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Aspirations of Farm Science Students in Odisha: A Comparative Analysis across Agricultural Disciplines

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Farm science undergraduates showed moderate aspirations in education, jobs, self-employment, socio-economic and economic domains.
- Veterinary science students reported higher aspirations, while gender differences reflected women's focus on higher studies and men's preference for entrepreneurship and income.
- Findings call for tailored academic support and career counselling to align with student aspirations in agriculture and allied fields.

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Farm science students, Aspirational levels, Career aspirations, Entrepreneurship development, Skill development, Agricultural education.

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ABSTRACT

Designing successful educational initiatives and policy interventions requires an understanding of these goals. 160 undergraduate students from the fields of agriculture, veterinary science, fisheries science and agricultural engineering participated in the current study at Centurion University of Technology and Management (CUTM), Odisha during 2025. The study had five main aspects of aspirations: economic, socioeconomic, self-employment, job and education. The results showed that most students in all subjects had moderate aspirational levels. Fisheries students had medium levels of educational aspirations, followed by veterinary science (65.00%), agriculture (60.00%) and agricultural engineering (57.50%). Eighty percent of veterinary science students and about sixty-five percent of students from the other disciplines expressed a medium level of enthusiasm for job. Seventy percent of students in agriculture and fisheries, sixty-seven percent in veterinary science and twenty-eight percent in agricultural engineering expressed a moderate desire to work for themselves. Students studying agriculture had the highest socioeconomic aspirations (92.50%), followed by fisheries (75.00%), veterinary science (67.50%) and agricultural engineering (65.00%). The study reveals significant differences in aspiration levels among students in various farm science fields and offers insightful information to help politicians and educational institutions create plans that promote students' professional and entrepreneurial development.

INTRODUCTION

Aspirations are strong motivators that influence young people's academic and career paths. Aspirations for undergraduate students seeking degrees in agriculture, veterinary, fisheries and agricultural engineering represent their socioeconomic and personal aims in addition to their academic and professional objectives. These aspirations have an impact on students' academic engagement, career choices and final contributions to society and the agricultural industry (Lekang et al., 2016; Lekang et al., 2017; Vishwakarma et

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al., 2025). While students' employment expectations emphasize their preferred careers in government, private or entrepreneurial domains, their educational aspirations direct their desire for further education and advanced learning opportunities (Sikdar & Prakash, 2025). While socio-economic ambitions highlight their interest in enhancing family welfare, obtaining social recognition and aiding in community development, self-employment aspirations show their propensity for independent endeavours, especially in agri-based businesses (Genicot & Ray, 2020). Students' life choices are greatly influenced by their economic goals, which are strongly linked to their financial security and job security, particularly in fields related to agriculture that are essential to the development of the country (Sebastian, 2021). However, there are clear differences between fields and gender, which calls for further research.

Designing successful educational initiatives and policy interventions requires an understanding of the goals of agriculture science students. In addition to influencing professional choices, aspirations also have an impact on academic achievement, skill development and entrepreneurial orientation (Arunachalam et al., 2020). Many agricultural graduates are becoming less interested in traditional farming and government occupations in favor of jobs in the private sector, agribusiness or non-agricultural fields (Vinodkumar & Seema, 2021; Raju & Devarani, 2023). Programs for rural development and agricultural extension networks will be significantly impacted by this change. The state of Odisha, which is renowned for its agrarian economy and diverse agroclimatic conditions, has made significant advancements in agricultural education through institutions that provide a range of farm science programs.

