Agritourism For Rural Development: An Analysis of Farmers' Training Needs

Kawita Bhatt[1], V. L. V. Kameswaria[2], Amardeep[2]

ABSTRACT

Agritourism has emerged as a promising strategy for income supplementation among marginal and smallholder farmers, particularly in geographically constrained rural areas. This study investigates the socio-economic profile and training needs of farmers involved in agritourism ventures. A total of 200 respondents were surveyed and findings indicated that the majority of participants were middle-aged male farmers with limited formal education and marginal landholdings. Training needs identified across seven core domains using Weighted Mean Score (WMS) analysis were guest management, financial management, administration, marketing, procurement, linkages/networking, and allied farm and non-farm activities. Guest management and financial skills emerged as top priorities, with training in Medicare (WMS = 1.910), accounting (WMS = 1.925), and digital marketing (WMS = 1.810) being highly sought. Additional preferences were expressed for training in sericulture (WMS = 2.270), beekeeping (WMS = 2.265), vegetable (WMS = 2.220) and fruit cultivation (WMS = 2.115). Farmers also showed interest for hands-on, one-week training programs conducted at ATCs. Findings offer policy-relevant insights for designing location-specific training infrastructure and efficient training modules to enhance agritourism's contribution to rural development and farmer income stability.

Keywords: Training needs; Agritourism; weighted mean score; guest management; financial management; marketing

Introduction

Agritourism, an innovative convergence of agriculture and tourism, is increasingly being recognized as a sustainable strategy for rural income diversification and community development (Barbieri, 2013; Phillip et al., 2010). By leveraging the cultural, ecological, and agricultural assets of rural landscapes, agritourism offers farmers an opportunity to supplement income

1. Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Shamli, Directorate of Extension, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel University of Agriculture and Technology, Meerut, U.P.,247776, India
2. Department of Agricultural Communication, College of Agriculture, Govind Ballabh Pant University of Agriculture and Technology, Pantnagar, Uttarakhand

Corresponding author: kavitabhatt822@gmail.com
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while promoting local heritage and agro-based experiences (Tew & Barbieri, 2012; Lane, 1994). This approach is especially significant for marginal and smallholder farmers in regions with fragmented landholdings and limited off-farm employment options (Ohe, 2007; Wilson et al., 2001; Sonnino, 2004). However, managing agritourism centres (ATCs) requires a blend of agricultural and non-agricultural skills, including hospitality, financial literacy, marketing, and administrative proficiency—areas in which most traditional farmers lack formal training (Barbieri & Mshenga, 2008; Nickerson et al., 2001).

Despite increasing policy-level support for agritourism, exemplified by initiatives such as the Deen Dayal Upadhyay Homestay Scheme, a significant knowledge gap persists concerning the specific training requirements of farmers engaged in this sector. Existing literature, including contributions by Sherawat (2009) and Rani et al. (2018), underscores the necessity for capacity-building in domains such as allied service delivery, environmental stewardship, and financial literacy.

Empirical studies have identified key factors influencing tourist satisfaction and the sustainable development of agritourism. Bradley (1982) emphasized the entertainment value of incorporating indigenous cultural elements like rural games and folk music. Ingram (2002) noted a reciprocal motivation between urban tourists seeking respite from city life and rural hosts valuing cultural engagement. Maetzold (2002) and Yac (2003) demonstrated that scenic landscapes, nature-based interactions, and immersive cultural experiences are preferred by tourists, with public policy playing a vital role in long-term sustainability. Kiper and Arslan (2007) pointed to heritage architecture as a draw, although inadequate infrastructure remains a deterrent.

Subsequent research emphasizes the importance of transport accessibility (Srikatanyoo & Campiranon, 2008), food quality (Chi et al., 2010), safety, and trust (Ellen, 2011). Studies by Chadda and Bhakare (2012) and Malkanthi and Routray (2011) reveal that agritourism fosters economic benefits for farmers while fulfilling tourists' expectations for peaceful environments, cultural engagement, and educational value. However, despite these insights, there remains a lack of systematic, context-specific assessments and training frameworks tailored to the operational needs of agritourism stakeholders.

