

# Agrotourism

## Revitalization of Uttarakhand Hills

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*India Subsistence agriculture has been a major characteristic of Indian farming. To make farming lucrative, a new arena of agro-tourism has emerged. Agro-tourism can be defined as a business model that links agricultural production with tourism in order to attract visitors to farms, forests and other allied activities for the purpose of entertaining and educating visitors which can add to the income of the farm. It reduces the dependence of farmers on volatile commodity prices by expanding their area of operation. It can also help in preserving landscapes and providing youth with an entrepreneurial platform. Regardless of the enormous benefits, agro-tourism has not been given priority in the policy structure of Uttarakhand unlike the other States viz. Maharashtra. Some of the examples of agri-tourism in Uttarakhand are Goat village, Silent valley, Dyo: organic village, etc. The development of agrotourism farm requires minimal infrastructure viz. a farm located in a rich natural environment, a farmhouse and basic facilities of clean water and sanitation. Three things should be kept in mind viz. tourist should have something to see, to do and to buy from the farm to make the concept of farm-tourism effective with the ultimate aim of enhancing the economic status and livelihood stability.*

**Key words:** Agripreneurship, Agro-tourism, Hill-farming, Sustainable Livelihood

### Introduction

India is a country where most of the population is engaged in farming. But the contribution of agriculture to gross national product has been dropping down as majority of the population is involved in subsistence agriculture. Major reasons behind this are land depletion, less profit in farming, reduced interest of young generation towards farming and lack of awareness about agriculture related livelihood options among the population. As per the changing needs of time and to make agriculture as a business enterprise, it is important to visualize a new arena relating to agriculture. One such area has emerged as agro-tourism or agri-tourism. It is an innovative activity incorporating agriculture and tourism which makes farming a more lucrative and interesting venture. It also has the potential to cater the

profitability issues up to a large extent.

### Defining Agro-tourism

Agro-tourism simply means bringing tourists to farm or ranch. Agro-tourism of farmers can be defined as an agribusiness activity that combines working farm operations and commercial tourism by involving the visitors in multi-activities in the farm estate with complementary hospitality in order to generate extra income for the farm household. Other synonymous terms for agro-tourism include agritainment, agricultural tourism, agri-tourism, farm tourism, farm vacation tourism, wine tourism etc. The complimentary terms related to agro-tourism are ecotourism, nature tourism, rural tourism, alternative farming and wildlife enterprises, etc.

The major activities done in farm

tourism are broadly divided into sales directly from farmer to consumer, exposure visits of students to the farm for educational purposes, overnight farm stays, accommodation and hospitality, recreational activities such as hunting, fishing, trekking etc., and farm entertainment. Farmer guides the tourists to farm and agriculture related activities where they are told about various crops right from sowing to harvesting. Apart from understanding and helping in small agricultural operations, it also gives an opportunity to connect them with farm family, local language, traditional food, local handicraft, festivals and folk music. Some other services such as spa and therapy, yoga, bullock cart ride, mindfulness meditation sessions can also be added for leisure. Ultimately, to make the concept effective, three things should

be kept in mind *viz.* tourist should have something to see, to do and to buy from the farm.

A model of Agro-tourism Center (ATC) may have four stages:

Land development → Accommodation (farm stay) → Processing Unit Development → ATC

#### Opportunities in agro-tourism:

The rapid industrialization, dynamic and stressed lifestyle of the urban population needs a break to a destination closer to nature that can deliver an original and newer experience to them. Urban populations show interest in the rural tourist areas away from the cities. On the other hand, the farmers need to change their non-profitable subsistence farming to a farming venture which can be taken as a cash crop for them. Hence, agro-tourism can satisfy the needs and requirements of the urban tourists and the farmers both at the same time.

Though agro-tourism is comparatively a new concept, it is growing at the rate of 20% per annum in India. In some States like Maharashtra, Sikkim, Bihar, Rajasthan, agri-tourism is growing at a higher pace. The hilly State like Uttarakhand, where there is a large area under natural habitat, forest and pilgrimage, has immense opportunity for agro-tourism. Tourism contributes to the GSDP is high but less has been done from the policy front on the agro-tourism to preserve the farm landscapes and to support the farm families. The paper presents benefits of agro-tourism from the farmers' point of view, such as:

**Reducing dependence on volatile commodity prices:** The risk factor involved in the farm sector has always been a matter of concern for profitability in agriculture. The Farmers often do not get prices for their produce due to multiple factors. Agro-tourism can give a chance to expand their area of operation to reduce the risk of failure. It can also provide a direct consumer market for farmers to gain some extra income.

**Additional income to the farms:** While agro-tourism provides low cost travel experience to the urban tourists, it gives higher returns to the

rural communities. The additional revenue is generated by providing various services to the visitors and by selling their local products. Further, the urban tourists may play a part in

the advertisement of agro-tourism.

**Farm recreation:** The village community can be benefitted from agro-tourism. It helps in preserving natural landscapes, folk arts and assets by creating a market for them. The low and middle-class families can be benefitted when the urban currency flows in the village. The inter-communication among the tourists and villagers also improves and adds value to the agricultural lands.

**Motivating youth towards Agripreneurship:** Young generation is the future farmers. The awareness of agro-tourism would give them an insight into agriculture as a business enterprise. It has the potential to reduce the migration of rural youth as well as the reverse migration of urban youth towards rural areas. They may enhance their management skills and spirit of agripreneurship through agro-tourism.