Moreover, there exists a noticeable gap between academic training and industry requirements, leading to issues such as unemployment, underemployment and lack of entrepreneurial skills among graduates (Modak et al., 2018; Meena et al., 2018). Despite the significance of this issue, empirical studies focusing on the aspirations of farm science students, particularly in Odisha, remain limited. In light of this, the current study was carried out to evaluate the economic, socioeconomic, job, educational and self-employment goals of farm sciences undergraduate students. By examining these aspects, the study aims to offer knowledge that will help colleges, decision-makers and career advisors match academic programs and support networks with students' goals, strengthening their position in agriculture and related fields (Kosec & Khan, 2016). In this regard, the current study was conducted to evaluate the economic, socioeconomic, occupational, educational and self-employment goals of Centurion University of Technology and Management, Odisha undergraduate students majoring in agriculture science. For the study undergraduate students from the fields of agriculture, veterinary science, fisheries science and agricultural engineering participated in the study. Knowing these goals is crucial to figuring out what drives students to pursue professional growth, entrepreneurship and career advancement in agriculture and related fields (Kim et al., 2015). Additionally, it is anticipated that the study's conclusions will give educational institutions, legislators and career counsellors important information about how to match academic programs and support networks with students' goals (Meinam et al., 2023). In addition to meeting the changing labour and skill needs of the industry in India, such alignment will improve students' readiness for new opportunities and challenges in agricultural and related industries (Arun Kumar et al., 2021).

METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional descriptive and comparative study was conducted during 2024–25 at Centurion University of Technology and Management (CUTM), Paralakhemundi, Odisha. CUTM was purposively selected because it is among the few private skill-focused universities in eastern India offering all four undergraduate farm science programmes viz. B.Sc. (Hons.) Agriculture, B.V.Sc. & A.H., (Veterinary Science), B.F.Sc. (Fishery Science) and B.Tech (Agricultural Engineering) under a single institutional roof, enabling direct disciplinary comparison under a uniform institutional environment. The study is grounded in Genicot and Ray's (2020) Aspiration Theory, which holds that aspirations function as endogenous reference points embedded within social networks. When aspirations are within a feasible reach of one's current position, they motivate effort and investment; when they exceed perceived capacity, they may generate frustration or disengagement. This framework guided both the selection of aspiration domains and the interpretation of moderate aspiration levels observed in the study. The sampling frame consisted of all final-year and pre final year undergraduate students enrolled in the four disciplines at CUTM during 2024-25. Final-year and pre final year students were targeted because they are most proximate to career decision-making and are likely to hold crystallized aspirations. The total enrolment across disciplines constituted the population (N = approximately 200). A sample of n = 160 was drawn using proportional simple random sampling, with allocation proportional to discipline enrolment size: Agriculture (n = 40), Veterinary Science (n = 40), Fishery Science (n = 40) and Agricultural Engineering (n = 40). Within each discipline, students were selected by systematic random sampling from the department register. The resulting sample was 64% male (n = 102) and 36% female (n = 58), broadly reflecting the enrolment composition at the institution. The scale comprised five Likert-type subscales, each measuring one aspiration domain (educational, job, self-employment, socio-economic and economic). Each item was rated on a 5-point scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Aspiration levels were classified into three categories Low, Medium and High using the Mean ± Standard Deviation (SD) criterion, a widely accepted method in extension education research (Arunachalam *et al.,* 2020; Meinam et al., 2023. Chi-square (χ^2) tests of independence were used to test for significant associations between (a) discipline and aspiration level categories, and (b) gender and aspiration level categories.

RESULTS

Aspirations of farm science students according to their discipline

Agricultural science

Table 1 shows how aspirations are distributed among farm science students by subject. Most students in the agriculture subject showed medium levels in every aspiration component. Just 10% of the students had high educational aspirations, while 60%

