

Challenges and Strategies for Promotion of Agritourism: A Multi-dimensional Study

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted on 45 agritourism host farmers and 200 agritourists altogether selected from two states, viz. Maharashtra and Goa to delineate the challenges in managing agritourism farm and sustainability of this venture. The major challenges in proper management were high cost of land development and initial investment, weak communication skills of staff, inability to introduce more activities and lack of specific policy for promotion of agritourism. Farmers of Maharashtra were found to be better placed with respect to cost of labour and policy initiatives by government. All the stakeholders agreed that proper policy level research along with public-private partnership for promotion and sustainability of agritourism is much essential. Farmers' ability to successfully integrate this enterprise to suit their socio-economic and agro-ecological conditions would further enhance its profitability and sustainability.

Keywords: Challenges, communication skills, management, policy for promotion, public-private partnership, stakeholder

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture and its allied activities are on the brink of a change for both the farmers as well as consumers. A plethora of diversified activities amalgamated with scientific methods of cropping is paving the way for a mechanised and secure future. Agritourism is one such activity where people from outside visit a farm on vacation. The term agritourism has often been used interchangeably with agrotourism, farm tourism, farm-based tourism, and rural tourism (McGehee and Kim, 2004; Barbieri, 2010). Barbieri and Mshenga (2008) referred to agritourism as "any practice developed on a working farm to attract visitors." Agritourism is the nascent growing sector in the tourism industry in recent years. The concept has been derived from western economies from where this venture came into light. Later it spread to other developing countries. It has been initiated in Maharashtra, Kerala, Rajasthan, Goa and many other states of India with amalgamation into similar concepts of rural tourism. Farm visits, farm stays and trail visits are gradually picking up amongst tourists to

experience something different from clichéd sightseeing packages of a destination. India being a vast country with diverse and extreme agro-climatic conditions and rich rural heritage, agritourism venture can be started which runs year round that engages the labour efficiently and generates income as non-farm activity. However, agritourism initiative and its operation vary widely across the states in India. This enterprise required high initial investment and proper management for effective utilisation of resources as well as satisfy the visitors. In this context, it is important and topical to delineate the challenges that farmers face in practicing this component of non-farm activity. This would also help in devising mechanism and strategies for effective implementation and enhancing its outreach to more farmers and urbanites.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted during 2016-17 to 2018-19. It followed an ex-post facto research design and was purposively conducted in Maharashtra and Goa states because of leading states in number of agritourism centres

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established and number of tourists respectively. The sample of respondents in the present study comprised of forty-five agritourism centres drawn from both states (30 from Maharashtra and 15 from Goa). The total number of agritourists (visitors) was 200, which consist of 100 visitors each from respective states.

The sample also consisted of 20 officials drawn from NGOs promoting agritourism, cooperative society, KVK-Baramati and ICAR-CCARI, Goa. An exhaustive list of challenges was prepared and the respondents' opinion in the study area on challenges was measured on a five point continuum scale of very severe, quite severe, severe, not so severe and least severe with score of 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. Relevancy Ranking Technique was used with the following formula

$$RC_i = \frac{\text{Total score of all the respondents for } i\text{th challenge}}{\text{Maximum on the continuum} \times \text{Total number of respondents}}$$

RC_i refers to Relevancy Coefficient for the i th challenge. The ranking of each challenge was made according to its relevancy coefficient such that the challenge having the highest relevancy coefficient is ranked 1st and subsequent rank given according to the scores obtained in that order. The strategies to overcome the challenges faced by farmers in efficient management of agritourism were pooled based on discussions with all the respondents of the study. Strategies were tabulated and analyzed using Garrett's ranking technique.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Challenges are further divided into four types, namely financial, human resource, technical and policy challenges. The respective tables are presented to compare and analyze the shortcomings for the venture. The relevancy coefficient is mentioned in front of each challenge unit in the chart.

Financial Challenges

The financial challenges faced by farmers in managing agritourism in Maharashtra and Goa have been presented in Table 1.

