

ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF LIVELIHOOD FOR FARMERS

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Abstract

Socio-economic viability of modern society envisages change in the thinking pattern and use of natural resources. Tourism is now well recognised as an engine of growth in the various economies in the world. Several countries have transformed their economies by developing their tourism potential. Tourism has great capacity to generate large-scale employment and additional income sources to the skilled and unskilled. Today the concept of traditional tourism has been changed. Some new areas of the tourism have been emerged like Agro- Tourism. Promotion of tourism would bring many direct and indirect benefits to the people.

Keyword - Agro tourism, agricultural transformation, sunrise industry, rural life, rural recreation



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INTRODUCTION

Agritourism or agrotourism, as it is defined most broadly, involves any agriculturally based operation or activity that brings visitors to a farm or ranch. Agro-tourism includes a wide variety of activities, including buying produce direct from a farm stand, navigating a corn maze, slopping hogs, picking fruit, feeding animals, or staying at a bed and breakfast (B&B) on a farm.

Agro-tourism is a way of sustainable tourist development and multi-activity in rural areas through which the visitor has the opportunity to get aware with agricultural areas, agricultural occupations, local products, traditional food and the daily life of the rural people, as well as the cultural elements and traditions.

Moreover, this activity brings visitors closer to nature and rural activities in which they can participate, be entertained and feel the pleasure of touring. Agricultural Tourism is the Holidays concept of Visiting a working farm or any agricultural, horticultural, or agribusiness operations for the purpose of enjoyment, education, or active involvement in the activities of the farm or operation.

Agri-Tourism is the practice of attracting travellers or visitors to an area or areas used primarily for agricultural purposes. However, Agri-Tourism is small-scale, low-impact, and, in most cases, education-focused. Because landowners operate the majority of farms in

Maharashtra, opportunities for uniqueness and customization are limitless. Agro-Tourism is helpful to the both farmers and urban peoples. It provides an additional income source to the farmers and gives employment opportunity to the family members and rural youth. But, there are some problems in the process of the development of such centres.

Hence, the government and other related authorities should try to support these activities in Maharashtra for the rural development and increase income level of the farmers. The farmers should also try to establish their co-operative society for the development of agro-tourism centres. The agro-tourism may become a cash crop for the farmers in Maharashtra and also an instrument of the rural employment generation.

LOCATION:



OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this paper are follows:

1. To examine the importance of agro-tourism development in Maharashtra.
2. To define a suitable framework for the of agro- tourism centres in the view of marginal and small farmers.
3. To identify the problems of the agro-tourism and make suggestions to establishment and operations of agro-tourism.

Agro-Tourism Potential in Maharashtra

Maharashtra is the third largest state of India, both in area and population. It is located on the west coast of India with a 720 km long coastline along the green Konkan region. Nestled in the Western Ghats and the *Sahyadri* mountain ranges have several hill stations and water reservoirs with semi-evergreen and deciduous forests. There are many tourist

centres in Maharashtra which are the supporting natural environment for the agro- tourism centres in Maharashtra.

Maharashtra has a total 22368 thousand hectare area under the agriculture and 36122 thousands of livestock (cow, buffaloes, goats etc.). Principal crops include rice, jowar, bajra, wheat, pulses, turmeric, onions, cotton, sugarcane and several oil seeds including groundnut, sunflower and soya bean. The state has huge areas, under fruit cultivation of which mangoes, bananas, grapes, and oranges etc.

More than 4.11 core (43 percent of total) population are living in the urban areas of the Maharashtra, which can be a huge customer base of the agro-tourist centres located in the rural areas. Other than nature and culture there is an enough road and rail connectivity in urban rural areas to travel in rural Maharashtra.

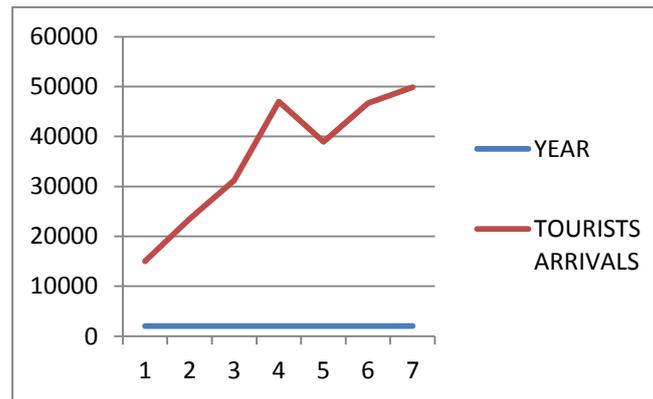
Maharashtra abounds in numerous tourist attractions ranging from ancient cave temples, unspoiled beaches, ancient forts and monuments, forests and wildlife, unique hill stations, pilgrimage, centres, and a rich tradition of festivals, art and culture.

