, educational, and social benefits are provided to tourists, farmers and rural communities by agritourism. Agri-tourism brings together elements of agriculture and tourism all together, providing an opportunity for both to thrive better financially. It helps farmers in direct marketing of their farm produce to consumers. Farmers choose agri-tourism as a supplementary source of income in addition to their primary occupation along with the involvement of entire farm family for extending various services to the tourists. The tourists get involved in the farming activities during their farm stays, enjoy the nature as well as local foods, visit fairs, purchase farm produces and locally produced handicrafts. Thus, it boosts the tourism industry and creates new employment opportunities.

### **Agri-Tourism Market Trends: Indian Context**

The seeds of agri-tourism in India were first sown by the formation of the Agri Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) located at Baramati in Maharashtra. The ATDC was founded in 2004 by Pandurang Taware, an entrepreneur from the farming community. Currently, India's revenue from agri-tourism is growing at an annual growth rate of 20%. The Indian Agri-tourism market is expected to exhibit a CAGR of 20.6% during 2022-27.

The widespread adoption of agritourism to support farmers' incomes and create novel tourism forms, thereby contributing to the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainability, is primarily driving the India agritourism market. In addition to this, the growing curiosity about rural and farm activities, particularly among the millennial and urban population, is also propelling the growth of the market. Furthermore, the escalating popularity of agritourism as it provides business opportunities for the local tourism operators and offers family-oriented recreation surroundings is creating a positive outlook for the regional market. In line with this, agritourism also offers several farm activities, including fishing, horseback riding, harvest festivals, wildlife photography, wagon or sleigh rides, sheep shearing, cooking classes, guided animal tours, historical re-enactments, etc., at a meager cost. This, along with the rising utilization of farms for events, such as weddings, gatherings, and private parties, is acting as a significant growth-inducing factor. Moreover, the expanding health-conscious population, which seeks pro-nature ways to escape the stress of hectic lifestyles, is also stimulating the market growth. Additionally, numerous favorable initiatives by the Indian government aimed at promoting and developing the agritourism sector in the country are further catalyzing the market. For instance, the Ministry of

Tourism and Culture has launched the Swadesh Darshan Scheme for the integrated development of theme-based tourist circuits and instituted a national award in the category of 'Best Rural/Agri/Plantation Tourism Projects' to motivate the stakeholders. Apart from this, the emergence of community-based agritourism, which emphasizes on sustaining rural livelihoods, protecting traditional agricultural practices, and preserving cultures via sustainable land use planning, is projected to fuel the India agritourism market in the upcoming years.

### **Promoting Agri-Tourism in Bihar**

The development of rural tourism offers potential solutions to many problems faced by rural areas. Rural Tourism events have been found to increase business, income and employment and are seen to assist with social and economic development. It is one of the many opportunities that rural communities might consider to improve productivity and incomes (Irshad, 2010). The agro-tourism has become a cash crop for the farmers in Maharashtra and also an instrument of the rural employment generation (Kumbahar, 2010). Agri-tourism promotes livelihood security through improving the diversity and security of resources, skills and technologies that are available to agricultural communities. The fact is that there is a huge employment potential for tourism which is not been exploited by the Bihar farmers. Hence, this sector may act as a workforce multiplier for the economic development of Bihar (Milalic, 2014).

The promotion and showcase of the culture of the agriculture and rural families of different states in India and parts of Bihar will help the agriculturists (farmers) earn the well-deserved respect, as a supplementary income to his family. At the time of distress sale, it will act as an additional source of income for the farmers. For rural youth and farm families, it provides employment opportunities. Cultural transformation takes place between urban and rural people like social moral values, ethics, customs etc. It is also one of the potential sources for supporting a long-term goal of economic development of the Bihar state. Due to its rich heritage in artifacts, historical facts and natural resources, Bihar state can aim to attract and promote tourism to an existing tourist circuit like Buddhists, Jain, Ramayan, Sufi, Gandhi along with the ecological advantages. However, there are inherited challenges for the state to overcome and make the state as a favourite destination to the tourists while developing the agri and rural tourism circuits. In the absence of devoted policy framework, there has been a greater scope for amalgamating an existing rural tourist circuit with Agri-tourism in the state. This is also possible with the help of integrating various stakeholders and creating a single window platform for tourism promotion in the state of Bihar, in lights of other successful states like Maharashtra and Rajasthan.

