

FACE TO FACE



“I believe that agri-tourism can be an important driver in poverty alleviation through the creation of sustainable livelihood and diversification of rural economies. Extension and advisory services could play a major role in strengthening agri-tourism. But to do this, their capacities need considerable enhancement.”

Shri Pandurang Taware
Founder & Managing Director
Agri-tourism Development Corporation Pvt Ltd, Maharashtra

Shri. Pandurang Taware has received several national and international awards for his work on agri-tourism. Mr Gopal Naidu recently interviewed Shri. Taware to understand the potential of agri-tourism and some of the challenges it faces in India.

Why do you think Agri-tourism is important for farmers?

Agri-tourism can generate weekly income which can compensate weekly expenses of the farm. While a farmer receives income from agriculture only once or twice a year, he has to spend on agriculture almost every week. Farmers find it very difficult to survive under these circumstances. Agri-tourism offers him an opportunity to earn income in between and it can make farming and his livelihood more secure and sustainable.



Foreign tourists engaged in farming activity at Tea plantation bungalows

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Box 1: What is Agri-tourism?

Agri-tourism or agro-tourism, involves any agriculturally based operation or activity that brings visitors to a farm or ranch. Rich et al (2012) defines agri-tourism to comprise of activities offered on working farms and other agricultural settings for entertainment or educational purposes. (<http://jotr.eu/index.php/tourism-management/105-katsoni1>)

Agri-tourism has different definitions in different parts of the world, and sometimes referring to farm stays and sometimes to a wide variety of activities, including buying a produce directly 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 (Wikipedia). Definitions of agri-tourism are wide-ranging in the literature. The discrepancies found among the various agri-tourism definitions relate to three issues: (1) the type of setting (e.g., farm, any agricultural setting); (2) the authenticity of the agricultural facility or the experience; and (3) the types of activities involved (e.g., lodging, education). Agri-tourism products and services can be divided into different types like farm accommodation, farm catering, participatory agri-tourism, farm retailing, therapy at the farm, holidaying in a farm and farm entertainment.

In India, agri-tourism refers to a range of services and amenities provided by farmers and artisans attract tourists to their area in order to generate additional income from their livelihood activities. In other words, it is about a holiday/tourism experience in agricultural and rural settings with possibilities to understand and experience agricultural operations.

According to Panduarang Taware (2010), Agri-tourism should ensure the following three basic principles: *Have something for visitors to see* - Animals, birds, farms and nature are few things which Agri-Tourism could offer to the tourist. Apart from these, culture, dress, festivals and rural games could create enough interest among visitors in agri-tourism.

Have something for visitors to do - Participating in agricultural operations, swimming, bullock cart riding, camel riding, buffalo riding, cooking and participating in the rural games are few activities to quote in which tourists can take part and enjoy.

Have something for visitors to buy- Rural crafts, dress materials, farm gate fresh agriculture products, processed foods are the few items which tourist can buy as a souvenir. (http://www.agritourism.in/images/Agri-Tourism_Concept_Note.pdf)

How do you get attracted to Agri-tourism?

I belong to a farm family and my 17 years' experience in hospitality business motivated me to think about agri-tourism. I did a research in 2004 to understand the scope of agri-tourism in Maharashtra and found that 43% of urban population did not have any relative left in the village and around 97% of urban population wants to experience the rustic beauty of village life. This encouraged us to develop tourism centers in the village around agricultural activities.



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A humble attempt to implement and start the pilot project of agri-tourism by ATDC was made in 2005 in Malegaon near Baramati in Maharashtra, where agri-tourism was demonstrated on Agriculture Development Trust's farm. Within 2 years, the pilot project became a huge success. In 2007, ATDC launched Maharashtra State Agri Tourism Vistar Yojana 2007 where in 52 farmers were selected to start Agri-tourism centers across the entire state of Maharashtra. In 2010, we registered ATDC as ATDC Pvt Ltd (<http://www.agritourism.in/>)

How the concept of Agri-tourism evolved?