A comprehensive review of agritourism literature underscores the critical role of training and skill development for rural tourism managers and agritourism operators. Numerous studies highlight the challenges faced by these stakeholders due to limited formal education and experience, emphasizing the need for targeted educational interventions to enhance their capabilities and ensure the success of agritourism ventures. Page and Getz (1997) identified that

rural tourism managers often lack formal business education and experience, suggesting that formal management training is essential for driving business success. This observation underscores the importance of equipping managers with the necessary skills to navigate the complexities of rural tourism. Schulze et al. (2007) conducted an online survey in Lower Saxony, Germany, revealing that farmers engaged in agritourism perceive personal skills as crucial for success. They also noted that company size impacts success, highlighting the importance of economies of scale. Many farmers initially pursued agritourism for diversification but later transitioned it into their primary economic activity.

Haldar (2018) reported that only 21 per cent of respondents in India were interested in agritourism. Preferred activities included overnight stays at farms, fruit harvesting, bed and breakfast services, and enjoying the rural environment. These preferences indicate a demand for educational and immersive experiences in agritourism. Shehrawat (2009) found that 96.25% of respondents in Haryana considered environmental management as the most needed area of training for establishing farm tourism. Additionally, 93.25 per cent emphasized the importance of nursery production and value addition of fruits and vegetables. Jagtap et al. (2010) studied agritourism in Maharashtra and identified key training areas, including publicity, collaboration with travel agencies, visitor feedback mechanisms, and customer service. These elements are vital for building successful agritourism ventures. Kunjiapu and Yasin (2010) highlighted the scarcity and fragmentation of rural tourism competencies. They noted a significant gap in the skills required by rural tourism managers to excel in a competitive tourism arena, emphasizing the need for comprehensive training programs.

Tew and Barbieri (2012) examined the perceived benefits of agritourism in Missouri and found that farmers' age and educational background influenced agritourism establishment. Those with higher education levels and participation in training performed better, indicating the positive impact of education and training on agritourism success. Miller et al. (2012) surveyed agritourism operators in Arkansas and identified key educational needs, including information on legislation, government support, advertising, niche marketing, liability insurance, and media relations. These areas are crucial for operators to navigate the complexities of agritourism. Martins et al. (2014) analyzed the needs of local stakeholders in rural tourism development and concluded that there are significant gaps in knowledge and skills, particularly in management aspects like environmental, financial, human resource, and operational management. This lack of knowledge hinders the ability to fully capitalize on regional assets.

Duffy et al. (2012) conducted a study on coastal communities and found that most

farmers trained in agrological practices delivered quality products and services in agri-ecotourism. This highlights the importance of specialized training in enhancing service quality. Ohe (2017) surveyed next-generation successors working on Educational Dairy Farms in Japan and revealed that higher education levels increased the likelihood of introducing diversified activities and attracting more visitors to agritourism enterprises. This underscores the role of education in fostering innovation and growth in agritourism. Collectively, these studies emphasize the necessity for targeted training and education to equip agritourism operators and rural tourism managers with the skills and knowledge required to succeed in a competitive and evolving industry.

The current study addresses this gap by exploring the socio-personal and economic characteristics of agritourism practitioners and systematically identifying their training needs. Using a structured survey and Weighted Mean Score (WMS) analysis, data were collected from farmers managing ATCs to determine the areas where capacity-building interventions are most urgently required. The training domains assessed include guest management, financial and administrative capabilities, marketing strategies, procurement logistics, institutional networking, and technical know-how in allied and non-farm activities. The research also captures farmer preferences regarding the duration and location of training programs, thereby providing a holistic view for planning practical and effective training modules.

The findings aim to inform government departments, non-governmental organizations, and rural development agencies engaged in promoting agritourism. By aligning training initiatives with farmers' expressed needs and learning preferences, this study contributes to developing targeted interventions that not only enhance operational efficiency but also improve the viability of agritourism as a supplemental income source in rural India.