### **The Underlying Challenges**

Agri-tourism is although a boom for the development of our rural society but only if it can positively handle the challenges in its path. The areas which need attention are being given hereunder:

- Active farmers may tend to ignore their farming activity if their attention and focus shift towards agri-tourism; if it becomes a more lucrative source of income. This is an alarming situation.
- The tourists prefer to visit agri-tourism centres with a larger area and multiple fun and recreational activities. This contrasts with the very purpose of agri-tourism that is to support small and marginal farmers, who are unlikely to have larger agri-tourism centres with several amenities.
- Linguistic challenges have been found to be one of the barriers in the enhancement of the tourism potential. People are found to be lacking proper fluency in Hindi, English or even local dialect, for interaction with the tourists.
- Insufficient financial support can hinder the tourism potential of the region, which would help the folks to preserve the local culture, traditions, heritage, art forms etc.
- The whole tourism concept is very indigenous in the rural areas. Though initiative attempts have been taken by the local youths, yet the professionalism is lacking. They are lacking proper training to project in a manner suitable from a tourism perspective.
- Some regions have great potential as an upcoming agri-tourist spot. However, lack of business planning skills is another big obstruction in this path.

### **Suggested Measures**

Indian farmers need to cater the concept of this agri tourism as diversifying their operation. Explaining the determinant of Agri tourism is a creative strategy for their betterment, however it will not be an easy road map to follow by the farmers or farm owners. A well defined strategy has to be implemented for the development of agri-tourism at national and state level which must cover

- **Policy Attention:** Agri-tourism warrants greater policy attention in developing countries where a majority of the populace is either directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture. With perpetual adversities like uncertain cash flow, recurring debt trap and unpredictable climate, agri-tourism can be promoted as an income-generating activity for farmers and strengthen economic, cultural and ecological resilience of rural regions.
- **Addressing Land Issues:** It is important for the government to address the issue of small/inadequate land to support agri-tourism. One way to serve the tourist market is land consolidation through cluster-based farming or One District One Crop services.
- **Role of State Agencies/Investors:** The state agencies can account for farmers' economic dependence on farm operations and the perceived popularity of agri-tourism activities in order to enable business environments

for agri-ecosystem-based services. Social or impact investors can mobilise private equities into agri-tourism based on the stage of the business and business model adopted by agri-preneurs. The ATDC can attract start-ups and impact investors to harness the business potential of the agri-tourism landscape in India.

- R&D for Agri-tourism: Promotion of Agri-Tourism needs conceptual convergence with Rural Tourism, Eco-Tourism, Health Tourism, Adventure Tourism and culinary adventures. Research is one of the key factors for development in any discipline as it helps students and practitioners to get involved in their areas of interest and search for all possible solutions for the benefit of local communities.

In order to achieve success in the field of agritourism, the farmers should:

- Give a wide publicity of their tourism centre by newspapers, television etc. and develop contacts with the schools, colleges, NGOs, clubs, unions, organisations etc.
- Train their staff or family members for reception and hospitality of the agri-tourists.
- Understand the customers' demands and their expectations and serve them accordingly.
- Charge optimum rent and charges for the facilities/services on the commercial base.
- Develop a website and update from time to time to attract foreign tourists and take their feedback and comments about the service and suggestions for more development and modification.
- Develop different agri-tour packages for different types of tourist and their expectations.
- Small farmers can develop their agri-tourism centres on the basis of cooperative society.

### Conclusion

Agri-tourism is a supportive system to the agricultural activities in India. It is an Innovative practices which can be utilized by the famer and farm owners to harvest this opportunity, through a diversified approach. It creates income and employment opportunities not only to the farmers directly but also to the rural localities indirectly. Tourists need other amenities and product while touring the agricultural farms for which other local people also get involved in different business activities; thus boosting local business activities, income and employments. Agri-tourism also helps in preserving local traditions, art and culture. Tourists visiting farms also tend to purchase the local handicrafts and souvenirs. Agri-tourism facilitates up gradation and revitalisation of community facilities. It helps in empowerment of rural women, diversifies and improves rural economy. Thus, we may opine that agri-tourism creates a win-win situation balancing farmers, tourists and the government.

It is high time that efforts to promote agri-tourism be made at large scale. Promotion of agri-tourism primarily needs proper recognition of the agri-tourism industry; supportive government policies; education and capacity building of the farmers to develop their agri-business/ entrepreneurial skills; formation of farmers' co-operative for implementation of agritourism; financial assistance; training of the farmers for improvement in products and service quality; proper marketing; risk management and conflict management; development of strategic partnerships; and setting up location specific successful agri-tourism models. We may conclude that establishing and managing agri-tourism is a challenging task for farmers and agricultural entrepreneurs in the absence of a good planning and understanding of management practices. Accordingly, the multifaceted aspects be handled and potentialities of agri-tourism be capitalised.

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