

6. Unleashing The Potential of Sustainability: Agro-Tourism in Maharashtra W.R.T. Konkan Region

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Abstract:

Tourism is now well recognized as an engine of growth in the various economies in the world. Several countries have transformed their economies by developing their tourism potential.

Tourism has great capacity to generate large-scale employment and additional income sources to the skilled and unskilled. Today the concept of traditional tourism has been changed. Some new areas of the tourism have been emerged like Agro-Tourism. Promotion of tourism would bring many direct and indirect benefits to the people.

Agro-tourism is a way of sustainable tourist development and multi-activity in rural areas through which the visitor has the opportunity to get aware with agricultural areas, agricultural occupations, local products, traditional food and the daily life of the rural people, as well as the cultural elements and traditions.

Hence, the government and other related authorities should try to support these activities in Maharashtra for the rural development and increase income level of the farmers. The farmers should also try to establish their co-operative society for the development of agro-tourism centers. The agro-tourism may become a cash crop for the farmers in Maharashtra and also an instrument of the rural employment generation.

Keywords:

Agro-Tourism, Sustainable Development.

6.1 Introduction:

Tourism is now well recognized as an engine of growth in the various economies in the world. Several countries have transformed their economies by developing their tourism potential.

Tourism has great capacity to generate large-scale employment and additional income sources to the skilled and unskilled. Today the concept of traditional tourism has been changed. Some new areas of the tourism have been emerged like Agro-Tourism. Promotion of tourism would bring many direct and indirect benefits to the people.

Agro-tourism is an innovative agricultural activity related to tourism and agriculture both. It has a great capacity to create additional source of income and employment opportunities to the farmers. Maharashtra is one of the major tourist centers in the India and there is large scope and great potential to develop agro-tourism.

6.2 Objectives of Study:

The objectives of this paper are follows:

- To examine the importance of Agro-tourism development in Maharashtra.
- To define a suitable framework for the of Agro- tourism centers in the view of marginal and small farmers.
- To identify the problems of the Agro-tourism and make suggestions to establishment and operations of Agro-tourism.

6.3 Importance of Study:

Agriculture is the most important occupation in the India including in the Maharashtra. But, today it becomes unprofitable due the irregular monsoon, prices fluctuations of Agro-products and some internal weaknesses of the agriculture sector. Hence, there is need to do some innovative activities in the agriculture, which will help to farmers, rural people.

Urban population is increasing day by day in the Maharashtra, today the urban people's world is restricted in the closed-door flats, offices, clubs, television, video games, spicy fast food, computer, internet, and so on. They can see nature only on television or screen of the computers.

More over some people living in the cities do not have relatives in villages and they never visited or stayed in village. These people want to enjoy rural life but there is problem of such type of facilities. Hence, it is opportunity to the farmers for the development of the Agro-tourism centers and it serves him and create additional income source.

6.4 Research Methodology:

The scope of the study is limited to examine the benefits and applicability of Agro-tourism business in Maharashtra. The study includes their benefits and problems. As well as it includes appropriate framework regarding to establish the Agro-tourism centers in the Maharashtra. The present study was conducted on the Agro-tourism is based on secondary data. The data has been furnished from the related articles, research papers, reports and 11th plan document of the government of India. Some data has been furnished from the websites of the government of India and Maharashtra, as well as ministry of agriculture. Some ideas have been taken from the Tourism Development Corporation of Maharashtra.

6.5 Review of Literature:

A term 'Agro-Tourism' is a new face of tourism. An agro-tourism is farm based business that is open to the public. These specialized agro-tourism destinations generally offer things to see, things to do, and produce or gifts to buy, and are open to the public. Agritourism is defined as "Travel that combines agricultural or rural settings with products of agricultural operations – all within a tourism experience". According to Mr. Pandurang Tavare (ATDC, Pune) - "Agro-Tourism is that Agri-Business activity, when a native farmers or person of the area offers tours to their agriculture farm to allow a person to view them growing, harvesting, and processing locally grown foods, such as coconuts, pineapple, sugar cane, corn, or any agriculture produce the person would not encounter in their city or home country. Often the farmers would provide a home-stay opportunity and education". Agro-Tourism and Eco-Tourism are closely related to each other. Eco-Tourism provided by the tour companies but, in the agro-tourism farmers offer tours to their agriculture farm and providing entertainment, education and fun-filled experiences for the urban people.

Agro-tourism is a way of sustainable tourist development and multi-activity in rural areas through which the visitor has the opportunity to get aware with agricultural areas, agricultural occupations, local products, traditional food and the daily life of the rural people, as well as the cultural elements and traditions. Moreover, this activity brings visitors closer to nature and rural activities in which they can participate, be entertained and feel the pleasure of touring.

Who Can Start Agro-Tourism Centers?

The individual farmer can start agro-tourism who have minimum two hector land, farm house, water resource and is interested to entertain the tourists. Apart from the individual farmer, agricultural co-operatives institute, Non-Government organisations, Agricultural Universities, and agricultural colleges may start their centers. Even Grampanchayats can start such centers in their operational areas with the help of villagers and farmers.

6.6 Requirements for Agro-Tourism Centers:

Researcher has identified the minimum requirements for the agro-tourism centre. To develop an agro-tourism in their farm, the farmer / farmers must have basic infrastructure and facilities in their farm as follows:

Infrastructure Facilities:

- Accommodation facilities at same place or alliance with nearest hotels.
- Farmhouse, which has the rural look and feel comfortable along with all minimum required facilities.
- Rich resources in agriculture namely water and plants at the place.
- Cooking equipment for cooking food, if tourists have interested.
- Emergency medical cares with first aid box.
- The well or lake or swimming tank for fishing, swimming
- Bullock cart, cattle shade, telephone facilities etc
- Goat farm, Emu (Ostrich bird) farm, sericulture farm, green house, etc.