Objectives

i. To study socio-personal characteristics of farmers practicing agritourism.

ii. To assess training needs of farmers in agritourism as a strategy for income supplementation.

Methodology

Uttarakhand is the locale of the study. According to Uttarakhand Tourism Policy Report (2018), and Upadhyay (2021), eight districts in the state have rural/ agritourism potential. These include Uttarkashi, Tehri Garhwal, Rudraprayag, Chamoli, Pithoragarh, Almora, Bageshwar and Pauri Garhwal.

From the list, two districts viz. Pauri Garhwal from Garhwal division and

Almora from Kumaon division were selected for the study through simple random sampling. Table 1 shows the proportion of sample selected from the blocks (Table 1). After consultation with tourism department, two blocks from Almora district and three blocks from Pauri Garhwal district were selected. From each district100 farmers who were registered with the state tourism department under the home stay scheme were selected. Hence, there was sample of 200 farmers.

Table 1. Sample plan

S. No.	Division	Districts	No. of blocks		Name of block selected	Number of farmers selected	
			Total	Selected		Number	Percentage
1	kumaon	Almora	11	2	Tarikhet	30	15.0
					Hawalbagh	70	35.0
2	Garhwal	Pauri Garhwal	15	3	Khirshu	18	9.0
					Dwarikhal	40	20.0
					Yemkeshwar	42	21.0
Total	02	02	26	5	-	200	100

In this study training need refers to the gap between the desired and expected level of performance of the farmer operating the homestay and agritourism enterprise. Training needs of the respondents were measured on three-point continuum with corresponding scores of 3, 2 and 1 representing very much required, required and not at all required respectively.

Results and Discussion

Characteristics of farmers

This study aimed to assess the socio-personal and economic characteristics of farmers involved in agritourism, focusing on demographic features, education, occupation, landholding size, and diversification practices. Variables examined included age, gender, family structure, education, occupation, livestock ownership, agritourism center attributes, and related activities.

Findings revealed that 54 percent of farmers were middle-aged (39–49 years), 30 percent young, and 16 percent older adults, aligning with previous research (Zawadka et al., 2022). Male dominance was evident, with 70.5 percent male and 29.5 percent female respondents. Joint families were most common (52%),

followed by nuclear (45.5%) and extended families (2.5%). Family sizes were generally small (49.5%) or medium (46%). Educational attainment was low, with 47.5 percent of farmers being illiterate and only 12.5 percent having graduate or postgraduate qualifications (Table 2). As evident in Figure 1, farming was the primary occupation for 74.5 percent of respondents, while others were engaged in private jobs (17%,) wage labour (5%), and government employment (3%). All participants were marginal farmers, owning less than one hectare of land, and over 75 percent possessed under five nali (≈0.12 hectares). Despite land constraints, agritourism was practiced effectively, demonstrating its viability for smallholders

Table 2. Distribution of respondents on the basis their basic characteristics (n=200)

S. No.	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age			
	Young (below 39 years)	60	30.0
	Middle age (39 – 49 years)	108	54.0
	Old (above 49 years)	32	16.0
Sex			
	Female	59	29.5
	Male	141	70.5
Family type			
	Nuclear family	91	45.5
	Joint family	104	52.0
	Extended family	5	2.5
Family size (number of members)			
	Small (1-5)	99	49.5
	Medium (6- 10)	92	46.0
	Large (11 -15)	9	4.5
Education qualification			
	Illiterate	95	47.5
	Primary school	33	16.5
	Middle school	26	13.0
	High school	21	10.5
	Graduate	8	4.0
	Post-graduate or above	17	8.5