As our efforts have expanded, we realized the need for bringing all agricultural and rural tourism co-operatives under one umbrella and to have an apex body that will guide, train, build capacity, promote, sell and market agri- and rural-tourism concept in urban cities. Such an apex body is also important to work in tandem with government departments in the state of Maharashtra. Thus Maharashtra State Agri & Rural Tourism Cooperative Federation Ltd (MART) was registered on 12 Dec 2008, with the main objective to coordinate the activity of planning, financing, marketing and liaising with various state and central agencies.

The governing body of this Federation has 12 representatives from agri and rural tourism co-operatives as well as 11 individual farmers who run agri and rural tourism center along with women directors from the individual farmers and two government nominated directors. The agri-tourism co-operative societies receives funding support for setting up of diary unit, poultry, nursery etc, and get finances from National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD).



Tractor ride at Agri and Eco Tourism Centre, Baramati

What is the role of ATDC Pvt. Ltd. in promoting agri-tourism?

Our corporation acts as a supporting body or as a one stop solution shop for farmers who are in the business of agri-tourism and for those who want to enter into the field of agri-tourism. We select the farms according to fixed norms. ATDC also benchmarks the farms and monitors the delivery of services rendered by the agri-tourism service providers. We provide consultancy, project reports preparation, sales and marketing and training in the field of agri and rural tourism. Recently, ATDC Pvt. Ltd. received World Responsible Tourism Gold Award (Best for Poverty Reduction, 2015) from the World Travel Market (WTM).

What kind of training is given to farmers in the area of agri-tourism?

We train the farmers who are interested to start agri-tourism at their farms. The training includes various modules which ultimately makes the farmers to kick start agri-tourism center at their farms. We provide a 4-day training to the farmers which includes topics such as Establishment, Management and Structure for Agri Tourism; Banking, Finance, Documentation for Establishment of Tourism Centre; and Hospitality Management and other agri-tourism related options specific to

Box 2: Role of Extension and Advisory Services (EAS) in promoting agri-tourism

There are several challenges in promoting agri-tourism. Lack of knowledge among farmers, lack of training opportunities to learn about agri-tourism and implement projects and absence of policies and infrastructure support that can support agri-tourism projects are some of the major challenges.

EAS can play major role in overcoming these knowledge and training barriers. Apart from providing necessary training to acquire knowledge and skills by farmers and entrepreneurs, EAS could assist authorities in establishing rules and regulations for proper functioning of agri-tourism center and promoting & marketing of agri-tourism products.

EAS however needs to be competent in the area of agri-tourism. Today EAS should have competency not only in production process, but also in marketing, promotion, and additional ways of development of farming community such as agri-tourism. EAS personnel should know about identifying potential farms and entrepreneurs who can implement agri-tourism projects. Many of the so called experts in agri-tourism have inadequate or partial knowledge of both agriculture and tourism aspects.

To overcome this issue, the development has to be taken place in a sequence. First, a team of senior and middle level extension staff should be well trained in agri-tourism. The team must be selected very carefully considering their real interest on agri-tourism and be trained locally and internationally giving them a broader experience in agri-tourism.

Source: Rohana P Mahaliyanaarachchi (2014). Role of agricultural extension in promotion and development of agri tourism in Sri Lanka, .

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/277006212_ROLE_OF_AGRICULTURAL_EXTENSION_IN_PROMOTION_AND_DEVELOPMENT_OF_AGRI_TOURISM_IN_SRI_LANKA

each farm. Apart from these, we also take farmers to successful agri-tourism centres and continuously help the farmers in running their Agri-tourism center successfully. Until now we have trained nearly 1500 farmers in Maharashtra region.

We utilize the services of the faculty from Department of Agriculture mainly from horticulture and extension education to organize these trainings. Other than that, we also have experts from banking and finance who train farmers in getting loan and maintenance of financial records.



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Does the Agri-tourism project have government backing?

State government of Maharashtra is promoting agri-tourism through its 'Mahabhraman scheme'. While we have no financial help from the government, we do get marketing help from the Tourism Department of the state. The government recognizes the importance of generating supplementary income and employment allied to agriculture through agri-tourism. With job opportunities created here, urban migration might come down. The government wants the next generation of the farming community to have employable and income generating activities in the farm.