Agriculture Tourism Development Corporation –ATDC is the main promoter of this activity in the Maharashtra. ATDC is promoting agriculture tourism for achieving income, employment and economic stability in rural areas. It help to boosting a range of activities, services and amenities, provided by farmers and rural people to attract urban tourists to their area thus providing opportunity to urban people to get back to the rural roots”. About 25 such locations have been identified by ATDC in Maharashtra as rural agro-tourist destinations. Thus all the districts in Maharashtra have a tourism potential.

Table 1.Tourists Arrivals In Maharashtra

YEAR	TOURISTS ARRIVALS
2007	15000
2008	23500
2009	31200
2010	47000
2011	38900
2012	46700
2013	49850

Compiled from various sources



The data clearly shows the increasing trend of tourist arrivals in Maharashtra.

Thus there is an urgent need to promote agro-tourism centres

Some following notable factors helpful to the agro-tourism in Maharashtra are:

1. Tourist places are already exist to support Agro-Tourists
2. Good communication and transport facilities
3. Green house cultivation of long stem cut flowers, vegetables, fruits etc.
4. State has 13 lakh hectares area under horticulture Maharashtra now is a major horticulture state.
5. Maharashtra is already established as one of the top tourist destination in the world
6. Maharashtra is major producer of fruit, spices, medicinal and aromatic plant allowed under horticulture in India.
7. There are an increasing number of tourists preferring non-urban tourist spots
8. Maharashtra has diverse Agro-climatic conditions, diverse crops, people, deserts, mountains, which provide scope for promotion of all season, multi-location agro-tourism
9. Some of the popular folk dances in rural Maharashtra are Lavni, Dhangari Gaja, Povadas, Koli dance and Tamasha. and Dindi are the religious folk dances. Culture of Maharashtra is very glorious with a great variety. It gives a unique identity to the rural Maharashtra.

Problems of Agro- tourism in Maharashtra

Maharashtra has a greater potential of the development of the agro-tourism centres due to the good natural and climatic conditions. But there are some problems in the process of agro-tourism development in the state.

Major challenges and problems are follows:

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1. Lack of perfect knowledge about the agro-tourism
2. Weak communication skill and lack of commercial approach of the small farmers
3. Lack of capital to develop basic infrastructure for the agro-tourism
4. Ignorance of the farmers regarding to the such type of activities
5. Presence of unorganized sector in the Agri-Tourism industry.
6. Ensuring hygiene and basic requirements considering urban visitors
7. Lakhs of farmers have small size holding, low quality land and little or no access to credit or irrigation. Have to negotiate with consistent drought.
8. 148 of the 355 Talukas in the state are consistently drought prone
9. Some agri- tourism enterprises can be launched with very little financial support but there is lack of financial awareness

Agro tourism is complimentary to traditional agricultural activities. It is an opportunity for farmers to use the available resources in a diversified and innovative way. It creates a win – win situation to farmers as well as tourists. Farmers earn better from innovative use of available resources and the tourist can enjoy village life and nature in affordable prices.

Not only that, the villages are also benefited due to the development of agro tourism. Some cases of agro tourism in Maharashtra Dist. Raigad; Pune and Satara have proved that agro tourism not only bring development of farmers but to the village as a whole from social and economic angle.

The objective of promoting Agro tourism is

1. To introduce farmers and interested entrepreneurs with the concept of Agrotourism as an additional revenue generating option along with their regular business.
2. To attract national & international tourists to the peri-urban and rural areas thus increasing the income generation potential
3. A solution to- – Rural unemployment – Low and seasonal income of farmers – Lack of rural accommodation Significance of Agro tourism
4. An opportunity for city-dwellers to visit “The rural life of India”.
5. Introduction to village life with first-hand experience on the farm. •

CONCLUSION

Government should focus on

1. creating awareness on options for diversification of Agro business and options for additional income with Sunrise sectors

2. Introduction of futuristic business opportunities to youth and young entrepreneurs.
3. Involve cross sectoral stake holders.
4. Emphasize on traditional wisdom and integration of contemporary technologies.
5. Encourage interstate participation of farmers, industries and researchers.

SUPPORT TO AGRO- TOURISM IN MAHARASHTRA

Promotion of Agro-Tourism involves some more important stakeholders namely Ministry of Agriculture and rural development ministry of the state and central governments. To promote domestic tourism, thrust areas should be identified by the government of India for the development of infrastructure, product development and diversification, development of eco-adventure sports, cultural presentations, providing inexpensive accommodation etc.

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