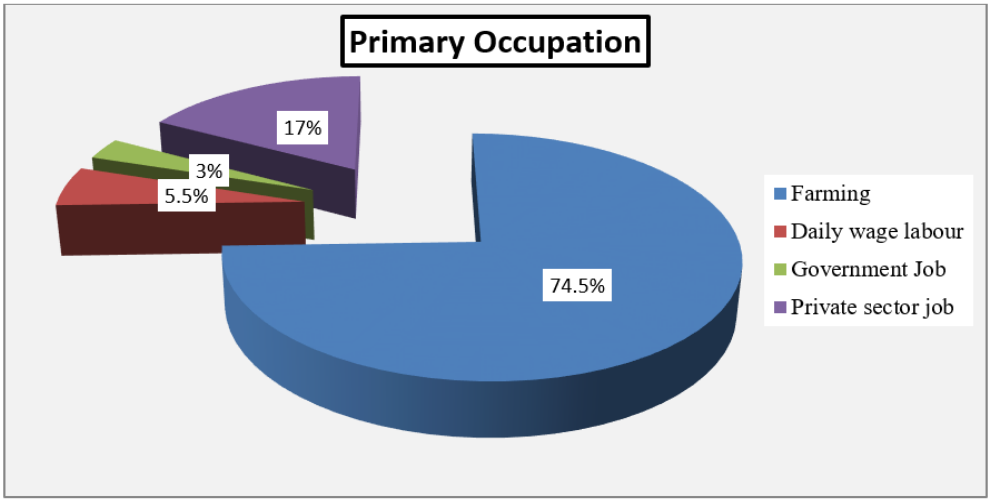


Figure .1 Distribution of the respondents on the basis of occupation

Training needs of the farmers

Agritourism, is an amalgamation of agriculture and tourism, serves as a viable strategy for rural income diversification and heritage promotion. However, for farmers to manage Agri-Tourism centres (ATCs) effectively, they require training in a range of non-agricultural competencies. This study identified the core training needs of farmers operating homestays along with agriculture, categorized into seven operational areas: guest management, financial management, administration, marketing, procurement, linkages and networking, and allied farm and non-farm activities. These needs were assessed using Weighted Mean Score (WMS) and radar analysis to help design targeted capacity-building initiatives.

As depicted in Figure 2, One of the most emphasized training areas was guest management, which is particularly important due to the remote locations of many ATCs. Radar diagram clearly show that Medicare (WMS = 1.910), transportation logistics (WMS = 1.905) and housekeeping (WMS = 1.900) are in the outermost ring and hence prioritised most by the farmers to handle medical emergencies, given the limited access to health facilities and transportation being one of the challenges of hilly terrain. Farmers also expressed need for the trainings related to organizing recreational activities (WMS = 1.855) for improving guest satisfaction. These needs align with Sherawat (2009), who reported that guest satisfaction and hospitality were critical to farm tourism success in Haryana. Similarly, Tew and Barbieri (2012) reported that positive host–guest interaction significantly enhances tourist loyalty and repeat visitation in farm tourism enterprises.

In the domain of financial management, the radar chart indicates that accounting (WMS = 1.925) is the most critical training need. Agritourism enterprises involve diversified income streams (accommodation, food services, recreational activities, sale of farm produce), which require proper bookkeeping and financial documentation. Many farmers traditionally operate informal farm accounts and may lack exposure to structured accounting systems. Hence, the strong need for accounting training reflects the transition from subsistence or production-oriented farming to service-based enterprise management. Training needs lying in the third outer ring include financial forecasting (WMS = 1.855), budgeting (WMS = 1.845), and understanding taxation (WMS = 1.805) were also in demand. This is particularly relevant because all participating ATCs were registered under the Deen Dayal Upadhyay Homestay Scheme, which provides tax exemptions but requires proper record-keeping. These results are consistent with Rani et al. (2018), who found that financial training was a major need among farmers engaged in government-supported agriculture ventures.

