

Agripreneurs and their Opinion on Agri-Clinics and Agri-Business Centres Scheme

L.M. Ahire¹, B.S. Sontakki² and P. Punna Rao³

Introduction

Ensuring a competitive agricultural economy is critical for reducing poverty, enabling food, nutrition and livelihood security, and sustainable natural resource management. Even in this high-tech era, farming happens to be the primary livelihood support system for nearly 60% of our populace. Agriculture has already reached the limits of land and water, thus future increase in food production must exploit biological yields on existing land (World Bank, 1997). Hence, these challenges put tremendous pressure on agriculture to change from the way it used to be practiced earlier and even today. Agriculture of the next generation has to go beyond mere food production to be a propellant of economic development by being sustainable, environment friendly and market oriented.

One of the prime movers of agricultural development – the extension system – has played a vital role in national development. However, the growing disparities and ‘divide’ as a fall out of the unprecedented technological developments, are placing doubts over the role and relevance of extension systems in general and public extension in particular. As Christoplos (1996) puts it “agricultural extension is in crisis”. It is time to counter the questions of ‘Who are we serving?’ “How sustainable are the livelihoods of those whom we are serving?” and “How well equipped is the system to answer these questions?” These questions demand a shift from traditional natural science perspectives, which ‘target crops rather than people’. Hence, there has to be a shift in our thinking and acting processes to focus on human development as the prime goal of extension. Hence, the existing extension systems, both in the public and private sectors, need strengthening to think and act beyond ‘transfer of technology’ to perhaps don the role of a farmers’ ‘friend, philosopher and guide’.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India, in association with National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) launched a centrally sponsored

¹Technical Officer, ²Senior Scientist, National Academy of Agricultural Research Management, Rajendranagar, Hyderabad,

³Deputy Director of Extension, Acharya N. G. Ranga Agricultural University, Rajendranagar, Hyderabad.

scheme called "Agri-Clinics and Agri-Business Centers" in 2002 to augment extension interventions. The National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE) was identified as the nodal agency to monitor all the 57 recognized training organizations throughout the country to train the agricultural graduates through this scheme. MANAGE has completed its first cycle of training programmes successfully and it has already met the main objectives namely – supplementing general public extension services while providing specialized extension services to farmers. It has created self-employment opportunities for unemployed agricultural graduates and the main intention to motivate the agriculture professionals to become agripreneurs. Innovations and value addition through the Agri-clinics and Agri-Business Centres Scheme are expected to make the present extension system more dynamic.

Agri-clinics are envisaged to provide expert services and advice to farmers on cropping practices, technology dissemination, crop protection from pests and diseases, market trends and prices of various crops in the markets and also clinical services for animal health etc. which would enhance productivity of crops / animals. Agribusiness Centres are envisaged to provide input supply, farm equipments on hire and other services.

The main objective of this scheme is to create job producers. These professionals would provide fee-based services to the stakeholders for enhancement of agricultural production and income of the farmers. These Agriclincs and Agribusiness centers run by the agripreneurs are expected to advice farmers on selection of crops, location specific package of practices, post-harvest value added options, important agricultural information including weather forecasting, market prices, market trends, risk mitigation, crop insurance, credit and input access, as well as the other critical sanitary and phyto-sanitary considerations, which the stakeholders need to keep in mind. This scheme provides free training for a period of two months to agricultural graduates as well as to setup the Agri-clinic and Agri-business centers through identified training institutes across the country. The main focus of this training programme is on entrepreneurship and business management as well as skill improvement enhancement modules in the identified and chosen areas of agripreneurs. Necessary financial assistance is also provided to the agripreneurs to obtain loans for setting up of their enterprise units. It was felt that it would be worthwhile to explore the performance of those enterprises, which have been commissioned. This would provide vital information for sustaining and improving the effectiveness of the scheme. Keeping this in view, this study was conducted with the following objectives:

1. To know the personal profile of the agripreneurs trained through the "Agri-Clinics and Agri-Business Centres" scheme and their opinion on training components.