Table 1. Distribution of farm science students according to their aspirations

S.No.	Component	Category	Score	Frequency	Percentage	
Agricultural Science						
1	Education Aspiration	Low	<7	12	30.0	Mean=7.7; SD=0.7
		Medium	7-8.4	24	60.0	
		High	>8.4	4	10.0	
2	Job Aspiration	Low	<12	9	22.5	Mean=13.6; SD=1.6
		Medium	12-15.2	27	67.5	
		High	>15.2	4	10.0	
3	Self-employment Aspiration	Low	<15.6	5	12.5	Mean=17.2; SD=1.6
		Medium	15.6-18.8	28	70.0	
		High	>18.8	7	17.5	
4	Socio- economic Aspiration	Low	<9.3	3	7.5	Mean=10.2; SD=0.9
		Medium	9.3-11.1	34	85.0	
		High	>11.1	3	7.5	
5	Economic Aspiration	Low	<6.6	2	5.0	Mean=7.8; SD=1.2
		Medium	6.6-9	33	82.5	
		High	>9	5	12.5	
Veterinary Science						
1	Education Aspiration	Low	<15.7	6	15.0	Mean=18.5; SD=2.7
		Medium	15.7-21.36	26	65.0	
		High	>21.36	8	20.0	
2	Job Aspiration	Low	<11.8	4	10.0	Mean=13.5; SD=1.7
		Medium	11.8-15.2	32	80.0	
		High	>15.2	4	10.0	
3	Self-employment Aspiration	Low	<14.3	6	15.0	Mean=16S; D=1.7
		Medium	14.3-17.7	27	67.5	
		High	>17.7	7	17.5	
4	Socio- economic Aspiration	Low	<10.6	5	12.5	Mean=12.6; SD=2.0
		Medium	10.6-14.6	27	67.5	
		High	>14.6	8	20.0	
5	Economic Aspiration	Low	<6.6	2	5.0	Mean=7.8; SD=1.2
		Medium	6.6-9	33	82.5	
		High	>9	5	12.5	
Fishery Science						
1	Education Aspiration	Low	<16.9	3	7.5	Mean=19.7; SD=2.8
		Medium	16.9-22.5	30	75.0	
		High	>22.5	7	17.5	
2	Job Aspiration	Low	<12	9	22.5	Mean=13.6; SD=1.6
		Medium	12-15.2	26	65.0	
		High	>15.2	5	12.5	
3	Self-employment Aspiration	Low	<15.5	5	12.5	Mean=17.2; SD=1.7
		Medium	15.5-18.9	28	70.0	
		High	>18.9	7	17.5	
4	Socio- economic Aspiration	Low	<9.6	5	12.5	Mean=11.7; SD=2.1
		Medium	9.6-13.8	26	65.0	
		High	>13.8	9	22.5	
5	Economic Aspiration	Low	<6.6	2	5.0	Mean=7.8; SD=1.2
		Medium	6.6-9	33	82.5	
		High	>9	5	12.5	
Agricultural Engineering						
1	Education Aspiration	Low	<7	13	32.5	Mean=7.7; SD=0.7
		Medium	7-8.4	23	57.5	
		High	>8.4	4	10.0	
2	Job Aspiration	Low	<12	10	25.0	Mean=13.6; SD=1.6
		Medium	12-15.2	26	65.0	
		High	>15.2	4	10.0	
3	Self-employment Aspiration	Low	<15.6	5	12.5	Mean=17.2; SD=1.6
		Medium	15.6-18.8	28	70.0	
		High	>18.8	7	17.5	
4	Socio- economic Aspiration	Low	<9.6	5	12.5	Mean=11.7; SD=2.1
		Medium	9.6	26	65.0	
		High	>13.8	9	22.5	
5	Economic Aspiration	Low	<6.6	2	5.0	Mean=7.8; SD=1.2
		Medium	6.6-9	33	82.5	
		High	>9	5	12.5	

of the students fell into the medium category. In a similar vein, only a tiny percentage of students (10.00-12.50%) expressed strong job aspiration, while the majority of students (67.50%) had medium levels. Similar trends were seen in the students' aspirations for self-employment, with only 17.5% having high aspirations and 70% falling into the medium category. When it came to socioeconomic aspirations, the majority of students (85.0%) had medium aspirations, with 82.50% of students in the medium category and only 5% in the low category, economic desire had the largest concentration. These findings indicate that agriculture students generally possessed moderate levels of aspiration across educational, job, self-employment, socioeconomic and economic dimensions, with relatively fewer students exhibiting high aspiration levels, particularly in educational and work aspirations (Joaquim, 2022).