Box 3: EAS and agri-tourism promotion in other countries

Agri-tourism is an important area for extension in several universities in USA. For instance, In North Carolina, depressed agricultural revenues and the decline of demand for traditional cash crops like tobacco are encouraging farmers to offer a variety of recreational, educational, and tourism activities to make their finances more resilient. The Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism Management at the College of Natural Resources, NC State University addresses the needs of agri-tourism providers by assisting farmers in successfully developing agri-tourism to respond to their needs and entrepreneurial motivation (https://tourism.ces.ncsu.edu/?page_id=277374).

In the Philippines, the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI), Ministry of Agriculture also encourages farmers and entrepreneurs in adopting agri-tourism. ATI also organizes training to those individuals who are interested to develop and manage agri/farm tourism projects in their respective areas.

(<http://ati.da.gov.ph/services/training>)

In China, the Agricultural Management Institute under the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) organises training for officials in charge of agricultural departments from national agri-tourism demonstration counties and representatives of MoA (http://english.agri.gov.cn/news/dqnf/201504/t20150415_25400.htm)

In Italy, the Italian Farmers' Confederation which is a professional farmer organization offers training and marketing to options to farmers. The basic training for anyone wishing to establish a new operation is 100-200 hours depending on the region. This includes topics such as the concept and philosophy of agri-tourism, hygiene and safety, communication skills (including some basic internet technology), and some marketing.

(http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.agrifoodskills.net.au/resource/resmgr/fellowship_reports/iss_fel_report_p_porcaro_low.pdf)



Lodging Facilities at Agri and Eco Tourism Centre, Baramati

Apart from the state government support, I feel that the support and participation of local government is important, especially in (a) funding tourism development and promotion in the respective panchayats/municipalities, (b) creating and maintaining infrastructure necessary for agri-tourism, (c) ensuring participation of community to keep the villages clean and appealing to tourists and (d) also for training farmers to take up agri-tourism.

How do you maintain relationship with your clients?

We have our own Customer Relationship Management (CRM) cell at our office, where our executives maintain fruitful relationship with our clients. We also update farmers through newspaper and WhatsApp chat group.

What challenges you face in promoting agri-tourism?

It has been ten years now that the development of rural areas in Maharashtra through agri tourism has been taken up. However, the journey hasn't been very easy. There has been uncertainty always regarding the demand for agri-tourism vis-a vis with other forms of tourism. Another major hurdle has been the lack of sufficient government support, plus accessibility and approachability to

the area and also availability of basic infrastructures such as medical facilities, transport facilities, availability of water, etc. Then there is also the danger of over-exploitation of natural resources, which needs to be checked from time to time. Farmers especially had limited knowledge of the tourism industry, little or no business experience and understanding related to market for agri-tourism. But, we have come a long way and today agri-tourism is flourishing and helping farmers all across, empowering them.

What are your future plans?

We are currently planning to expand our services in other states to promote agri-tourism and to initiate agri-tourism centers where there is potential and feasibility. We are also planning to strengthen our common platform in terms of ICT for providing wider options to tourists who are looking to experience agri-tourism.

Can extension agencies play any role in promoting agri-tourism?

Extension & Advisory Services (EAS) can play a major role in identifying the potential of agri-tourism among the farming communities and encouraging them to take up agri-tourism initiatives. They can definitely play a major role in developing the capacities of farmers who are willing to initiate agri-tourism project. However, to play these roles meaningfully, their capacities in this area have to be developed first. Organizations such as the National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE) and State Agricultural Management and Extension Training Institutes (SAMETIs) should organize training for EAS providers in this emerging area.



Gopal Naidu is doing his MBA from the National Academy of Agricultural Research Management (NAARM), Hyderabad. He is currently exploring the area of Agro-tourism as part of his internship with the Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy (CRISP), Hyderabad, India (gopalnaidukvv@gmail.com)

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