

# **Agricultural Tourism and Rural Development in India - Challenges and Possibilities**

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## **ABSTARCT**

India is predominantly an agricultural country. It is not only an occupation; it is a mode of life which for centuries has shaped the thoughts and outlook of millions of people. Agri-tourism is basically where agriculture and tourism intersect, as farms and ranches invite the public onto their property to experience the out of doors, the leisure pace, and the healthy and nutritious produce that is only possible when it is fresh picked at the peak of perfection. Agri-tourism, one of the fastest growing segments of the travel industry, offers a huge variety of entertainment, education, relaxation, outdoor adventures, shopping and dining experiences.

**KEYWORDS:** Agri-tourism, Rural Development and Sustainability.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Agriculture is the foundation of the Indian economy. India is endowed with vast agricultural resources, including extensive plains and fields. Agriculture has been prominently featured in India's five-year plans, with significant focus on land reforms, consolidation of holdings, provision of irrigation facilities, scientific advancements in agricultural research, utilization of fertilizers and manures, provision of agricultural credit, and subsidies, which have collectively initiated a large-scale green revolution in the country. Tourism is a vital component of the service industry, significantly contributing to India's economic progress in recent years. Nevertheless, agricultural revenue is only seasonal. Agritourism may provide as a supplementary source of revenue. India can enhance its gross output by incorporating supplementary income-generating activities into its present agricultural framework. It is seen as a remedy for the nation's sustained economic growth. This article has chosen this subject to explore the need of agri-tourism and the expanding potential of the agricultural and allied activities sector in the rural development of the country.

## **OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY**

The research is mostly descriptive in character. Secondary data are used for the study's objectives. The primary aims of the article are:

- Elucidate the extent and obstacles of agri-tourism in the rural development of India.

## What is agri-tourism?

Agri-tourism denotes a commercial venture on a functioning ranch, farm, or agricultural facility designed for tourist pleasure, which generates revenue for the proprietors. This denotes the act of visiting a functioning farm or any horticultural or agricultural enterprise for enjoyment, education, or active participation in farm activities, which also contributes to the economic viability of the site (American Farm Bureau Federation, 2004).

The innovative idea of transforming farms into holiday enterprises with hospitality amenities to augment earnings is referred to as agri-tourism. Leisurely pursuits in rural regions increase an individual's comprehension and appreciation of the country and its inhabitants. This vacation type occurs on a farm or ranch and often provides the chance to assist with on-site agricultural work during visits. It involves a significant meeting with a producer of terrestrial items and services. Agri-tourism is characterized by a variety of activities, services, and facilities offered by farmers and rural residents to entice visitors to their region, hence generating supplementary money for their enterprises. Globalization, free trade, declining commodity prices, excess supply of commodities, changes in subsidy policies, and heightened dependence on technologically advanced production have all affected farmers' lives (Che et al 2005).

The global economic restructuring has generated an environment in which several local economies must adapt to sustain or improve their socio-economic viability. These modifications, together with innovative concepts and methodologies for leisure and recreation, are accelerating tourist growth in rural regions at an ever-increasing rate. Agri-tourism, an extension of rural tourism, has significant potential in India. Given that agriculture is the primary vocation in India and other emerging nations, particularly in Asia, it is imperative for these countries to consider supplementary revenue production tactics alongside agriculture, one of which is agri-tourism. Agri-tourism has been recognized as a potential method for rural areas to diversify their economies and sustain a rural or agricultural lifestyle. Agri-tourism is characterized by non-mass tourism, environmental sustainability, alignment with local social resources, compatibility with local natural resources, and a focus on ecologically and socially conscious clientele.

## CONDITIONS AND DEVELOPMENTS - AGRICULTURAL TOURISM

The concept of agri-tourism originated in the late twentieth century. It includes agricultural farms associated with tourism. This concept encompasses all actions pertaining to both visitors and vacation organizers in general. Agri-tourism is crucial for both rural communities and metropolitan regions. It offers several benefits: revenue, job development, housing use, activities, and conservation of natural resources, enjoyment, and education. However, the primary issue for several nations is the inadequate amount of agricultural

revenue. Agri-tourism aims to elevate the living conditions of rural areas, particularly by enhancing the income of those employed in agriculture.