High cost of land development and initial investment (0.83) in case of Maharashtra hosts where as high cost of labour (0.60) in case of Goa hosts were perceived as severe financial challenge. Further, maintenance charges (0.65) in Maharashtra and high cost of labour (0.60) in Goa are second most severe financial challenges faced by respondents.

Table 1: Financial challenges as perceived by farmers in managing agritourism

Challenges	n=45			
	Maharashtra		Goa	
	Relevancy coefficient	Rank	Relevancy coefficient	Rank
Lack of awareness about credit and subsidy facilities for various components	0.42	V	0.51	III
No insurance coverage	0.53	IV	0.41	IV
Maintenance charges	0.65	II	0.45	IV
High cost of land development and initial investment	0.83	I	0.53	II
High cost of labour	0.34	VI	0.60	I
Non availability of tourists at vacation time	0.56	III	0.40	VI

Since the agritourism centers are modified version of erstwhile farm stays and ecotourism centers in Goa, the cost of establishment was perceived not so severe challenge. But the case was different in Maharashtra where the concept of agritourism is new to the farmers and everything is started from scratch. Labour cost is very high in Goa because of the fact that the most of the labour in Goa is from outside the state who come in the search of job and demand more than the localities. Since the agricultural season is not throughout the year in both Maharashtra and Goa, the non-availability of tourists puts economic pressure on the farmers. Nevertheless, the Goa ATCs were not much worried about seasonality of tourism since it's a destination of holidays but the cause of concern is more so pronounced in Maharashtra. Pinky (2014) reported that among major challenges to the agritourism centres is Lack of government support, seasonality of tourists, lack of proper credit facility and Non willingness of the tourists to purchase farm products.

Technical challenge

Table 2: Technical challenges as perceived by farmers in managing agritourism

Constraint	n=45			
	Maharashtra		Goa	
	Relevancy coefficient	Rank	Relevancy coefficient	Rank
Limited and irregular power supply	0.48	IV	0.36	IV
Inadequate supply of inputs	0.38	V	0.35	V
Unfavourable weather conditions	0.63	II	0.41	III
Inability to introduce more activities	0.68	I	0.45	II
Insufficient literature for agritourism practice	0.56	II	0.68	I

Table 2 showed the technical challenges that are faced by ATCs during the operation. Inability to introduce more activities was severe challenge in Maharashtra followed by unfavourable weather conditions and insufficient literature about agritourism. Severe technical challenge was insufficient literature about agritourism

followed by inability to introduce more activities and unfavourable weather conditions at Goa. Limited and irregular power supply was more so noticed in Maharashtra villages but not in tourism rich Goa. These findings are in consistent with Pinky (2014) and Walke (2013). Technical challenges also include inadequate supply of inputs in both sampling areas but not as severe as indicated by the relevancy coefficient figures. McGehee, N. G. (2007) reported that lack of sufficient literature and irregular power supply in the country side have been critical challenges that need technical expertise of concerned government departments.

Human Resource Challenges

Table 3: Human resource challenge as perceived by farmers in managing agritourism

n=45

Constraint	Maharashtra		Karnataka	
	Relevancy coefficient	Rank	Relevancy coefficient	Rank
Lack of organised effort like Farmer organisations	0.45	III	0.61	II
Weak communication skill of staff	0.82	I	0.68	I
Lack of commercial approach like other tourism venture	0.74	II	0.58	III

Table 3 showed the comparison of human resource challenges faced by ATCs in sampling area. Weak communication skills of staff (0.828) followed by lack of commercial approach (0.744) and lack of organised effort like Farmers' organisation (0.45) in Maharashtra. In Goa, the weak communication skill (0.68) is followed by lack of organised efforts like FO (0.619) and lack of commercial approach (0.58).