2. To study the problems encountered by the Agripreneurs trained under the scheme, before starting their enterprise and after starting their enterprise.

Methodology

In order to know the personal profile of the Agripreneurs, their perception on the Agri-Clinic and Agri-Business Centres scheme and problems faced by them at different stages viz., before starting the enterprise, while starting the enterprise and after starting the enterprise, a survey questionnaire was developed for data collection by taking suggestions from agriculture experts. The list of trained Agripreneurs of Maharashtra was obtained from MANAGE and questionnaires were mailed to 200 Agripreneurs selected randomly. The data received from 60 Agripreneurs was tabulated and analyzed using statistical tools like frequency and percentages.

Results and Discussion

Personal Profile of Agripreneurs

An attempt was made to describe the personal characteristics of the Agripreneurs viz., age, gender, educational qualifications and caste. Based on their personal profile agripreneurs were distributed in different categories and the results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Personal Profile of Agripreneurs

n=60		
Personal profile of the Agripreneurs	Frequency	Percentage
Age group		
Young (<35years)	38	63.00
Middle age (between 35-50 years)	19	32.00
Old age group (> 50 years)	3	5.00
Gender		
Female	5	08.00
Male	55	92.00
Educational Qualifications		
B. Sc. Agri.	35	58.00
M. Sc. Agri.	25	42.00
Caste		
Scheduled Caste	10	17.00
Scheduled Tribe	1	2.00
Other backward caste	24	40.00
General	25	41.00

It is found from Table 1 that majority (95 per cent) of the agripreneurs belong to young and middle age groups. Starting any enterprise and its success depends on the people who are involved work hard, are young and energetic. The age 35-50 years is a productive age. Five per cent of the agripreneurs belong to the old age group.

Gender wise distribution of agripreneurs shows that this programme is male dominated (92.00 per cent) and very few female (8.00 per cent) agripreneurs have undergone this training programme. The risk factor in business may be the main reason for less participation of females.

Regarding educational background, a majority (58 per cent) of the agripreneurs were graduates and 42 per cent of the agripreneurs were postgraduates. It could be that most of them want to be employed as soon as possible after their graduation. Caste wise distribution showed that majority (41.00 per cent) of the agripreneurs belong to the general category followed by OBC (40.00 per cent), 17 per cent of the agripreneurs were from Scheduled Caste category and only one agripreneur belonged to Scheduled Tribe category.

Agripreneurs' Opinion about Practical Orientation

The agripreneurs were asked to express their opinion on practical orientation in the programme on a 5 point continuum. Data from Table 2 reveals that around 47 per cent of the agripreneurs opined that the training programme is "practical oriented to a great extent" followed by 27 per cent of the agripreneurs who expressed that the programme was "completely practical oriented", 16 per cent of the agripreneurs said that the training programme was "practical oriented to some extent", three per cent of the agripreneurs expressed that it was "practical oriented to less extent" and seven per cent of the agripreneurs opined that the training programme was not at all practical oriented.

Table 2. Opinion of the Agripreneurs about Practical Orientation

			n=60
Sl. No.	Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
1	Completely practical oriented	16	27.00
2	Practical oriented to great extent	28	47.00
3	Practical oriented to some extent	10	16.00
4	Practical oriented to less extent	2	3.00
5	Not at all practical oriented	4	7.00

It can be inferred that 90 per cent of the agripreneurs opined that the training programme was "practical oriented to some extent" to "completely practical oriented".

Based on the opinion of the agripreneurs an inference can be drawn that the training programme was perceived as practical oriented by the agripreneurs.

Opinion on Qualitative Aspects of the Training

It can be seen from Table 3 that 47 per cent of the agripreneurs rated the training programme as "excellent", followed by 35 per cent and 12 per cent of the agripreneurs who expressed their opinion on the qualitative aspects of the programme as "very good" and "good" respectively. The remaining equal percentage (3 per cent each) of the agripreneurs opined that the training programme was "average" and "below average" respectively (Table 3).

Thus 94 per cent of the agripreneurs rated the qualitative aspects of the training programme from "good to excellent".