Five primary categories of rural tourism provide advantages for both visitors and the local community.

- Ecotourism, mostly favored for its recreational benefits.
- Cultural tourism mostly pertains to the culture, history, and archaeology of the tourist place.
- Ecotourism is a kind of tourism that showcases natural resources while preserving local values and the well-being of the community.
- Rural tourism, whereby guests reside and participate in several aspects of agrarian life.
- Agri-tourism allows visitors to see and engage in traditional farming activities while preserving the host ecosystems.

The concept of agri-tourism originated in the late twentieth century. It includes agricultural farms associated with tourism. This concept encompasses all actions pertaining not just to visitors but also to vacation organizers in general. Consequently, agri-tourism is seen differently by visitors compared to other stakeholders in the tourism sector. For visitors, agri-tourism encompasses any activities that facilitate learning about agricultural production or include extended stays in a farm setting. Evidence indicates that more organizations are engaging in agri-tourism, while companies are increasingly diverting their attention away from agriculture. The definition of "agri-tourism" differs across various geographical locations. The connections between agricultural and rural tourism varied, influenced by the community's involvement in these regions.

The distinction between agri-tourism and rural tourism in Europe is significant. In regions characterized by specialized agricultural output and evident connections within the rural community, it is preferable to use the term rural tourism rather than agri-tourism. Agri-tourism broadly encompasses services associated with traditional food producing enterprises. This facet of agri-tourism is essential for the promotion of rural products in nations with significant food production. As a manifestation of supplementary development in agricultural and rural regions, contemporary agri-tourism encompasses comprehensive expertise in economics, marketing, and management.

Agri-tourism is crucial for both rural communities and metropolitan regions. It offers several benefits: revenue, job opportunities, accommodation use, activities, natural resource preservation, enjoyment, and education. A primary issue for several nations is the inadequate amount of agricultural revenue. Agri-tourism aims to elevate the living conditions of rural areas, particularly by augmenting the income of those employed in agriculture. It employs diverse financial and agricultural policies. In several nations, agricultural farm revenue is almost equivalent to the average.

Farmers sometimes engage in dual industries simultaneously, generating two streams of revenue. The rationale for launching diverse businesses is the insufficient revenue from agriculture coupled with a surplus labor force. Alterations in employment and income sources influence the decline in the number of farmers engaged in part-time labor. This problem is especially prevalent in Southern European nations, where over 50% of workers are engaged in part-time labor.

Agricultural supply in Europe is plentiful, as farms, farmers, and their production enterprises focus on identifying supplementary income streams via services offered to visitors. Retaining weekend travelers in these regions is crucial for European nations, since the success of agricultural activities relies on the quality of services and their adherence to the expectations and needs of tourists. The WTO defines service quality in tourism as the fulfillment of all client expectations including pricing, legal guarantees, adherence to safety and sanitary standards, and compatibility with the natural environment. The primary tool for quality evaluation is the assertiveness and standardization of agricultural output and rural tourism.

### **Agri-tourism in India**

India, characterized by its benevolent populace, verdant landscapes, and meandering rivers, has a rich historical tapestry, abundant greenery, and a diversified cultural heritage, making it an exemplary destination for agri-tourism that captivates visitors from across the globe. In recent years, rural tourism in India has gained traction as a significant revenue-generating sector, drawing attention to the rural areas that house a substantial portion of the population. The Ministry of 2002-03 proceeded with the rural tourism initiative aimed at highlighting art, culture, and history via village life. In the first two years of the program, primarily physical infrastructure development activities were undertaken; starting in the year 2004-05, capacity building activities were also initiated. The physical elements of the rural tourism projects (RTPs) have received funding from the plan scheme for products/infrastructure development for destinations and circuits (PIDDC). The capacity components of 36 RTPs approved in 2004-05 and 2005-06 have been financed through the GOI-UNDP endogenous projects scheme. As of 2011, around 169 rural tourist sites in 28 states and union territories have been approved by the Ministry of tourist. The village level council (VLC) serves as the interactive platform for local community engagement in the execution of project work plans, further bolstered by community-level institutions. Ministry of Tourism Report, 2011.