Veterinary science

The findings on the aspirations of veterinary science students showed that the majority of respondents had medium-level goals for each of the components. The majority of students (65%) had medium educational aspirations, while 20% had high expectations, showing that a reasonable percentage were pursuing higher education. Only 10% of respondents had high expectations, indicating a modest propensity towards career goals, whereas 80% of respondents had job aspirations that were heavily focused in the medium category. The majority of veterinary science students felt medium goals for self-employment (67.5%), despite 17.5% having high expectations. Socioeconomic aspirations showed similar patterns, with 20% falling into the high category and 67.5% into the middle level. While the medium category had the highest concentration of economic aims (82.5%), just 12.5% of students reported having high ambitions. Veterinary students generally showed a propensity toward moderate aspirations in all areas, with comparatively fewer students aiming at higher levels, however socioeconomic and educational dimensions showed a much larger inclination towards high expectations than others (Bysted & Hansen, 2015).

Fishery science

The analysis of ambitions among fisheries students revealed that most students had medium-level aspiration in all categories. A moderate but balanced inclination for additional education is shown by the fact that 75% of respondents had medium educational goals and 17.5% had high hopes. Similar trends were seen in students' job expectations, with only 12.5% displaying high goals and 65% falling into the medium category. Seventy percent of students had medium-range expectations for self-employment, whilst 17.5% had high aspirations. According to socioeconomic ambitions, 65% of students fell into the midrange category followed by 22.5% of students aimed for higher levels and low 12.5%. The medium group has the highest concentration of economic aspirations (82.5%), whereas just 12.5% had high goals. Overall, the results show that students studying fisheries have a tendency to have modest goals in a variety of fields, with comparatively few students aiming higher, especially in the economic and employment domains (Hari et al., 2013).

Agricultural engineering discipline

The analysis of agricultural engineering students' aspirations shows that the majority of respondents expressed medium levels in most domains. Only 10% reported having high aspirations, indicating very modest educational aims, whereas the majority of respondents (57.5%) had medium expectations, with a significant 32.5% falling into the low category. Additionally, the majority of job aspirations (65%) fell into the medium category, with only 10% falling into the high category and 25% into the low category. Seventy percent of students had medium goals for self-employment, while just 17.5% had high aspirations. The distribution of socioeconomic goals was similar, with 22.5% aiming for higher levels and 65% in the medium category. Just 12.5% of students showed high expectations, but 82.5% of students were in the medium category with the highest concentration of economic aspirations. Overall, the expectations of agricultural engineering students were primarily moderate throughout several domains, with comparatively fewer students aiming for higher levels, especially in the areas of education and employment.

Overall aspiration levels of farm science students across disciplines

The results showed that most students in all farm science courses had medium levels of overall aspirations, which reflected balanced and moderate future aspiration. There were fewer