Table 3. Opinion of the Agripreneurs on Qualitative Aspects of the Training

n=60			
Sl. No.	Qualitative aspects	Frequency	Percentage
1	Excellent	28	47.00
2	Very good	21	35.00
3	Good	7	12.00
4	Average	2	3.00
5	Below average	2	3.00

Change in Attitude after completion of the Training

The responses were obtained from agripreneurs on change in their attitude after completion of the training in the form of "yes" or "No" and it was observed that 90 per cent of the agripreneurs opined that the training programme helped them in changing their attitude towards entrepreneurship development while 10 per cent of the agripreneurs opined that the training programme did not help in change of their attitude towards entrepreneurship development as may be seen in Table 4.

Table 4. Change in Attitude after completion of the Training

n=60		
Attitude change	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	54	90.00
No	6	10.00

This indicates that the training programme is helpful to the agripreneurs in bringing about a change in their attitude to look at agriculture as an enterprise and the training

programme motivated the agripreneurs towards entrepreneurship development. It is also necessary for the training organizations to meet the challenges in agri-enterprise, so that every respondent is motivated towards entrepreneurship development.

Duration of the Training Programme

Agripreneurs were asked to express their opinion on the existing duration of the training programme, whether it was "sufficient" or "not sufficient" and it can be seen from the results (Table 5) that majority (60 per cent) of the agripreneurs were satisfied with the present duration of the training programme while 40 per cent of the agripreneurs expressed that the programme duration is not sufficient.

Table 5. Duration of the Training Programme

n=60		
Duration of training programme	Frequency	Percentage
Sufficient (Existing duration 60 days)	36	60.00
Not sufficient	24	40.00
Change in duration		
Two weeks	6	10.00
More than two weeks	-	-
One month	4	9.00
Two months	11	18.00

The opinion of the agripreneurs were also obtained on change in the existing duration of the training programme and it was found that a majority (18.00 per cent) of the agripreneurs opined that the training duration could be increased by two months while 9 per cent opined that the duration of the training programme could be increased by one month. The remaining 10 per cent of the agripreneurs were in favour of extending the present duration by two weeks. The present 60 days is divided into 6 different phases with 168 theory classes as well as 72 field visits which may be very hectic for the agripreneurs and they may have faced difficulties in proper understanding of the entire process of entrepreneurship development. Hence it is time for training organizations to made suitable changes in the duration of the training programme in consultation with the nodal agency MANAGE, which will be helpful to the agripreneurs to understand all the aspects of business development.

Opinion on different aspects of the Training Programme

It can be seen from the multiple responses received from agripreneurs on different

aspects of the training programme (Table 6) that 70 per cent of the agripreneurs opined that the programme helped them to “increase their knowledge on management of agribusiness” followed by more than half (53 per cent) who opined that they “enhanced skills on management of agribusiness”; 43 per cent of the agripreneurs opined that they “established necessary contacts for management of agribusiness”, and 23 per cent of the agripreneurs expressed that the training “created positive attitude on management of agribusiness”.

Table 6. Opinion on different aspects of the Training Programme

n=60			
Sl.No.	Aspects	Frequency*	Percentage
1.	Increased knowledge on management of agribusiness	42	70.00
2.	Enhanced skills on management of agribusiness	32	53.00
3.	Created positive attitude about management of agribusiness	14	23.00
4.	Established necessary contacts for management of agribusiness	26	43.00

*Multiple responses

Therefore it can be inferred that the programme helped the agripreneurs to gain knowledge, improve their skills, establish necessary contacts and also helped them to change their attitude to agribusiness management.

Environment at Training Institutions

In order to know the effectiveness of the environment at training centers some kind of evaluation is required. The opinion of the participants was obtained regarding the environment in training institutions and may be seen in Table 7.

