

**A 21-day Training Program on
Agripreneurship for Atma Nirbhar Bharat
Anand Agricultural University (AAU), Anand, Gujarat.
6 to 26 October 2023**



In this Meeting Note, Ms Anusha Velamuri and Dr Suhas Mane share their experience after undergoing training on Agripreneurship for Atma Nirbhar Bharat conducted by the Centre for Agricultural Market Intelligence, National Agricultural Higher Education Project - Centre of Advanced Agricultural Science & Technology (NAHEP-CAAST), Anand Agricultural University (AAU), Anand, Gujarat.

CONTEXT

Entrepreneurship stands as a ladder leading to transformation of agriculture, going from food security to economic and nutrition security. When applied to agriculture and its related sectors, entrepreneurial activities are referred to as 'agripreneurship'. Therefore, a 21-day training program was organized in association with NAHEP-CAAST, AAU, with the below mentioned objectives.

- Gain experiential knowledge about different enterprises;
- Understand the enabling environment and institutional support for agripreneurship;
- Recognize the role of entrepreneurial skills for career and personal development; and for
- Prepare business plans effectively.

About 45 participants enrolled from six states of India (of whom 13 were faculty members), and the faculty consisted of 53 experts. The program was also packed with nine exposure visits.



Ice breaker session conducted by Dr Hemlatha Saini (Program Coordinator) as part of the first day of training

The technical sessions covered: traditional agripreneurial domains, modern agripreneurial domains, supporting factors for agripreneurship, addressing the human aspect in agripreneurship, and exposure visits.



Dignitaries at the Inaugural Session

Traditional agripreneurial domains

In a session on **'Beekeeping'** we learnt about various kinds of bee species, their social hierarchy, and communicative dances, as well as the economic aspects of bee keeping. To maintain the viability of the enterprise, migrating colonies was suggested as ideal. This means that instead of permanent structures of bee colonies taking up land, it was better to take colonies across the terrain according to the season. In this method the bee gets to collect nectar from various types of flora, thus adding different tastes and aroma to the honey, which could be branded and sold as 'A natural way to get better-flavored honey'.

'Biofertilizers as an enterprise for agripreneurs' was conducted by Dr RV Vyas, Professor and Head (Microbiology), AAU. We learnt about the technology developed and commercialized by him: 'Anubhav biofertilizer'. For sustainability in food production, a wave of change is being observed in India towards organic and natural farming. Sadly, subsidies by the crore are given for chemical fertilizers leading to a decline in soil health. So, using biofertilizers is crucial and could become a flourishing enterprise. In this regard, we visited an in-house biofertilizer production unit, where we learnt all about the protocol, which motivated all the participants to sign an MoU with the Department of Microbiology, AAU, to become biofertilizer entrepreneurs.

In the session on **'Areas of agripreneurship with special reference to agricultural innovation,'** we understood how important it was for a breeder to recognise and deal with price fluctuations in the market. Market price problems are always handed to economists so they can develop better predictions and extension systems to disseminate market information. But as a breeder, tweaking the days by which the plant reaches maturity ensures an even supply of the product instead of a market glut. This was something new for me and I realised its significance for the first time during the session.



Dr KB Kathiriya (Vice Chancellor, AAU) delivering the session on breeder's role in areas of agripreneurship

Modern agripreneurial domains

Under this domain, the following topics were discussed: Hydroponics and soilless cultivation, FPO – a group agribusiness, Precision farming, and Agri service centres and Agrotourism opportunities for rural youth. Each topic is unique in its own way and could be viewed as enterprises for the future. The 'Hydroponics and soilless cultivation' theme considered it as an enterprise that could become a compelling force in the future. Shedding light on advanced technology, expert advice was to start at a low volume and select crops that can be grown in simple grow bags but fetch high prices before moving on to hydroponic pumps.

The session on '**FPO - a group agribusiness**' dealt with how an FPO can be formed and its minimum requirements. The session emphasized the need for dynamic leadership, with a CEO, to make the FPO sustainable. As instability generally prevails in agriculture, FPOs are not immune to it; so, the benefits of an FPO can't be seen overnight, just as in the case of any other enterprise.