As the fastest-growing business globally, it is essential to examine and comprehend the economic effects of tourism at regional, national, and local levels. Job creation, foreign currency revenue, and infrastructure development are identified as beneficial economic effects. The World Travel and Tourism Council projected a 10.7% rise in agro-tourism for the year 2017. A favorable economic effect would result in less leakage. For any tourist strategy to be successful and cost-effective, it must minimize leakages, particularly in employment,

since tourism employs around 100 million people globally. It is regarded as a generator of employment. The employment opportunities mostly exist within small, medium-sized, and family-owned firms. This is particularly true in the context of agritourism.

Tourism growth is often associated with airports, roadways, municipal infrastructure, and the restoration of cultural sites. However, one must also evaluate if such investment in infrastructure depletes local resources, so depriving inhabitants. In agro-tourism, the infrastructure, including roads, water supply, and power, also benefits the local population.

Agri-tourism generates employment in underdeveloped areas, so promoting economic equity nationwide and serving as a deterrent to urban migration. In the instance of Bhilar village examined for this research, the young who went to urban areas have returned to Bhilar and started farming and agro-tourism due to the availability of local economic possibilities. The tourism business generates substantial tax income for the government via taxes imposed on accommodations, restaurants, and different levies. In the realm of agri-tourism, primary agricultural revenue and associated enterprises such as dairy, apiculture, and animal husbandry are exempt from taxation. However, agro-tourism (offering lodging) is subject to entertainment tax. Given that tourism and agriculture are two primary focus areas of the government, it is apparent that agri-tourism has emerged as a derivative of rural tourism and has significant potential in India. It may significantly enhance the optimum use of agricultural land in India, produce supplementary revenue for farmers, and create job opportunities. In this context, the role of organizations such as NABARD has emerged to promote and support the extensive scope and significant potential of agri-tourism in India.

## **PROSPECTS OF AGRITOURISM**

Contemporary existence is a result of varied cognition and actions. Each person tries to exert more effort in various pursuits to augment their income and indulge in contemporary luxuries. Consequently, tranquility is always absent from his disposition. Tourism serves as a method for seeking tranquil destinations. Peace and tranquility are inherent in agritourism, since it is situated away from metropolitan environments and in proximity to nature. It encompasses farms, communities, and agriculture, which has the potential to fulfill the populace's interest about nature. Agri-tourism offers a diverse array of recreational activities to tourists via festivals and handicrafts. The lifestyle, attire, language, and culture of farmers consistently enhance pro-nature modes of living. Agri-tourism has many advantages:

- Agri-tourism bridges the main sector of agriculture with the significant service industry of tourism.
- It assists farmers in generating supplementary income and enhancing sustainability with minimum effects on adjacent rural regions.
- It generates job possibilities and empowers local rural populations.

- It fosters investment, generates possibilities in auxiliary and support sectors, and ensures a favorable experience for both tourists and hosts.
- It highlights the natural, cultural, and historic aspects of the area. It ultimately heightens sensitivity to the political, social, and environmental atmosphere of host nations.
- It showcases rural traditional food and culinary traditions, handicrafts, and vernacular skills that foster environmental and cultural awareness and respect.
- Agri-tourism enables the agricultural sector to accommodate growth in the tourist industry, fostering goodwill and favorable feelings between visiting communities and hosts.

The expenses for lodging, leisure activities, and transportation are minimal in agri-tourism. This expands the tourist demographic. The clichéd notion of travel and tourism, traditionally confined to urban affluent classes representing a little segment of the population, is evolving; agritourism is expanding the reach of travel and tourism to a broader demographic, hence enhancing the intersection of tourism and agriculture. It might raise awareness of rural life and agricultural expertise, offering a unique chance for education via leisure, where learning is both effective and accessible.