Table 7. Environment at Training Institutions

n=60			
Sl. No.	Environment	Frequency	Percentage
1	Inspiring and motivating for learning	38	64.00
2	Somewhat motivating	20	33.00
3	Not at all motivating	2	3.00

The results show that majority (64%) of the agripreneurs found the environment “inspiring and motivating for learning”, 33 per cent of the agripreneurs opined that the

environment at training institutions was “somewhat motivating”. The rest 3 per cent of the agripreneurs were not at all satisfied with the training environment, and expressed that it was not motivating to them. Though a large number of agripreneurs are happy with the training environment at training organizations, there is still scope for improvement of the environment at training organizations which will be helpful to the agripreneurs and also a motivating factor towards entrepreneurship development.

Relevance of Course Content and usefulness of Field Visits

It can be seen from Table 8 that the course content is immediately relevant as opined by half (50 per cent) of the agripreneurs, 38 per cent of the agripreneurs opined that the course content is “relevant in future” and 12 per cent of the agripreneurs are not happy with the course content which is a serious matter for the training institutions.

Table 8. Relevance of Course Content and usefulness of Field Visits

n=60		
Course content	Frequency	Percentage
Immediate relevance	30	50.00
Relevant in future	23	38.00
Not at all relevant	7	12.00
Field visits	Frequency	Percentage
Very useful	33	55.00
Useful	17	29.00
Average	5	8.00
Below average	3	5.00
Not at all useful	2	3.00

Training institutions need to focus on course content, and necessary changes should be made in the curricula to make it enterprise specific.

Regarding field visits it was also observed that around 85 per cent (84%) of the agripreneurs rated the field visits as useful and very useful during training programme, to have an idea about enterprise development. The remaining 16 per cent of the agripreneurs rated the field visits between not at all useful and average. The reason might be due to more number of visits (72) in a 60 days programme in which many of the visits may not be useful to them. Hence it is very essential for the training institutions to look into the matter and arrange the field visit keeping in view the area of interest of the agripreneurs.

Facilities at Training Centres

It is observed from Table 9 that 77 per cent, 74 per cent and 67 per cent agripreneurs were satisfied with the lodging, boarding, transport and communication facilities at the centre, while 25 per cent, 23 per cent and 13 per cent of the agripreneurs were somewhat satisfied with the facilities provided.

Table 9. Facilities at Training Centres

		n=60					
Sl. No	Facilities	Satisfactory		Some what satisfactory		Not at all satisfactory	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Lodging	46	77.00	8	13.00	6	10.00
2	Boarding	44	74.00	14	23.00	2	3.00
3	Transport / communication	40	67.00	15	25.00	5	8.00

F = Frequency % = Percentage

Ten per cent of the agripreneurs were not at all satisfied with the lodging facilities, eight per cent were not at all satisfied with the transport and communication and the remaining three per cent of the agripreneurs were not at all satisfied with the boarding facilities. There is a scope for training organizations to improve the loading, boarding and transport/communication facilities.

Table 10. Opinion of the Agripreneurs on lecture hall / practical facilities

		n=60	
Sl. No.	Lecture hall/practical facilities	Frequency	Percentage
1	Ideal for learning	42	70.00
2	Some what ideal	15	25.00
3	Not at all ideal	3	5.00

It can be seen in Table 10 that that 70 per cent of the agripreneurs opined that the lecture hall/practical facilities are "ideal for learning", 25 per cent of the agripreneurs opined that the lecture hall / practical facilities are "somewhat ideal" and the remaining 5 per cent of the agripreneurs expressed that the lecture hall/practical facilities are "not at all ideal". It can be inferred that the majority of the agripreneurs were satisfied with the lecture hall and practical facilities but there is also scope for training institutions to improve these facilities.

Problems during Training

Eleven per cent of the agripreneurs opined that pre-planning is lacking in arranging field visits in the training programme followed by 7 per cent of the agripreneurs who opined that transport was not provided to local participants during the training.

Only five percent of the agripreneurs expressed that technical and practical knowledge is lacking in the programme, while five per cent opined that proper communication is also lacking among the participants. The other problems relate to course content not being up to the mark by 3 per cent and lack of discipline in the training institutes (3 per cent). Training institutions need to concentrate on pre-planning of the training programme, transport should be arranged for local participants and discipline maintained to implement the programme more effectively.

