

## Farm-tourism: an innovative income earning opportunity for empowering rural women

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The challenges facing agriculture- low rainfall, high input costs, poor agricultural returns, and unsustainable farm lands are forcing farmers to sell their farms, seek wage employment and other alternative avenues to supplement family incomes. However, those holding back the small farms are recognizing the need and desire to diversify their farm products and supplement their agricultural incomes and agritainment can provide them an opportunity. Agritainment (an industry comprised of agritourism and farm entertainment) has been described by some as a new cash crop for urbanites looking for hands-on rural experiences (Lazarus, 1998). Similarly, the term 'farm tourism' is used in some regions or countries with agrotourism or agritourism. Whatever the label, most often it refers to 'rural tourism conducted on working farms where the working environment forms part of the product from the perspective of the consumer' (Roberts and Hall, 2001).

Farm-tourism is an emerging area which combines agriculture and tourism, improves natural resources and contributes to the rural area socially and economically. It offers an educational activity to sensitize general public about lives of the farming community and also instils love of nature in them. It is a great getaway for the people from the busy city lives and rejuvenates them by their participation in physical activities on the farm and also fulfils their spiritual and social needs. Agritourism is "a commercial enterprise at a working farm, ranch, or agricultural plant conducted for the enjoyment of visitors that generates supplemental income for the owner."

Tourism is termed as an instrument for employment generation, poverty alleviation and sustainable human development.

Farm tourism is a sub-sector of rural tourism. According to Roberts and Hall (2001), farm tourism is one of the five categories of rural tourism, the others being ecotourism, cultural, adventure and activity tourism. Researchers and development practitioners have focused a great deal of interest on the area of agritourism as a potential means to allow farm families to preserve their lifestyles and values and make a profit (Bowen *et al.*, 1991; Cawley *et al.*, 1995; Clemmons, 2004; Davies and Gilbert, 1992; Hjalager, 1996; Klitsunova, 2003; McKelvie, 2004). Moreover, the Agro tourism philosophy aims to increase farmers' incomes and the quality of life of rural society (Zoto, 2013).

**Farm-tourism provides many societal benefits :** It is especially important to educate the visitors and public about agriculture, preserve farms and farmland, share agricultural heritage and rural lifestyles with visitors, preserve rural heritage and traditions, generate additional income for farmers and provide quality local products and produce.

### **Socio-cultural benefits:**

- Educate the visitors, children, public about agriculture.
- Share rural and agricultural heritage with visitors.
- Preserve rural heritage and culture.
- Improve relations and acknowledge important role of farming community.



- Provide natural out- door recreational facilities.
- Dignity to farmers and local artisans.

**Environmental benefits :**

- Preserve farms and environment.
- Promote natural products and crafts.
- Preserve eco-systems and natural resources.
- Provide pollution free scenic and natural beauty.

**Economic benefits :**

- Generate additional income to farmers and land owners.
- Promote back to nature movement.
- Help local economy.
- Provide employment to family members.
- Enhance quality of life of local people.

**Farm- Tourism should ensure the following three basic principles**

*Visual and physical appeal :*

It should offer the visitors something to see and feel physically: crops at different stages, trees, medicinal plants, domestic animals, birds, ponds, small lake to attract children specially. Apart from these, culture, dress, festivals and rural games could create enough interest among visitors in Agri-Tourism.

**Scope for participation and involvement :** It should offer the visitors scope to participate in agricultural operations, enjoy rural sports, swimming, bullock cart riding, camel riding, buffalo riding, cooking and craft making which they can do and enjoy.

**Sale counter :** The concept of pick your own produce can be explored where visitors can harvest themselves the produce of their choice on payment basis. The sale of products can range from grains, fruits, vegetables, processed foods to clothes, utensils, local crafts, mementoes and jewellery.