#### Agricultural Tourism and Sustainability

The United Nations General Assembly designated 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, emphasizing tourism's capacity to promote the universal 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The International Year seeks to promote alterations in legislation, corporate practices, and consumer behavior to foster a more sustainable tourism industry that may successfully contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Travel fosters understanding, tolerance, and empathy for others—qualities vital in the era of globalization, when a global community can thrive only through peaceful coexistence. The significant promise that tourism offers to the agriculture sector should motivate the global farming community to pursue a sustainable future for humanity and the earth. Dr. Marco Marzano de Marinis, Secretary General of the World Farmers' Organisation (WFO), stated that this represents a distinctive opportunity to cultivate a more responsible and dedicated tourism sector capable of harnessing its significant potential for economic growth, sustainability, and the multifunctionality of the agricultural sector.

Agri-tourism provides a significant economic benefit for numerous agricultural enterprises. It represents a niche yet expanding sector within the tourism industry, offering tourists an authentic experience rooted in local food and culture, while integrating "rural aesthetics" with agricultural production into a compelling tourist package. This allows travelers to engage with environmental, cultural, and agricultural activities, generating revenue for the farms. Establishing connections between agriculture and tourism presents an

opportunity for farmers who have been marginalized to leverage their livelihoods for the advantage of themselves and their communities.

Young individuals play a pivotal role in the development of the burgeoning agri-tourism sector. As the majority of global food production is conducted by aging smallholder farmers, the next generation is more inclined to embrace innovative concepts that can draw tourist interest and investment. Technology serves as one of the most significant assets for youth.

Agri-tourism could well hold the greatest potential to increase the involvement of the youth in agriculture, opening-up innovative and creative opportunities to build successful and sustainable businesses. Where there is a supportive environment, the youth will be able to find groundbreaking ways to create a future for themselves while contributing to the overall well-being of their communities. and the quality of life of rural society. Through this there are presented new opportunities for education in agriculture society and ecosystems. Therefore, the development of agro-tourism will provide the opportunity for local farmers to increase income and lifestyle. Agro tourism educates people and society about agriculture and contributes to the local economy; it reduces the level of urbanization as people work and earn more from agro tourism; it promotes local products and create added value through direct marketing and stimulates economic activities in order to increase benefits in societies where the agro tourism is developed.

## CASE STUDIES ON AGRI-TOURISM IN INDIA

To comprehend the potential and effects of agri-tourism on rural development, the following case studies from India elucidate the practical applications, advantages, and obstacles related to the program.

### Case Study 1: Baramati Agricultural Tourism, Maharashtra

Baramati, situated in the Pune district of Maharashtra, is recognized as a forerunner in India's agri-tourism sector. The initiative commenced in 2005 via the Agri Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC), in partnership with NABARD, to educate farmers and establish essential infrastructure for accommodating tourists. The farm-stay model encompasses rural cuisine, traditional games, agricultural experiences, and cultural programs. This endeavor has produced sustainable income for farmers and generated employment for local inhabitants, rendering it a replicable model across various states.

### Case Study 2: Bhilar - The Literary Village, Maharashtra

Bhilar, a diminutive village in Satara district, Maharashtra, has evolved into India's inaugural "Village of Books." While fundamentally a rural literary tourism initiative, it has inadvertently prompted local farmers to amalgamate agri-tourism with educational tourism. The surge of visitors has catalyzed the advancement of floriculture, fruit orchards, and food-based agricultural products. This case exemplifies how thematic tourism, in conjunction with agriculture, can bolster the rural economy.

### Case Study 3: Kodagu Coffee Trails, Karnataka

Kodagu (Coorg) in Karnataka exemplifies plantation-based agri-tourism. Coffee estates in the area provide homestays where visitors participate in activities like coffee picking, roasting, and plantation walks. These experiences facilitate urban tourists' connection with rural life while enhancing the income of estate proprietors. NABARD, in partnership with local tourism boards, has facilitated infrastructure development and training for farmers, transforming the district into a sustainable rural tourism center.

These examples demonstrate how agri-tourism may successfully integrate culture, education, and agriculture, while promoting rural development, environmental sustainability, and local empowerment.