The practical experience sharing session on '**Precision farming**' and '**Agri service centres**' by young entrepreneurs was motivating. On farmland of over 65 acres, they grow potatoes planted with a potato seeder and watered by drip irrigation. They use the 'Cropin Smart Plus' app for monitoring pest and disease, and manage everything using a petrol-powered drone, and finally, harvesting is done with a potato harvester. As early adopters of technology they invest in quality and futuristic products and share their knowledge with all farmers.

We learnt about '**Agrotourism opportunities for rural youth**' that explained how agro-tourism provides experience, education, and cultural transformation, and how it differs from regular tourism, which means just visiting, seeing a place and enjoying it. We saw how active cosmopolitan non-agri professionals came to be involved in these enterprises, and this shed light on the scope for local rural youth to get involved in it.

Supporting factors for agripreneurship

A first-generation entrepreneur with only some general ideas needs guidance to start off. A session on '**Generation, incubation and commercialization of ideas and innovations**,' mentioned that incubation centres are the right place to begin with in such cases. Such incubations centres (for instance, a-IDEA) stay with a novice entrepreneur and provides technical, infrastructural, and even monetary support (grants and investments).



Dr Senthil (CEO, a-IDEA, NAARM) showcasing the works of the a-IDEA incubator

Anand Agriculture University (AAU) also has an incubation centre and runs a **Student Startup and Innovation Policy (SSIP)** program to support student entrepreneurs in Gujarat. Dr Nikunj Soni (CEO, AIC, Anand) highlighted the efforts of the government to cultivate an entrepreneurial culture among students by issuing grants to test the viability of an idea.

A lecture on '**Export Opportunities and Initiation Trade for Organization**' shed light on India's status on export. Although agricultural products have a positive balance of trade overall in India, it's negative, which means that there's great potential for improvement. Targeting products that have higher comparative advantage in high-end markets was suggested as the way ahead for the export industry. Value addition to tackle the sudden bans on agricultural products and producing Ready to Eat, Serve, and Cook items was another avenue for growth.

To bring out transparency and traceability in the agri-supply chain, there were discussions on '**Blockchain and Agripreneurship**'. This topic was relatively more technical in nature, meant for agri-oriented trainees. Yet, the trainer managed to sow the seeds for working on the mechanism of Blockchain and its applications in the supply chain of agriculture for transparency and traceability.

Addressing the human aspect in agripreneurship

For the sustainability of an enterprise, along with the idea, the individual, and the kind of environment he/she cultivates in the organization also matter. The sessions on stress management, and soft skills

for agripreneurs ensured the capacity building of participants. The **‘Stress management’** session pointed out the stressors that could emerge in an organization and how they could be tackled at the organizational and individual levels. The conclusion remarked that stress is ubiquitous and unavoidable, so we must learn to make our way around it as nothing is permanent, neither the good, the bad, nor the ugly. Under a broad spectrum of various aspects of **‘Soft skills for agripreneurs,’** the presenter emphasised the importance of effective communication for agripreneurs.

There were simulation exercises – the tower-building exercise – that controlled our mindset which was not attuned to being an entrepreneur. The task of building a tower (keeping one block over the other) was set for trainees. Every individual was asked to give away their targets (‘How many do you think you will be able to keep one over the other?’). The targets ranged from unrealistic, practical, to subpar. Then constraints were introduced, as tasks needed to be done blindfolded, and only the left hand had to be used. When asked if trainees could change their targets, a few dropped their number drastically, but some others even after knowing the constraints, didn’t want to back out/adjust, and held on to the same number. The learning from it was to correctly assess one’s potential and adapt according to the situations, keeping in mind that constraints must be appreciated rather than avoided. Later, the person doing the task (as a worker) was guided by two others as managers. “To whom would you give credit for this building?”, was the question, and the unhesitant worker gave a significant share to her managers rather than realizing it was her own skill that actually got the work done. The learning here was to show that we have an ‘employee’ mindset. As soon as we are placed in the system, we undermine ourselves voluntarily, giving maximum credit to the top management, who were just the guiding force.