**Educational value:** The knowledge of agriculture science can be imparted among the children more effectively through practical experience in the fields. The exposure visits of the students by 'seeing is believing' and 'learning by doing' can lead to better learning. The issues related to agriculture can be better visualized by this experience. Indigenous technical knowledge (ITK) can also be promoted through agro-tourism among the wider population.

**Sustainable rural livelihood:** From the above all points the farm business will have the opportunity to sustain for a longer term with higher productivity and good returns. The rural population will be the job creators rather than job seekers due to which the rural economy will be strengthened. Subsequently, the issues like land degradation, out-migration and fading traditions can be mitigated.

#### Scope of agrotourism in Uttarakhand

Agritourism has immense potential in Uttarakhand as it is the multitude of popular tourists' attractions ranging from beautiful rivers, mountains, glaciers, lakes, unique hill stations, ancient temples, pilgrimage, forests surrounded by enormous floristic and vegetation diversity and wildlife. A large portion of the population of the state is engaged in agriculture and horticulture. The State has beautiful orchards and gardens of many fruits, flowers, medicinal plants and aromatic plants. The agricultural land covers a total of 7.41 lakh ha area in Uttarakhand. Across the Country, the State leads in the production of pear, plum, peach and apricot while stands second in the production of walnuts and apples. Apart from this, it has a unique ecological diversity. The topography and terrain of the State is largely hilly with large areas under snow cover and steep slopes.

The State is also blessed with a rich and diverse cultural heritage. It has several communities belonging to different religions, and a number of festivals colour the culture of Uttarakhand with the spirit of exuberance. There is enough road connectivity in urban-rural areas to travel in rural Uttarakhand. In this pandemic situation for small farms' survival, agricultural tourism is a potential means. Agrotourism can generate direct marketing opportunities for local farmers to increase revenues and enhance the viability of their farm operations and ensure a more stable income.

#### Agrotourism in Uttarakhand

Few examples of Agrotourism in Uttarakhand are:

##### Goat Villages

Under the guidance of Col. Ajay Kothiyal and Shri Rupesh Rai a community named Green People was started by a team of volunteers coming from different sectors of Uttarakhand on 1 January 2015. A project named Goat Villages was devised to engage youths of the State and slow down migration in Uttarakhand. Goat villages let tourists experience farming, goat

rearing, animal husbandry along with all the abundant grace of natural resources around. The farmers were taught to optimize their crop production through various methods and this product was then packaged under the aptly named “BAKRI CHAAP” brand.

#### *The Silent Valley*

The Silent Valley is a colonial house designed in the nineteenth century amidst estate settled among the Himalayan foothills. It is an exclusive 100 acres of land domain in the Nainital region (Alchauna, Chanfi, near Bhimtal), Kumaon locale of Uttarakhand. Homestay has been set up and activities like bee keeping, cow milking, horse riding, ploughing the fields, climbing trees, wild swimming, trekking, village walk, jungle walk, bird watching, and evening bonfires can be experienced by tourists.

#### *Dyo – The Organic Village Resort*

Two sisters Kanika and Kushika Sharma came up with the concept of Dyo – The Organic Village Resort located in Mukhteshwar, Nainital district. They wanted their guests to have a first-hand experience of witnessing the beauty of Kumaon hills and also experience the hard work of farmers. They offer an opportunity for tourists to experience the sheer joy of organic and natural farming. The guests can try farming practices themselves and pick their veggies, fruits and give them to the chef for a meal. Along with the exuberant experience, they also provide luxury rooms with modern amenities.

#### *R.O.S.E. (Rural Opportunity for Social Elevation)*

A Self Help Group named R.O.S.E (Rural Opportunity for Social Elevation) in Sunargaon village of district Kanda Bageshwar is working on the agri-tourism model with the collaboration of Shri Jeevan Lal Verma owner of Jeevan Paying Guest Unit. In the village, tourists can avail homestays amidst the wheat fields and scenic mountain views and indulge in regular work like cooking, harvesting of crops, teaching to the school kids and many other activities.

#### **Starting an agro-tourism farm**

The development of agro-tourism farms requires minimal infrastructure. The essential specifications for starting this venture include a farm which is easy to locate with a rich natural resource environment, a farmhouse with a rural outlook offering good accommodation, access to clean drinking water and sanitation, kitchen staff for tourist to prepare local dishes, telecommunication facilities, etc. Apart from this, the important points to keep in mind for flourishing business is that the farm should focus on adapting traditional and indigenous farming practices, cultivate local and endangered crop species, rear local breeds of animals, local species of fishes and birds and the production of herbal/medicinal plants. The agro tourism farms should endorse conservation of the unique natural resources on the farm, preservation of sacred landscapes and culture upholding the unique myths, beliefs and traditions surrounding farming in the locality etc. The

person planning to start an agro farm should offer a pollution free environment for tourists, provide on farm folk dance activities, ensure the security of tourist, the sale of cultural artefacts, local restaurants services, have a well-structured farm tour programme, an easy to read farm map, and an easy to read guide for tourist to travel to the farm community and the farms as well. Furthermore, these farms in their quest to attract Agro tourists should engage well-trained staffs who are warm, welcoming with good communication and comic skills to serve as tourist guides.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Agritourism has immense potential in making farming lucrative in Uttarakhand due to factors like the potential organic farming, alluring nature, varied agro-climatic zones and hardworking population. The farmers can take up this business venture to develop their socio-economic status. One small agro farm can give employment to a number other villagers. Three essential things that should be kept in mind while starting the agro-farm includes: tourist should have something to see, to do and to buy from the farm in order to make the concept of farm-tourism effective with the ultimate aim of enhancing economic status and livelihood stability.

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