Rural tourism and agro tourism, while frequently conflated, possess distinct characteristics. Rural tourism is a broad term, whereas agro tourism pertains to specific leisure activities orchestrated by farmers for various visitors. These tourist services provide supplementary income for farmers. Typically, agro tourism encompasses: distinct accommodations within farmers' residences; activities that reflect preserved family traditions and customs; and opportunities for visitors to enjoy a serene environment, characterized by the warmth of local hospitality and the tranquillity of nature.

Agro-tourism transcends a mere tourist product, encompassing a multitude of accompanying services. It represents a means of perceiving travel as a novel experience or constructive engagement with the environment, community, and their culture. Agro-tourism serves as a recreational pursuit and has achieved considerable success. The opportunity to appreciate the rural milieu and culture appeals to diverse tourist markets.

Agro-tourism participants typically travel with family and originate from urban locales. They exhibit reverence for rural customs and actively seek information regarding their intended destinations. Agro-touristic services are not designed for mass tourism. Beyond the advantages of lodging, dining, and various activities or direct sales, agro-tourism also yields additional benefits, including the acknowledgment and appreciation of architectural and cultural heritage. The agricultural environment produces not just physical items but also intangible assets, particularly those associated with culture, education, food, landscapes, and the environment.



## **THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF AGRO-TOURISM IN RURAL REGIONS**

All models of tourism development encounter dilemmas regarding their beneficial and detrimental impacts. The advancement of agro-tourism in numerous destinations is perceived favorably as a means for local communities to invest, enhance revenues and responsibilities, and safeguard the environment. Agro-tourism significantly contributes to rural development, manifesting in various forms: revenue augmentation, employment access, interactions between rural and urban areas, multiplier effects on direct investments, fortification of local structures through collaborative groups, stimulation of physical infrastructure development, diversification of economic activities, appreciation of property values, establishment of necessary infrastructure, and creation of opportunities for additional economic advancements.

The detrimental impacts of agro-touristic development arise when such initiatives contravene ethical standards. The primary bad consequences are to environmental degradation and the erosion of local cultural attributes.

### **PRINCIPAL OBSTACLES**

Consequently, governments and policymakers generally perceive tourism-related diversification as highly advantageous, establishing agri-tourism as a cornerstone for revitalizing rural economies. While agri-tourism presents an innovative approach to enhancing farmers' efficiency and economic standing, financing remains a significant obstacle for entrepreneurs. Similar challenges have been identified, including insufficient government support, inadequate funding for the promotion of farm tourism, lack of knowledge and skills among proprietors, limited visitor numbers, technological deficiencies, lack of motivation, and inadequate pricing for agricultural products and activities, all of which hinder the establishment of agri-tourism (Shehrawat 2008). Agri-tourism is not devoid of challenges and issues. They are:

- Risk of over use of natural resources.
- Volatility in demand for agritourism.
- Ensuring and maintaining sanitary standards at agri-tourism sites.
- Insufficient governmental assistance.
- Inadequate training for farmers.
- Security considerations.
- The accessibility and approachability of the location concerning fundamental amenities such as medical services, transportation, water supply, and power outages.
- Effectively and persistently marketing agritourism as a product.

Notwithstanding these deficiencies, farmers must adopt a commercial mindset and employ marketing strategies for success. To enhance the efficacy of agri-tourism, farmers should be motivated to extensively publicize the tourism center through newspapers, television, and various advertising mediums, while also establishing connections with schools, colleges, NGOs, clubs, unions, and organizations. Given the diverse clientele and stakeholders in agri-tourism, effective business management can yield success at a reduced cost and capitalize on the advantages of the industry.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, agri-tourism presents significant potential for rural development in India. Nonetheless, various challenges persist, including inadequate funding for promotion, insufficient governmental support, a lack of literature on agri-tourism practices, and inadequate training opportunities. The involvement of institutions such as NABARD is pertinent. Therefore, intervention by relevant authorities is essential to address these issues and implement necessary measures to ensure the success of agri-tourism initiatives for rural development.

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