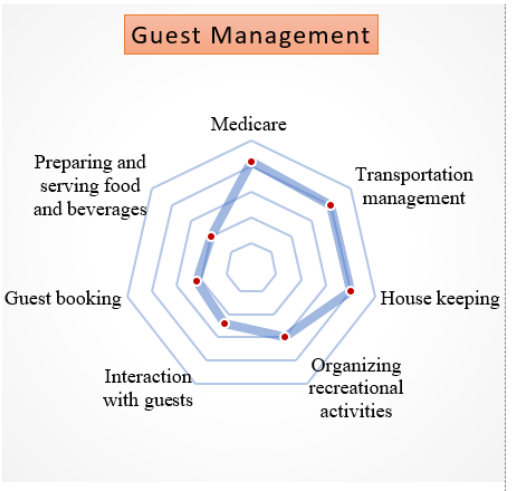
In the administration domain radar chart indicate that need for training in the aspects of assessment and planning (WMS = 1.865), inventory maintenance (WMS = 1.840), record keeping (WMS = 1.830), and staff management (WMS = 1.800) were identified. These skills are essential to streamline operations and prepare farmers for increasing competition as the rural tourism sector grows. As rural tourism markets expand, farmers increasingly face competition requiring organized operational systems. Similar patterns were identified by Das and Rainey (2010), who noted that administrative inefficiencies often limit the scalability of agritourism ventures in developing regions. The findings suggest a shift from subsistence-oriented hosting toward structured rural enterprises, supporting Ohe's (2007) concept of multifunctional agriculture where farms integrate production, recreation, and management functions simultaneously.

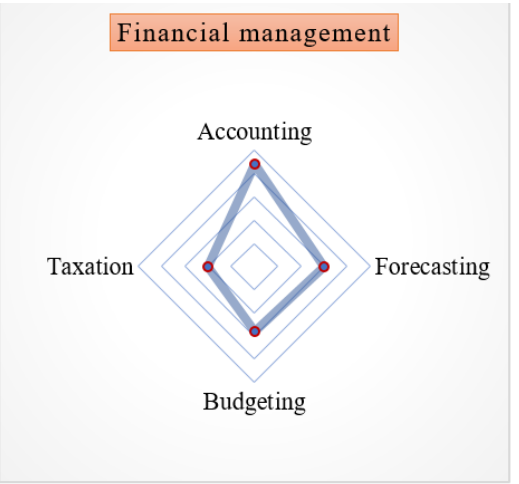
Marketing of agritourism centres was also highlighted as a crucial area, with publicity (WMS = 1.905) in the outermost ring. Farmers reported limited bookings, which they attributed to a lack of awareness about their services. To address this, they wanted to improve their skills in website development (WMS = 1.815) and digital marketing (WMS = 1.810). This demand for online presence strongly corresponds with Zawadka et al. (2022), who observed similar training needs among Polish agritourism operators during the COVID-19 pandemic. The growing importance of online engagement also supports Lane's (1994) assertion that rural tourism competitiveness increasingly depends on effective destination communication and branding. In terms of procurement, farmers faced difficulties in accessing daily essentials due to the isolated nature of their centres. As such, training in the procurement of guest necessities such as toiletries (WMS = 1.865), food items (WMS = 1.815), and technological assets

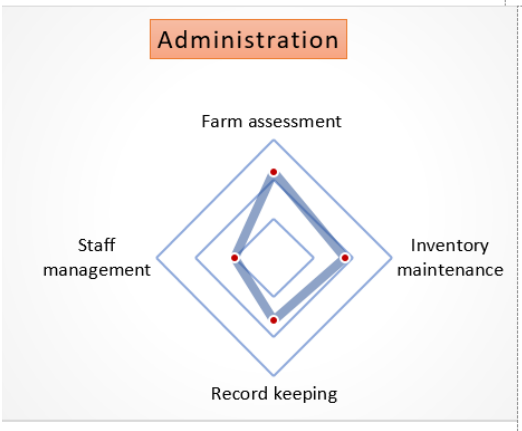
(WMS = 1.780) was identified as essential. These skills would help farmers better anticipate guest needs and maintain service standards, even with limited local market access. Under the category of linkages and networking, farmers expressed a pressing need for training in navigating government procedures. This included obtaining licenses (WMS = 1.815), connecting with institutions to avail of subsidies (WMS = 1.760), and acquiring necessary permits (WMS = 1.740). Many farmers had not applied for government schemes due to the complexity of documentation and lengthy verification processes. Building capacity in this area could enhance their access to funding and institutional support.