Success in starting an Enterprise

The data from Table 11 reveals that more than half (52 per cent) of the Agripreneurs were successful in starting their enterprise after attending the training programme.

Table 11. Success in starting an Enterprise

N=60		
Agripreneurs	Frequency	Percentage
Successful	31	52.00
Failure	29	48.00

The remaining 48 per cent failed to start their enterprise due to various reasons. The centrally sponsored Agri-Clinics and Agri-Business Centres scheme has been successful to some extent in catering to the needs of the un-employed graduates by developing them as entrepreneurs. Strong initiative is needed to provide the necessary guidance to the agripreneurs so that they can start their enterprise.

Reasons for not starting the Enterprise

Efforts were made to identify the reasons for not starting the enterprise after the training by the agripreneurs. It is observed from Table 12 that a majority (68 per cent) of the agripreneurs (20 out of 29) failed to start their enterprise due to lack of bank loans / bank related problems, while 14 per cent cited the reason as 'lack of their own funds' to start the enterprise. An equal percentage (7 per cent each) of surveyed agripreneurs expressed that assistance was not provided by training institutions to start their enterprise and lack of business skills and they did not want to take risk. Very few (3 per cent)

agripreneurs opined the un-economical agricultural production as a reason for not starting their enterprise.

Table 12. Reasons for not starting the Enterprise

N=29

Sl. No.	Reasons for not starting the enterprise	Frequency	Percentage
1	Un-economical agricultural production	1	3.00
2	Lack of assistance from training institutions	2	7.00
4	Lack of business skills and don't want to take risk	2	7.00
5	Lack of own funds	4	14.00
6	Lack of bank loans / bank related problems	20	68.00
	Total	29	100.00

Hence, it can be inferred that majority of the agripreneurs had financial problems and those who are seeking loans are not able to get the financial assistance in time from bankers. Even bankers are not able to sanction the loans in time. Government of India needs to take cognizance of loan related issues in consultation with NABARD and necessary guidelines issued to all the concerned banks so that the agricultural graduates who have undergone the training through the "Agri-clinics and Agribusiness centers Scheme" can obtain the loans in time to start their enterprise.

Problems faced by Agripreneurs

The problems faced by agripreneurs before and after starting the enterprise may be seen in Table 13.

Table 13. Problems faced by the Agripreneurs before and after starting the Enterprise

n=60

Sl. No.	Problems faced	Frequency	Percentage
1	Lack of bank loans or lack of own financial sources	16	68.00
2	Lack of support from training institutions	4	7.00
3	Lack of support from parents	4	7.00
4	No idea about business	5	8.00
5	Un-economical agricultural production	1	2.00
6	Lack of security to obtain loan from bank	3	5.00
7	Negative attitude of financial institutions	2	3.00

It is found in Table 13 that a majority (68 per cent) of the agripreneurs expressed lack of bank loans or lack of own financial resources. The other problems included lack of support from training institutions (7.00 per cent), lack of support from parents (7.00 per cent), no idea about business (8.00 per cent), lack of security to obtain loans (5.00 per cent) and negative attitude of financial institutions (3.00 per cent). It may be necessary for Government of India to issue necessary guidelines to the bankers to provide the loans by making their policies more flexible.

Conclusion

As could be seen from the present study, nearly half of the surveyed agripreneurs opined that the training programme was practical oriented to a great extent. A majority opined that the training programme rated from "good" to "excellent" in terms of quality and helped them to establish the intended enterprise. The respondents agreed that this training helped them acquire skills and knowledge needed for management of agribusiness. It was also suggested to change the duration of the training programme by reducing the hectic schedule for proper understanding of business skills by the agripreneurs. Fifty per cent success rate reported by trained graduates to start their ventures is a promising sign. Yet, there is scope for improvement on this count. The reasons cited by respondents for not starting the enterprise, hence, merit immediate attention of the concerned to ensure long-term success of the scheme. This calls for additional hand holding support after training in terms of information and liaison support service by the nodal agency as well as identified trainers to ensure that the trained farm graduates eventually start their enterprises on a sound footing.

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