Exposure visits

‘Seeing is believing’ is such a wonderful phrase applicable across all sections. Understanding this, the program organized multiple visits to emphasize the practical potential in agripreneurship.



Visit to the Technology and Business Incubation (TBI) Centre

A visit to the Technology and Business Incubation (TBI) Centre at the Savli Industrial Area

The TBI was furnished with 3D printers, laboratories, clean rooms, office spaces, etc. Technical guidance was provided to nurture innovative ideas and develop them into viable businesses – right from prototype to testing the product and release.

Visit to drumstick processing unit

Mr Dipen Shah is an entrepreneur (owner of Pushpam Foods) with numerous accolades and a resident of Kunjrao village of Anand district in Gujarat. Moving towards value addition after the production of moringa (drumstick) brought his enterprise into the limelight. He shared his difficulties with finding, if not creating a market for moringa leaf and drumstick powder and the government's role in establishing his own unit. Not stopping there, he is now developing two new products to share the nutritional benefits of moringa powder to children for whom the product was originally intended. This relentless attitude to strive and create better products marks an entrepreneur's true nature.

Visit to FPO, Boriavi

Shri Devesh Patel, the owner of Satva Organics, narrated the story of the first FPO formation in 2008 in Gujarat with 300 members across the state. He is involved mainly in cultivating potatoes and turmeric, practicing value addition, and developing innovative products with turmeric, such as capsules, pickles, and even lattes. Recently, as an FPO, they have exported 1.5 tons of organic vegetables to the USA along with millets. This is marked as an achievement, but the entrepreneur said it's just the beginning.

For further reading: <https://theorganicmagazine.com/meet-the-plantpreneur/devesh-patel-tied-to-my-roots-satva-organic/>

Visit to the Gujarat State Seed Corporation, Nadiad

The Gujarat State Seed Corporation, under the brand name Gurabini, is providing good quality seeds of major crops, such as wheat, gram, and soybean, to farmers at reasonable prices. Given an amount for all seed processing activities, we saw fully automated machinery imported from Japan.

Visit to the farm mechanization industry, Vasad

At AgriBiz Corporation, Shri Prafful Patel expanded on his entrepreneurial journey as India's first semi-automatic machine manufacturer of plastic mulch film. With demand raised from other countries too, he claimed to be making sales of around 350 units/year worth INR 75,000. They also deal with drip pipe laying machines and fertilizer spreaders. We then witnessed the manufacturing process and field demonstration of tractor-mounted plastic mulch film.

During these exposure visits, interacting with entrepreneurs who showed perseverance in the face of adversity taught us a lot. Moreover, the institutional efforts in providing a congenial environment for entrepreneurs to thrive in were duly noted.

Our Learning

Whenever entrepreneurship comes to mind, money would be the most significant constraint. But seeing how the government, through incubation centres, is extending its hands towards aspiring entrepreneurs, I now feel that you are only an idea away from being an entrepreneur. At the beginning of the training, a hands-on exercise named 'Tower building' taught us how deep-rooted our thoughts and actions are. This can help us realise that we must learn to be solely responsible for the task at hand and accept it as our own, not of someone else placed above us as managers. This exercise made clear that being an entrepreneur starts with our own mindset. The actual utility of the training came out during the exposure visits. Interacting with real entrepreneurs who shared their journey with us, gave us an accurate picture of entrepreneurship, 'challenging but achievable'. When you have a master product, the market finds its way. This was illustrated by an export farmer who showed us the power of value addition and innovation that could be done with agricultural produce. Whenever entrepreneurship is spoken about, it's all about big enterprises and huge turnovers, but any big enterprise must have started small. All the entrepreneurs emphasized starting slowly and scaling up, which made me realize that 'one small step each day consistently' is what I need.



Receiving feedback and distribution of certificates for participants

CONCLUSION

The 21-day agripreneurship training, though it sounded like a long period, became transitory when the learning actually began. This training helped some participants to redefine their aspirations and encouraged others to become agripreneurs. The experts' assurance of their support on any day we start our entrepreneurial journey gave much encouragement to go forward.



The personnel involved in the training program on 'Agripreneurship for Atma Nirbhar Bharat'

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