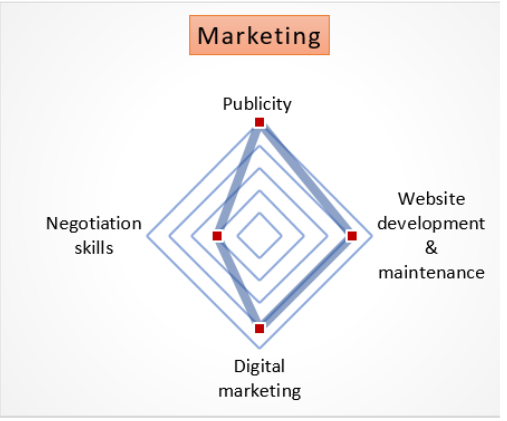
A broad range of allied farm and non-farm activities were also identified as areas requiring training. The most significant was input production (WMS = 2.430), including seeds, fertilizers, and compost. This was especially important for those offering farmer training sessions as part of their agritourism services. Other important areas included dairy farming (WMS = 2.310), organic crop production (WMS = 2.305), cultivation of medicinal and aromatic plants (WMS = 2.295), and value addition of farm products (WMS = 2.230). These training needs were particularly relevant in hilly areas, where conventional agriculture faces geographical constraints. By focusing on high-value, low-volume crops, farmers could tap into niche tourist markets. These reflect findings from Rani et al. (2018), who reported high interest in horticulture, poultry, and composting practices, indicating a pan-Indian pattern of farm diversification among agritourism practitioners.

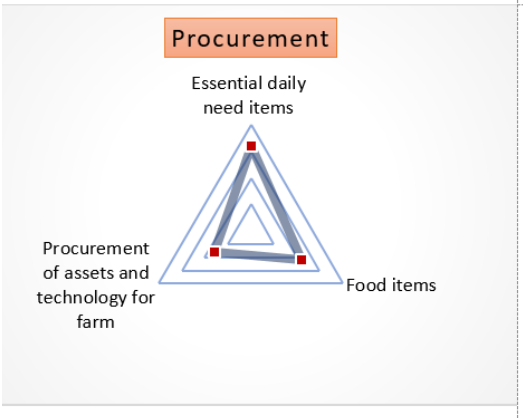
Although not prioritized as highly, creative farm-based activities such as crafts and cultural shows also emerged as a training domain (WMS = 2.225). However, farmers generally viewed agritourism as an immersive, organic experience where guests participate in daily routines rather than structured entertainment. Despite the lower emphasis, such activities may still appeal to urban tourists seeking hands-on rural experiences and could be considered as optional add-ons. Farmers also indicated additional training needs in specialized, high-value practices. These included exotic crop cultivation (2.0%), mushroom production (1.0%), and polyhouse/greenhouse management (1.0%). In hilly terrains, where conventional open-field farming is challenging, such innovations offer promising returns. These findings are in line with previous research, including Sherawat (2009) and Rani et al. (2018), both of whom emphasized environmental management, value addition, and allied farming activities as key training areas. For policymakers and training providers, the insights gained can inform the development of targeted and region-specific capacity-building programs. Such interventions, especially when tailored to marginal and small farmers in remote locations, have the potential to enhance agritourism practices and contribute significantly to rural economic development.

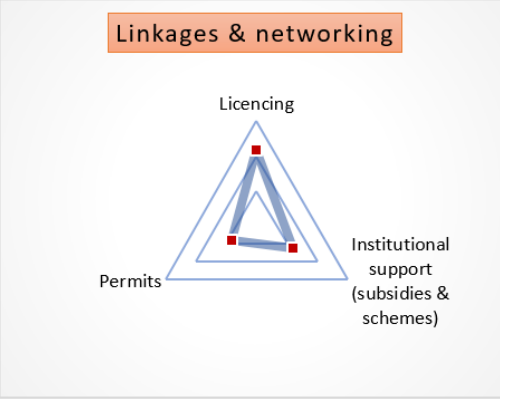

Guest Management
Medicare
Transportation management
House keeping
Organizing recreational activities
Interaction with guests
Guest booking
Preparing and serving food and beverages