**Role of rural women in promoting farm-tourism :** Rural women play important role in the sectors of

agriculture, animal husbandry and food processing along with their domestic role of care givers and excellent housekeeping skills to keep their households running. They have an immense scope to take up agri-tourism operations on their farms with appropriate being training either individually or as a group activity through SHGs.

**Training of rural women in core areas of Farm - tourism :**

- Grooming skills
- Housekeeping skills
- Book-keeping
- Food processing skills
- Craft making
- Farm management

**Farm-tourism enterprises might include :**

- Outdoor recreation (fishing, hunting, wildlife study, horseback riding).
- Educational experiences (cannery tours, cooking classes, or wine tasting).
- Entertainment (harvest festivals or local dances).
- Hospitality services (farm stays, guided tours or outfitter services).
- On-farm direct sales (pick your own produce or roadside stands).

**Season-wise crop based farm -tourism events in India :** The farm-tourism events can be planned in the following manner based on seasonal crops, vegetables, fruits and flowers coinciding with the school vacations so that more families could be attracted to plan their holidays with children.

**Amenities for setting up farm -tourism centre :** A farm having minimum half acre of planted crops, trees, a water source, some poultry and livestock unit, and natural scenic beauty is a must. The sufficient place for at least five families for outdoor play area with swings and rural games is also a must. Depending on the size and facilities

**Table 1 :**

Events	Season	Activities
Mango fest	Summer vacation (May-June)	Tree climbing, harvesting mangoes, pickle, jam making, handmade-mango –ice cream, outdoor camping, milking cows, bullock cart rides
Harvest fest	Dussehra vacation (October-November)	Rice harvesting, threshing, craft making, flower picking, staging Ramayana play, Ravan Dahanam diya making, paper mache, bathkamma festivities
Winter fest	Winter break (December-January)	Rice harvest festival, threshing ,kite flying, outdoor games, camping, hiking ,Christmas and New Year decorations
Ugadi/Holi/Spring fest	Spring (March-April)	Ugadi-New Year celebrations, holi festivities, making natural colors, sweets/savouries, camp fire
Birthday/family get-together, Alumni meet, corporate outings, school field trips, customized rural weddings	All year through	Custom designed parties based on requests along with farm and recreational activities

and financial status of the family/group running the agri-tourism center the night-stay type of accommodation for visitors needs to be planned in aesthetically designed cottages with clean bed and bath facilities with home cooked food.

**Popularising the farm -tourism events and destinations:** It is very important to create an advertising platform to inform the general public about the agritourism events and destinations through various means like personal websites, on websites of Government Departments, through print out in newspaper, radio and whatsapp groups. The destination should be easily accessible and moreover in the vicinity about 60-70 Kms from major cities with good road connectivity and basic hospital facilities in case of emergencies.

**Stake holders-mentoring by hospitality, IT and Agri professionals :** The role of different stakeholders in the establishment, functioning, marketing and sustainability of the agro-tourism centre is very important. Primarily the important stakeholders are the Agri-tourism providers (farm families) who deliver products and services to agri-tourism visitors (agritourists), who 'consume' those products and services and the marketing communications may be taken up by professional agencies. The rural farm families with their basic numeracy and literacy skills would need mentoring and hand holding by professionals from the fields of hospitality, agriculture and IT to enable them to make it an economically, ecologically and professionally viable agri-tourism unit by constant guidance and updates on certification and other governmental legal requirements. Each stakeholder group plays an important and distinct role in the agritourism system.

**Conclusion :** This new form of tourism can be taken up by any rural family, SHG, Farmer Producer Organization,

NGO, as an enterprise, as a family business to earn substantial income and sustain their farms with yearlong income. The satisfaction and support of satisfied agri-tourists will help to promote agri-tourism. These tours would help in creating sustainable interaction between urban and rural areas. Thus, agri-tourism has a potential to uplift rural communities, If it is marketed well by trained family members who gain a good understanding of the agri-tourists' needs and their expectations, offering, customized tour packages for different tourists.

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