The differences are due to the fact that Goa being the tourism oriented state finds it less challenge for Human resource since they are trained over the period of time. But, Maharashtra villages being very new to agritourism face this challenge more severely than Goa ATCs. Organised efforts are more often seen in Maharashtra in the form of MART, ATDC or local farmer clubs. But, Goa seems to be lacking in this. The ATCs are guided by individual management and promotion unlike organisations of Maharashtra. Commercial approach is more severe challenge in Maharashtra compared Goa because of popular tourism policy of the state. Moraru et.al.(2016) reported that lack of experience of farmers in the running of a tourism business; lack of knowledge, expertise and training in the tourism field; limited marketing channels and linkages; necessity to develop new skills in order to manage the tourists and their

expectations are some of major human resource constraints.

Policy level Challenges

Table 4: Policy level challenge as perceived by farmers in managing agritourism

n=45

Constraint	Maharashtra		Goa	
	Relevancy coefficient	Rank	Relevancy coefficient	Rank
Lack of transportation to interior rural places	0.51	I	0.41	III
No specific policy for promotion of agritourism	0.42	II	0.67	I
Complexity in getting license from Govt.	0.31	IV	0.38	IV
Lack of training in hospitality and management	0.35	III	0.42	II

Table 4 revealed that lack of specific policy for promotion of agritourism was severe challenge in Goa followed by lack of training in hospitality and management and lack of transportation to interior rural places. In Maharashtra, lack of transportation to interior places was perceived as severe challenge followed by lack of specific policy for promotion of agritourism. Sharpley, R. (2002) reported that stakeholders identified several issues that impact on the development of agritourism in Nova Scotia. These include issues related to marketing, product development, government support, education and training, and partnership and communication.

Strategies for promotion and sustainability of agritourism

The strategies are always long-term oriented goals for any organisation or an individual. They are the guidelines for improvement in the required area and the futuristic needs of the enterprise. Here, in the present research study suggestions were collected from all the stakeholders in the agritourism sector such as agritourism hosts, agritourists, staff at institutions and private organisations involved.

Table 5: Strategies for promotion and sustainability of agritourism as perceived by stakeholders

n=245

Strategies	Maharashtra		Goa	
	Garrett Mean Score	Rank	Garrett Mean Score	Rank
Policy initiatives				
Price policy mechanism	64.88	II	89.525	I
Regular power supply (three phase)	77.53	I	78.025	II
Timely availability of quality inputs	61.89	III	64.875	III
Subsidy for startup like agritourism	55.41	IV	43.088	IV

New training centers at nearby agricultural institutions	45.49	V	28.231	V
Research and development initiatives				
Reducing the high initial investment	78.63	I	79.625	I
Standardization of designs and structure of low cost agritourism initiative for different agro-climatic regions of the country	77.57	II	65.451	III
Marketing initiatives				
Availability of raw material of required quality at local market	42.48	IV	79.250	I
Promotion of direct marketing and forward marketing of the produce	58.55	III	61.587	II
Creation of separate cargo flights for national and international markets to export the produce	75.54	I	56.258	III
Creation of specialized brand for the produce and specialized market for the produce	63.59	II	41.658	IV
Famer level initiatives				
Cluster and cooperative based approach in operation and development of agritourism	61.66	II	86.578	I
Appropriate selection of location and site for agritourism initiative	77.65	I	71.865	II
Use of locally available vernacular materials for construction	43.66	IV	48.962	III
Improving communication skills and authentic rural hospitality	58.55	III	41.857	IV

Table 5 is the result of perceived strategies to sustain this entrepreneurial venture in the long term. Multiple stakeholders which include both farmers and visitors perceived the strategies as reported in the table. Policy and research backstopping must include institutional interventions and Government strategies and suggestions for agritourism development. Reduction of high initial investment through introducing low cost construction materials through intense research and case studies would bring the establishment cost to minimum level so that even the semi-medium and small farmers can also think of the venture.

CONCLUSION

Provision of loan through PACS/ Commercial banks under MUDRA or startup scheme will encourage the young and interested farmers to take this venture. Provision of subsidy for low cost agritourism farms would strengthen as an agritourism.

The government needs to come up with the price policy mechanism with respect to tour packages in order to prevent loss to farmers. Market survey in the urban areas needs to be done to identify potential consumers for agritourism and agri-products.

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