Financial management
Accounting
Forecasting
Budgeting
Taxation


Administration
Farm assessment
Inventory maintenance
Record keeping
Staff management


Marketing
Publicity
Website development & maintenance
Digital marketing
Negotiation skills


Procurement
Essential daily need items
Food items
Procurement of assets and technology for farm


Linkages & networking
Licencing
Institutional support (subsidies & schemes)
Permits

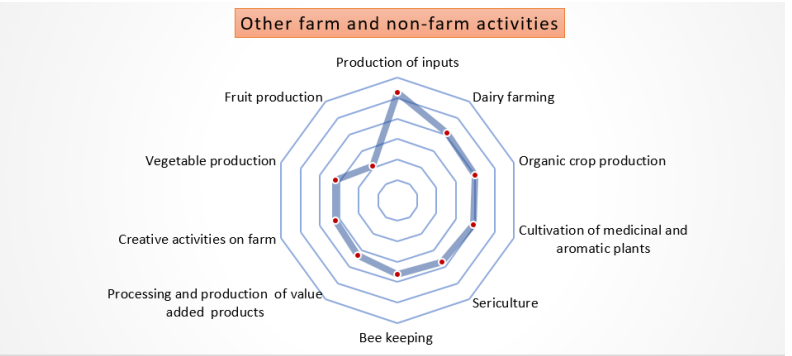


Figure 2: Radar analysis of training needs of the farmers in different domains of agritourism