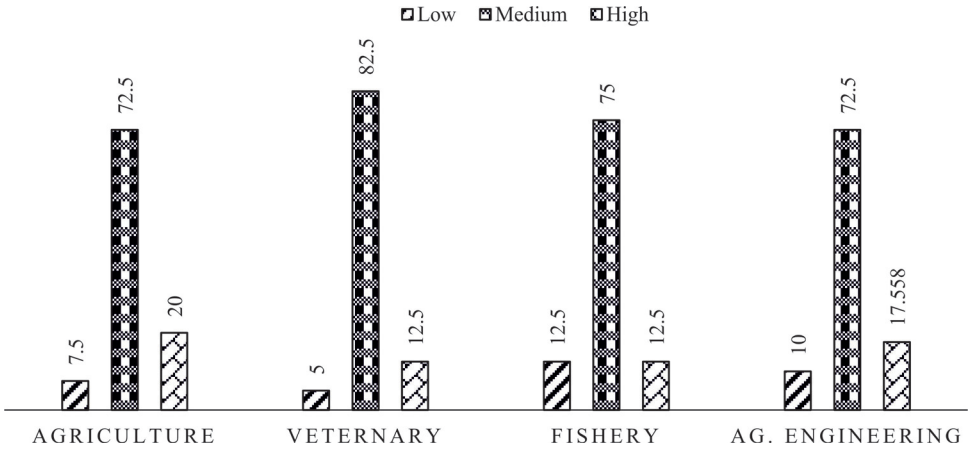

Figure 1. Overall aspiration of Farm science students

responders in the low and high aspiration groups, with the majority of students from agriculture, fishery and agricultural engineering falling into the medium aspiration category. The findings are consistent with those of Mann et al. (2020), who also found that farm science students had moderate aspiration levels.

However, veterinary science students exhibited a comparatively higher proportion in the high aspiration category than students of other science disciplines, indicating greater motivation and ambition towards their future goals and aspiration. This finding suggests that, although medium aspiration levels predominated overall, veterinary students possessed relatively higher aspirations regarding educational, occupational and self-employment opportunities. The present findings are in agreement with the studies conducted by Sharma et al. (2022); Chinchmalatpure and Tekale (2019).

Chi-square tests: Discipline-wise and gender-wise differences

Table 2 summarizes the chi-square test results for aspiration level differences across disciplines and gender.

H_{01} (no significant difference in aspiration levels across disciplines) was rejected for job aspirations ($\chi^2 = 8.74$, df = 3, p = .033) but retained for educational, self-employment, socio-economic, and economic aspirations. The significant discipline-wise difference in job aspirations indicates that students' career orientation toward employment is meaningfully shaped by the specific professional norms and labour market prospects of their disciplines most notably the structured job pathways (government veterinary officer, fisheries extension officer, agricultural engineer with NABARD or state agriculture departments) that vary markedly across these fields. The non-significant discipline effect on economic aspirations (p = .061) suggests that financial motivation is relatively homogeneous across disciplines, a finding that challenges simple narratives about 'more marketable' disciplines generating proportionally higher income aspirations.

H_{02} (no significant difference in aspiration levels between male and female students) was rejected for educational aspirations ($\chi^2 = 4.62$, df = 1, p = .032) and socio-economic aspirations ($\chi^2 = 6.15$, df = 2, p = .046), but retained for self-employment aspirations (p = .256). Female students displayed higher educational aspirations (65% versus 52% in the medium-to-high combined range), possibly reflecting sociocultural patterns in which higher education is perceived as a primary pathway to social mobility for women (Reddy & Rani, 2020; Meinam et al., 2023). Male students showed stronger socio-economic aspirations in some respects but female students were more likely to prioritize social recognition — a finding requiring more nuanced instruments in future research. The absence of a significant gender difference in self-employment aspirations is consistent with Mishra et al. (2021) and suggests that entrepreneurial motivation is not gender-differentiated among farm science undergraduates at this institution, contrary to general rural entrepreneurship literature.

Discipline-wise variation in aspirations of farm science students

The heat map of aspirations across discipline (Figure 2) depicts the various degrees of aspirations among students in four disciplines agriculture, veterinary, fishery and agri-engineering using six aspiration categories. The category of government career aspirations has the highest aspiration levels overall, with 70% of students expressing the greatest interest in fishery, closely followed by veterinary (68%), agriculture (65%) and agri-engineering (65%). This suggests that students across all subject areas strongly favour steady work in the public sector. Both socioeconomic recognition and high income (economic desire) are consistently high across all sectors, often between 60 and 65%, suggesting that students prioritize social standing and financial security. However, across all groups, agricultural science students had the lowest educational expectations, at 35%, which suggests a lack of enthusiasm in going to college. The moderate range of aspirations includes both self-employment and private or corporate employment, with private employment being marginally more desired than self-employment (Patel & Chauhan, 2023). Rather than being motivated by financial objectives, social recognition, and job stability, this general trend shows that students. The result aligns with the findings of Vinodkumar and Seema (2021).

