



Entrepreneurial opportunities through horticulture in Assam

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Rural development is presently linked to entrepreneurship. Institutions and individuals promoting rural development now consider entrepreneurship as a strategic development intervention that could accelerate the rural development process. Further, more institutions and individuals seem to agree on the urgent need to promote rural enterprises. Development agencies look into rural entrepreneurship as an enormous employment potential. Farmers take it as an instrument for improving farm earnings and women see it as an employment possibility near their homes which provide autonomy, independence and reduced need for social support. Development of economy of any nation depends primarily on the important role played by entrepreneurs. The role played by such entrepreneurs is of vital importance in developing country like India, where there are ample opportunities for using innovations to exploit the available resources. Thus, in all economic development activities, key focus is being paid on entrepreneurship of the people. In our country, where human resources are found to be in plenty, we can identify individuals in all segments of population who have the requisite entrepreneurial skills. To all these groups, however, entrepreneurship stands as a vehicle to improve the quality of life for individuals, families and communities and to sustain a healthy economy and environment.

Entrepreneurship contributes to development of a country in several ways, *viz.*, assembling and harnessing the various inputs, bearing the risks, innovating and imitating the techniques of production to reduce the cost and increase its quality and quantity, expanding the horizons of the market and co-ordinating and managing the manufacturing unit at various levels. During the Eleventh Plan period, 16.7 lakh ha of land was brought under horticultural crops in India. In order to harness production gains by reducing post harvest losses and creating value addition and better delivery mechanism to consumers through a cold chain system, a National Centre for Cold-

Chain Development (NCCD) has been set up, which is expected to provide the necessary boost for adding capacity and creating a cold chain network in the country (Economic Survey, India, 2012-13).

Vegetables are grown in almost all the states in the country under varied-agro climatic and soil conditions. India produces about 70 different varieties of leafy, fruity and starchy tuber varieties of vegetables. The major vegetables grown in India are onions, potatoes, tomatoes, radish, turnip, cucumber etc. India is world's largest



producer of cauliflower, second largest producer of onions and among the first 10 producers of cabbage, green peas, potatoes and tomatoes. In recent years, India has also taken up the production of gherkins, baby corns, asparagus, silver skin onions and broccoli which are used for domestic as well as export markets (Anonymous, 1999b). Vegetable crops provide an important source

of income for the small and marginal farmers of our country. The increasing population, urbanization and the rising incomes have given great impetus to the cultivation of vegetable crops which form an important source of minerals.

Assam is traditionally rich in horticultural production due to its diverse and unique agro-climatic conditions which is conducive for growing wide range of horticultural crops like fruits, vegetables, flowers, spices, nuts, tuber crops, medicinal and aromatic plants. Horticultural crops occupy about 15 per cent of the gross cultivated area of Assam and annually produces more than 15.0 lakh MT of fruits, 44.0 lakh MT of vegetables and 2.0 lakh MT of spices besides nut crops, flowers and medicinal and aromatic plants (Economic Survey, Assam, 2011-12). Thus, contributing significantly towards food and nutritional security of the State. Vegetable farming is the major attraction for the farmers of the State since it is comparatively more remunerative than field crops.

However, it is seen that only some varieties of vegetables are cultivated in North-East region which include potato, tomato, cabbage, cauliflower, knol-khol, brinjal, carrot, pumpkin, ridge gourd, bottle gourd, pointed gourd, ash gourd, snake gourd, sponge gourd, cowpea, varieties of beans and leafy vegetables. However, the productivity of most of the vegetables in the State is found to remain below the national average. Cole crops and some other *Kharif* and *Rabi* vegetables have great commercial value as fresh and processed vegetables which can serve as a good source of foreign exchange earner. Commercialization on a full scale is yet to begin and there is tremendous potential of entrepreneurship development in this region in vegetable cultivation. So far the fruits and vegetables grown in Assam have been sent by rail or road to other parts of the country, which can be used for processing many kinds of food. Apart from rice mills, flour mills and oil mills, many small establishments of producing biscuits, lozenges, soft drinks and snacks have recently come in the town and commercial centres of the region. The fruit processing sector has the potential to grow in Assam with increasing demand for processed fruit. Opportunities exist in processing, sourcing, setting up cold chains and logistics.