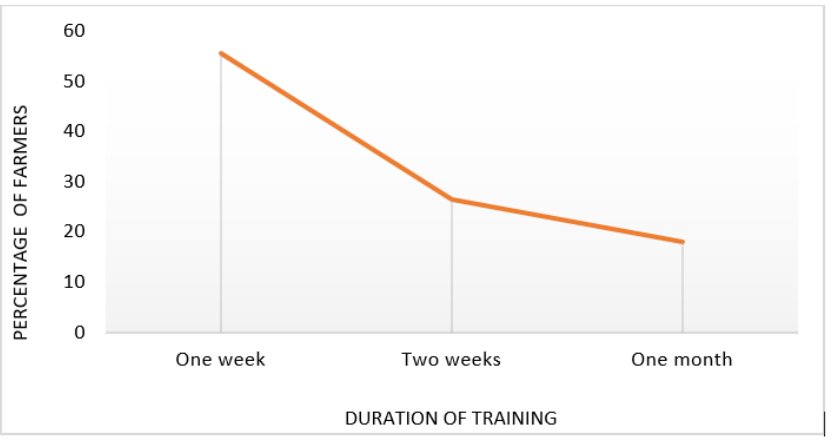


Figure 3. Preferences of respondents regarding duration of training

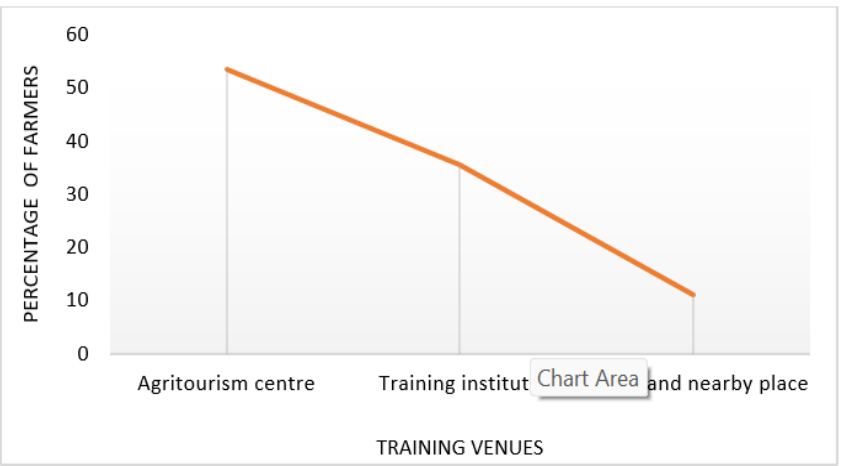


Figure 4. Preferences of respondents regarding location of training

The findings further indicated (Fig. 3) that a majority of farmers (55.5%) preferred a one-week training program, followed by 26.5 per cent who favored a two-week duration. Only 18 per cent of the respondents opted for a one-month training program, as agriculture requires continuous farmer involvement and prolonged absence may adversely affect farmland and crops. Regarding training venue (Fig. 4), 53.5 percent preferred training at an agritourism centre, citing hands-on learning and observation as more effective. Additionally, 35.5 percent chose training institutions, and only 9 percent preferred village-based programs. These preferences highlight the importance of practical, short-duration training conducted in real agritourism settings to enhance farmers' skills and understanding, supporting more effective capacity-building strategies tailored to their learning styles and logistical constraints.

Conclusion and Policy Implication

This research concludes that agritourism ventures in India are being taken as a farm diversification strategy by middle-aged (54%) male farmers (70.5%) who face significant educational barriers, with 47.5 per cent reporting illiteracy. Analytical assessment using Weighted Mean Scores highlights critical training gaps in non-agricultural competencies, particularly in financial accounting (WMS = 1.925), guest-related medical care (WMS = 1.910), and digital marketing (WMS = 1.810). While these ventures successfully leverage ancestral land to create "agro-adventure" and immersive cultural experiences, their long-term viability is challenged by the lack of structured operational systems and persistent logistical hurdles such as water scarcity and poor transport accessibility.

Theoretically, this study expands the "Multifunctional Agriculture" framework by providing empirical evidence of how marginal farmers can transition into service-oriented entrepreneurs, bridging the gap between subsistence production and experiential tourism. These results contrast with traditional "clichéd sightseeing" models by demonstrating that sustainability in Himalayan regions is rooted in "farm-to-table" interactions and the revitalization of traditional food systems (Chatterjee & Prasad, 2019). By applying a narrative synthesis to these success stories, the research contributes to the emerging discourse on agritourism as the "epitome of sustainability culture" in India. However, it critically adds that environmental assets alone are insufficient; success is fundamentally contingent upon "competence development" and the ability of local hosts to navigate complex management tasks like financial forecasting and website maintenance (Chatterjee & Prasad, 2019; Kunjiapu & Yasin, 2010

Despite the potential for rural revitalization, significant gaps remain, particularly regarding gender equity and the digital divide. The high male participation rate (70.5%) and widespread illiteracy (47.5%) suggest that

the socio-economic benefits of agritourism may not be accessible to the most vulnerable segments of the rural population. Future research should adopt "Circular Economy" dimensions to evaluate the resource efficiency and waste management practices of these mountain tourism clusters (Joshi et al., 2020). To address these gaps, policy interventions must move beyond generic support and establish decentralized "Agritourism Training Centers." These centers should provide specialized, one-week, on-site training modules that focus on digital literacy, financial documentation, and hospitality management, ensuring that agritourism serves as a resilient buffer against the unpredictable losses inherent in mountain agriculture.

Farmers are increasingly expected to go beyond traditional agricultural roles and adopt a strategic mindset to mitigate risks in the face of unpredictable farm-related losses. But there is a notable skills gap in understanding market dynamics and leveraging them to their advantage. Many farmers demonstrate strong entrepreneurial intent but they frequently lack essential non-agricultural competencies, mainly in marketing and management, which are necessary for the effective operation of their Agritourism Centres (ATCs). This study has highlighted the dire need of training for farmers involved in providing tourists stay at their farms as a means of income diversification.

The study recommends priority training areas including skill and knowledge regarding basic medical care for the guests, transportation management, financial literacy (budgeting and bookkeeping), market forecasting, farm assessment, inventory maintenance, publicity, website development & maintenance, licensing, institutional support (subsidies & schemes) and digital marketing. Farmers also expressed interest in diversifying into allied activities such as organic farming, dairy, beekeeping, and farm input production. They preferred practical, short-term, on-site training programs at ATCs, highlighting the value of experiential learning. These findings can guide government agencies in designing targeted training initiatives to help farmers efficiently operate ATCs, increase household income, and buffer against agricultural uncertainties.

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