Facilities be Provided:

1. Offer authentic rural Indian / Maharashtrian food for breakfast, lunch and dinner.
2. Farmers should offer to see and participate in the agricultural activities.
3. Offer an opportunity to participate in the rural games to the tourist
4. Provide information them about the culture, dress, arts, crafts, festivals, rural traditions and also give possible demonstration of some arts.
5. Offer bullock cart for riding and horse riding, buffalo ride in the water, fishing facility in your pounds or nearest lake.
6. Offer fruits, corns, groundnuts, sugarcane and other agro-products as per availability.
7. Show local birds, animals and waterfalls etc and give authentic information about them.
8. Must provide safety to tourists with the support of alliance hospitals.
9. Arrange folk dance programme, Shekoti folk songs bhajan, kirtana, lezim dance, dhangari gaja, etc.
10. Make available some agro-product to purchase to the tourist

Location For the Agro-Tourism Centre:

Location is most the important factor for success in the agro-tourism. The location of the centre must easy to arrive and have a good natural background. Urban tourists are interested into enjoying the nature and rural life. So, farmers should develop their centre in the rural areas only which have a beautiful natural background to attract urban tourist in your farm. The place of agro-tourism centre must be easily accessible by roads and railways.

Tourists want to enjoy some historical and natural tourist places along with the agro-tourism. Hence, the centre should be developed near of these tourist places. It is more beneficial to both tourist and farmers. The places which are already tourist centres like Mahabaleswara, Panchgani, Nashik, Jotiba, Narshinghvasi, Pandharpur, Akkalkot, Konkan etc. These are the better places for the development of agro-tourism. Other than these places farmer can develop their centres in any affordable places.

6.6 Benefits of Agro-Tourism Centers:

Agro-Tourism has the potential to change the economic face of traditional agriculture. The benefits of agro-tourism development are manifold. It would bring many direct and indirect benefits to the farmers and rural people. Some of the benefits are following: -

- Employment opportunities to the farmers including farm family members and youth
- Additional income source for the farmers to protect against income fluctuation.
- Cultural transformation between urban and rural people including social moral values
- Farmers can improve their standard of living due to the contacts with urban people.
- Benefits to the urban people, they can understand about the rural life and know about the agricultural activities.
- It supports for rural and agricultural development process.
- Help to the reduce burden on the other traditional tourist centers.

6.7 Supports to The Agro-Tourism in Maharashtra:

Promotion of Agro-Tourism involves some more important stakeholders namely Ministry of Agriculture and rural development ministry of the state and central governments. To promote domestic tourism, thrust areas identified by the government of India for the development of infrastructure, product development and diversification, development of eco-adventure sports, cultural presentations, providing inexpensive accommodation etc. The government has also realized the importance of agro-tourism. The Planning Commission of India had constituted a Working Group for the formulation of Tenth Five Year Plan on Tourism. It has accorded high priority to tourism as an instrument of employment generation and poverty alleviation in rural and backward areas by developing the potential of agro tourism to supplement farm incomes, and heritage tourism to promote village development.

AGRICULTURE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION –ATDC is the main promoter of this activity in the Maharashtra. ATDC is promoting agriculture tourism for achieving income, employment and economic stability in rural areas. It helps to boosting a range of activities, services and amenities, provided by farmers and rural people to attract urban tourists to their area thus providing opportunity to urban people to get back to the rural roots”.

6.8 Key Techniques for Success in Agro-Tourism:

some marketing techniques for the success. For the better success in the agro-tourism farmers should follow the following things;

- Give a wide publicity of your tourism centre by new papers, television etc Use all possible advertisement means.
- Develop contacts with the schools, colleges, NGOs, clubs, unions, organisations etc.
- Train your staff or family members for reception and hospitality
- understand about the customers wants and their expectations and serve
- Charge optimum rent and charges for the facilities/services on the commercial base
- Do the artificially use local resources for the entertain / serve to tourist
- Develop your website and update time to time for attract foreign tourist
- Take their feedback and comments about the service and suggestions to more development and modification
- Develop a good relationship with the tourist for future business and chain publicity
- Develop different agro-tour packages of for different type of tourist and their expectations.
- Preserve an address book and comments of the visited tourists for future tourism business
- Behave sincerely with the tourists and participate with them / him
- Small farmers can develop their agro-tourism centres on the basis of cooperative society.

6.9 Conclusions and Policy Implications:

Maharashtra has a great potential to the development of agro-tourism, because of natural conditions and different types of agri products as well as variety of rural traditions, festivals. More than 45 percent of population live in the urban areas and they want enjoy rural life and to know about the rural life. It is a good opportunity to develop an agro-tourism business in Maharashtra. But there is a problem of low awareness about this business in the farmer and problem of the finance and proper view in the farmers of the Maharashtra.

Hence, the agriculture departments of the districts, Agriculture Universities should try to give orientation about it and provide some innovative ideas regarding to the Agro-Tourism. The government should try to provide optimum financial aids to the agro-tourism activities in Maharashtra by the grants and institutional finance. Bank should provide optimum financial help for the agro-tourism activities in the Maharashtra. Union of the agro-tourism service providers is also another need of these farmers which helps the agricultural tourism network in the India including Maharashtra.

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