Gender-wise distribution of aspirations among farm science students

The aspiration levels of male and female students are compared in six areas in the Heatmap of Aspirations (Figure 3) by Gender educational aspiration, job aspiration (government), private/ corporate jobs, self-employment, socio-economic (social recognition), and economic (high income). According to the heatmap, female students are more interested in pursuing higher education than male students, with females having a considerably higher level of educational aspiration (65%) than males (52%). There is a shared preference for working in the public sector, as seen by the virtually equal interest shown by both sexes in government positions (68% for male and 69% for female). It's interesting to note that male students are more likely than female students to prefer private or corporate employment (58%) and to be interested in working for own (33% vs. 28%). On the other hand, women are more likely

Table 2. Chi-square Tests of Aspiration Level Differences by Discipline and Gender

Aspiration Domain	Groups Compared	χ^2	df	N	p-value	Significance
Educational Aspirations	Gender (Male vs. Female)	4.62	1	160	.032	Significant*
Job Aspirations	Discipline (4 groups)	8.74	3	160	.033	Significant*
Self-employment Aspirations	Gender (Male vs. Female)	1.29	1	160	.256	Not Significant
Socio-economic Aspirations	Gender (Male vs. Female)	6.15	2	160	.046	Significant*
Economic Aspirations	Discipline (4 groups)	7.38	3	160	.061	Not Significant (trend)

