



Importance and Challenges of Agro-Tourism Centers in Maharashtra

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Abstract:

Agriculture serves as the backbone of the Indian economy, consistently bolstering its growth. Despite the agricultural sector's significant contribution, the development of the common Indian farmer has not matched the progress of the sector. Following the economic reforms of 1991, Indian farmer suicides not only persisted but increased. Maharashtra, touted as the country's leading developed state, faces a grim scenario with a high incidence of farmer suicides. This raises the question: why, in the era of the neo-economic policy's prosperity, do farmers, considered the backbone of the economy, resort to extreme measures like suicide? The green revolution has indeed boosted agricultural production, but the income of farmers has not seen a proportional increase. Each year, the peasantry contends with various crises, often resulting in their defeat. Consequently, the younger generation is increasingly reluctant to pursue agriculture. In this bleak situation, Agro Tourism center emerges as a beacon of hope for educated young farmers. Agro-tourism, a fusion of agriculture and tourism, involves tourists visiting farms, witnessing various aspects of agriculture, purchasing fresh produce, enjoying a pollution-free environment, and experiencing rural food and traditional lifestyles such as jagran, gondhal, bharud, kirtan, sermons, folk art, and folk music. In the contemporary lifestyle, agro-tourism centers serve as a burgeoning business, offering not only significant opportunities for farmers but also acting as a golden bridge connecting urban and rural lifestyles. Maharashtra pioneered rural agro-tourism in India, starting from Baramati in 2005, and it has since expanded beyond state borders, experiencing rapid development. The influx of urban tourists seeking agricultural experiences has led to the establishment of 350 official agro-tourism centers in Maharashtra, attracting over 2 million tourists in the last three years, with a total turnover reaching 47 crores.

Keywords: Neo-economic policy, Argo-tourism, Suicides, Development

Objective of the Research Study:

1. To examine the importance and challenges of agro-tourism centers.
2. To evaluate various opportunities for agro-tourism centers.

Concepts used in the Research Paper:

- Tourist: A person or group traveling to a specific location for recreation,

work, or other purposes, staying for less than a year
Tourism: Traveling for less than a year for recreation, stress relief, or residing in a desired location.

- Agro-tourism: Tourists staying with local people in rural areas.

- **Agricultural market:** A marketplace for buying and selling agricultural and allied products.
- **Agricultural Tourism Center:** A location close to nature providing urban tourists with a rural lifestyle experience and scientific information about agriculture.

Research Methods:

Secondary data collection methods, such as annual reports, magazines, newspapers, reference books, periodicals, newsletters, and selected department websites, will be employed to gather information for the research.

Importance of Agro-Tourism Centers:

Despite agriculture being the cornerstone of the Indian economy, the sector faces various crises, necessitating the establishment of alternative or parallel businesses. The agro-tourism center business emerges as a vital alternative, offering the following benefits:

1. **Agricultural Business:** Agro-tourism centers can serve as a complementary business to agriculture, utilizing resources readily available to farmers with organized planning.
2. **Employment Generation:** The development of agro-tourism centers can provide permanent employment opportunities in rural areas, alleviating seasonal unemployment issues.
3. **Women Empowerment:** Inclusion of women in agro-tourism business can empower them economically, addressing the employment challenges faced by rural women.

4. **Cultivation of Rural Art Culture:** Agri-tourism centers showcase various rural art cultures, providing urban tourists with insights into disappearing traditions and offering rural artists opportunities to showcase and earn income.
5. **Rural Development:** Agri-tourism centers play a crucial role in economic, social, and cultural development, contributing to overall rural prosperity.

Challenges for Agro-Tourism Centers in Maharashtra:

As the development of agro-tourism centers in Maharashtra is in its early stages, several challenges impede their progress:

1. **Lack of Capital:** Acquiring capital remains a significant challenge, as government support is limited, and operators often face legal and technical constraints.
2. **Government Permission:** Obtaining legal permission for agro-tourism centers involves a time-consuming process, including dealing with objections from local systems and Gram Panchayat offices.
3. **Natural Calamities:** Limits on concrete construction in agro-tourism centers make them vulnerable to financial losses during natural disasters, with no concrete provisions for compensation.
4. **Local Problems:** Operating in rural areas exposes agro-tourism operators to various local challenges, necessitating frequent problem-solving involving the

police and negatively impacting tourist numbers.

5. **Safety of Tourists:** As the agro-tourism center business is in its initial stage, providing facilities to ensure the safety of tourists during emergencies poses a significant challenge.

Conclusion:

While agriculture remains the backbone of the Indian economy, a disparity exists between the output from the agricultural sector and the per capita income of farmers. To address this, the development of complementary industries to agriculture is essential. Recognizing the significance of agro-

tourism centers, they can play a pivotal role in supporting agribusiness and rural economy.

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