Opportunities for entrepreneurs: Assam has blessed by the nature with an abundance of natural resources which provides numerous opportunities to invest and venture in following fields:



– Banana plantation, cultivation and diversification of it's by products like banana powder, pseudo stem, leaves etc.

– Processing and value addition of the horticultural products by dehydration of fruits and vegetables, fruit pulp and juices

– Fruit processing (Jam and Jellies), vegetable product dehydration and canning of fruits, dehydration of vegetable and

instant vegetable soup.

– Cold storage, cold storage (fruits and vegetables), potato powder, flakes and granules with cold storage, Ware houses.

– Cultivation and processing of spice crops *vig.*, ginger, turmeric, garlic etc. for spice oil, dry powder, natural dyes etc.

– Fruit based bread making plant, biscuits, bakery industry, vanilla aero mated chocolate etc.

Contribution of technology mission for integrated development of horticulture (TMIDH) in Assam: For achieving integrated development of Horticulture Sector,

the scheme “Technology Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (TMIDH)”, a centrally sponsored scheme, is under implementation in Assam since 2001-02 which has received overwhelming response from farmers. The objective of the Scheme is to augment the productivity of horticulture crops with precise strategies in the form of Mini Missions. The specialty of the scheme is comprehensive which encompasses all the issues associated with development of horticulture right from generation of technologies (Mini Mission-I), increasing production and productivity (MM-II), storage and marketing (MM-III) and processing (MM-IV). The impact of this scheme in the State is gradually emerging in various fronts including products, productivity, infrastructure development, per capita income, commercialization etc. Assam Small Farmers Agri-Business Consortium (ASFAC) receives fund from the Government of India who in turn releases the fund to the State Horticulture Directorate for MM-II and also MM-III. The Assam State Agriculture Marketing Board (ASAMB) received fund to perform the activities under MM-III.

Following major achievements were reported to be made by the Directorate of Horticulture, Assam under the Mission:

During the year 2010-11, the Directorate of Horticulture and FP could cover an additional area of 8125 ha under various crops *viz.*, Banana, Orange, Pineapple, Assam lemon, Cashew nut, Black pepper, Ginger, Turmeric, Potato, Aromatic plants, *Bhut Jalakiya* etc. under ‘Horticulture Technology Mission’ as against 1883 hectare in 2009-10.

The Directorate could train 3394 nos. of farmers on improved practices of horticultural crops, deputed 800 nos. of farmers to outside the State for exposure visit during the year 2009-10.

As many as 577 numbers of 0.2 ha units of floriculture projects were set up for commercial production of Gerbera, Tube rose etc.

Similarly, the medicinal and Aromatic plants sector which was a neglected area could take up systematic cultivation. The Govt. of India has introduced a new scheme on this vital and comparatively new sector. Under this scheme 8 numbers. of private nurseries of medicinal plants have been established to generate planting materials for area expansion.

Successfully introduced cultivation of *Bhoot Jalakiya*, one of the hottest chilli in the world and area expansion programme is going on at Golaghat, Baska, Karbi Anglong, Nagaon and Jorhat district (Economic Survey, Assam, 2011-12).

Conclusion : The future looks bright for innovative

entrepreneurs, who possess the skills and experiences needed for the challenges of this entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship is the capacity of innovator and caliber to introduce innovative techniques in business operations. It is only the innovative entrepreneur who has the power to dream, transform new situations into thoughts and resolve them into action. Thus, entrepreneurs can play an important role in increasing production and in turn contribute for economic development of the country.

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