** $p < .05$.*

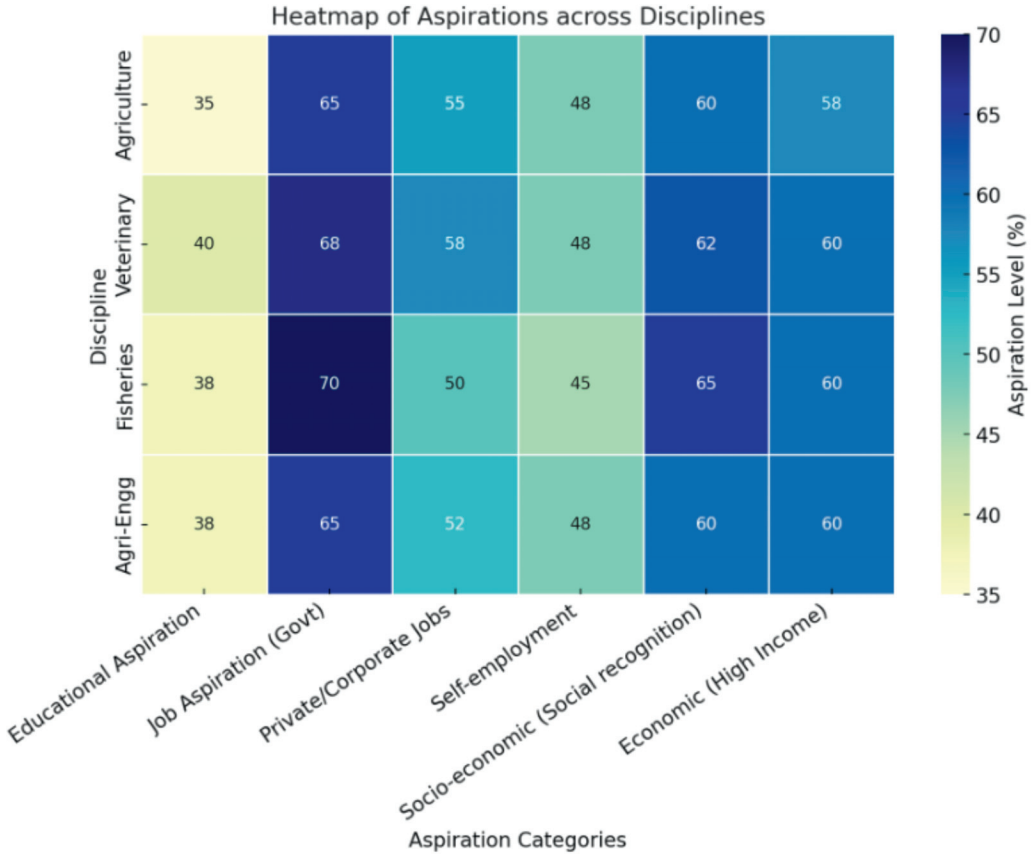

Figure 2. Heat map of Aspirations across Disciplines

Figure 3. Heat map of Aspirations by Gender

than men to have socioeconomic aspirations (67%) compared to 58%, indicating that women are more driven to achieve social status and recognition. Finally, men are more likely than women to have high income aspirations (62% vs. 55%). Overall, the research indicates that while both sexes value job security and recognition, women are more focused on academics and social interactions, while males are more interested in financial gain and entrepreneurial pathways (Reddy & Rani, 2020).

DISCUSSION

The predominance of medium aspiration levels across all five domains and all four disciplines at CUTM is consistent with Aspiration Theory's prediction that aspirations converge around perceived social and institutional feasibility (Genicot & Ray, 2020). Students appear to set aspirations that reflect an awareness of both their potential and the structural constraints they face including limited postgraduate seats, competitive government recruitment, and perceived risk in self-employment. This moderation in aspiration, while adaptive in the short term, may constrain the agricultural sector's need for highly motivated graduates willing to pursue advanced research, technology entrepreneurship, or agri-business leadership. The comparatively higher aspiration profile of veterinary science students particularly in educational and socio-economic dimensions likely reflects the structured professional identity of veterinary medicine (licensing, service obligation, high public regard) that functions as an institutional 'aspiration anchor.' By contrast, the elevated low-category proportion in educational aspirations among agricultural engineering students suggests a vocational disengagement from further academic study that may be partly functional (given strong industry demand at the B.Tech level) but risks limiting long-term research capacity in the sector.

Gender differences in educational and socio-economic aspirations are consistent with sociological literature on gendered career socialization in India. Female students' stronger educational aspirations may reflect both the perceived protective value of higher credentials in the face of gender-based employment discrimination and the influence of institutional environments that actively encourage female academic achievement. Male students' marginally stronger self-employment and economic aspirations (not statistically significant) accord with Raju and Devarani (2023), who link entrepreneurial aspirations in farm science to masculine norms around financial independence a pattern that is shifting as agri-business becomes increasingly gender-inclusive (Agarwal & Saini, 2021).

The non-significant association between gender and self-employment aspirations ($p = .256$) is a substantively important null result: it suggests that targeted agri-entrepreneurship programmes need not be designed along strictly gendered lines, but rather should focus on discipline-specific barriers and institutional support structures. The trend-level economic aspiration difference across disciplines ($p = .061$) warrants replication with larger, multi-institutional samples before conclusions are drawn.

CONCLUSION

The findings carry specific, actionable implications. First, agricultural universities should incorporate structured career counselling from the second year of undergraduate study, with discipline-tailored modules that systematically expose students to the full range of career pathways including agribusiness, research institutions, and international agencies contexts likely to shift aspirations upward toward the high category. Second, agri-entrepreneurship incubation cells with seed funding and mentorship should be established, with a focus on agricultural engineering and agriculture students who show relatively higher low-category proportions. Third, the significant gender gap in educational aspirations calls for targeted scholarship and postgraduate fellowship programmes for female farm science graduates. Fourth, policy planners should recognize that income aspirations are broadly homogeneous across disciplines (consistent medium levels), implying that financial incentives alone will not differentiate disciplinary career choices; non-monetary factors such as social recognition, job security, and contribution to community development are comparably or more important motivators.

DECLARATIONS

Ethics approval and informed consent: Throughout the study, the respondents were asked for their informed consent.

Conflict of interest: The research was carried out without any financial or commercial ties that might be seen as a potential conflict of interest, according to the authors. The authors affirm that they carefully examined, amended and edited the content as necessary when preparing this work. The final content of this publication is entirely the authors' responsibility.

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