

Agri-Tourism

"Innovative Supplementary Income Generating Activity For Agripreneurs" & Challenges and Strategies of the Agri-Tourism Industry



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Agriculture is the backbone of Indian Economy. Around 85 percent of the population is directly or indirectly dependent on Agriculture and almost 26 percent of India's GDP comes from Agriculture. 90 million farmers are dwelling in 6.25 lac villages producing more than 200 MT of food grains feeding the country. More than a profession or a business, agriculture is India's culture. Hence, adding additional income generating activities to existing agriculture would certainly increase contribution of agriculture in the national GDP. Serious efforts need to be made in this direction and Agri-Tourism is one such activity.

Tourism is terms as an instrument for employment generation, poverty alleviation and sustainable human development. During 1999-2000, direct employment created by Tourism was 15.5 million. Besides, Tourism also promotes national integration, international understanding and supports local handicrafts and cultural activities. During 2000, the number of foreign tourists that visited India was 26.41 lac. India's share in world tour market is just 0.38 percent. With

this meager share, foreign exchange earned is Rs. 14,475 crores. Turnover in domestic Tourism is much more than this. To promote domestic Tourism, thrust areas identified by Government of India are development of infrastructure, product development and diversification, development of eco-adventure sports, cultural presentation, providing inexpensive accommodation, streamlining facilitation procedures at airports, human resource development, creating awareness and public participation and facilitation of private sector participation. In this process, important stakeholders are State and Central department of Tourism, Indian Institute of Tourism and Travel Management, Tourism Development Corporations, foreign embassies, Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI), Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), Tourists, Transport Operators Association, Indian convention promotion bureau and Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA).

Promotion of Agri-Tourism involves some more important stakeholders namely Ministry of Agriculture and line departments at state and central governments and farmers. Promotion of Agri-Tourism needs conceptual convergence with Rural Tourism, Eco-Tourism, Health Tourism, Adventure Tourism and culinary adventures.

Some of the important advantages of Agri-Tourism are:

- It brings major primary sector agriculture closer to major service sector Tourism. This convergence is expected to create win-win situation for both the sectors.

- Tourism sector has potential to enlarge.

- Agriculture sector has the capacity to absorb expansion in Tourism Sector.

Scope of Agri-Tourism

Agri-Tourism has great scope in the present context for the following reasons:

An Inexpensive Gateway - The cost of food, accommodation, recreation and travel is least in Agri-Tourism. This widens the tourist base. Present concept travel and Tourism is limited to urban and rich class which constitutes only a small portion of the population. However, the concept of Agri-Tourism takes travel and Tourism to the larger population, widening the scope of Tourism due to its cost effectiveness.

Curiosity about the farming industry and life style - The urban population having roots in villages always have had the curiosity to learn about sources of food, plants, animals, raw materials like wood, handicrafts, languages, culture, tradition, dresses and rural lifestyle. Agri-Tourism which revolves around farmers, villages and agriculture has the capacity to satisfy the curiosity of this segment of population.

Strong demand for wholesome family oriented recreational activities - Villages provide recreational opportunities to all age groups i.e. children young, middle and old age, male, female, in total to the whole family at a cheaper cost. Rural games, festivals, food, dress and the nature provides variety of entertainment to the entire family.

Health consciousness of urban population and finding solace with nature friendly means - Modern lifestyle has made life

stressful and average life span has come down. Hence, people are in constant search of pro-nature means to make life more peaceful. Ayurveda which is a pro-nature medical approach has roots in villages. Indigenous medical knowledge of villagers is respected. Organic foods are in greater demand in urban areas and foreign countries. In total, health conscious urban population is looking towards pro-nature villages for solutions.

Desire for peace and tranquility - Modern life is a product of diversified thinking and diversified activities. Every individual attempts to work more, in different directions to earn more money to enjoy modern comforts. Hence, peace is always out of his system. Tourism is a means for searching peaceful location. Peace and tranquility are inbuilt in Agri-Tourism as it is away from urban areas and close to nature.

Interest in natural environment - Busy urban population is leaning towards nature. Because, natural environment is always away from busy life. Birds, animals, crops, mountains, water bodies, villages provide totally different atmosphere to urban population in which they can forget their busy urban life.

Disillusionment with over crowded resorts and cities - In resorts and cities, over crowded peace seekers disturb each other peace. Hence, peace is beyond cities and resorts. Even though efforts are made to create village atmosphere in the sub urban areas through resorts, farm houses, it looks like a distant replica of the original.

Nostalgia for their roots on the farm - Cities are growing at the cost of villages. Villagers are migrating to cities in search of jobs and to seek the comforts of modern life. Hence, yesterday's villagers are today's urbanites. Deep in the heart of urbanites lies the love and respect for their ancestors and villages. Hence, visit to villages satisfies their desire. This is also

expressed through the hatred of urbanites to flat culture and love for farmhouses located in the outskirts of cities. Any opportunity to visit villages and spend time with family is dream of any urbanite. But, minimum decent facilities are always problem. Agri-Tourism attempts to overcome this problem.

Rural recreation - Villages provide variety of recreation to urbanites through festivals and handicrafts. Villagers (farmers) lifestyle, dress, languages, culture/traditions which always add value to the entertainment. Agricultural environment around farmers and the entire production process could create curiosity among urban taught. Places of agricultural importance like highest crop yielding farm, highest animal yielding farm, processing units, farms where innovations tried add attraction to tourists. Agricultural products like farm gate fresh market, processed foods, organic food could lure the urban tourists.

As result of this agri-atmosphere in the villages, there is scope to develop Agri-Tourism products like agri-shopping, culinary Tourism, pick and own your tree/plot, bed and breakfast, pick and pay, bullock cart riding, camel riding, boating, fishing, herbal walk, rural games and health (ayurvedic) Tourism.

Educational value of Agri-Tourism - Agri - Tourism could create awareness about rural life and knowledge about agriculture science among urban school children. It provides a best alternative for school picnics which are urban college students in agriculture. It is a means for providing training to future farmers.

It would be effectively used as educational and training tool to train agriculture and line department officers. This provides unique opportunity for education through recreation where learning is fun effective and easy. Seeing is believing, doing is learning. This experience based concept is the USP of Agri-Tourism.

Basic Principles of Agri-Tourism

Agri-Tourism should ensure the following three basic principles:

Have something for visitors to see - Animals, birds, farms and nature are few things which Agri-Tourism could offer to the tourist. Apart from these, culture, dress, festivals and rural games could create enough interest among visitors in Agri-Tourism.

Have something for visitors to do - Participating in agricultural operations, swimming, bullock cart riding, camel riding, buffalo riding, cooking and participating in the rural games are few activities to quote in which tourists can take part and enjoy.

Have something for visitors to buy - Rural crafts, dress materials, farm gate fresh agriculture products, processed foods are the few items which tourist can buy as memento for remembrance.

Three Important Factors Contributing to the Success of Agri-Tourism

Farmer - In majority of the cases, farmers are less educated, less exposed and innocent. For a farmer, any outsider is a guest and is treated wholeheartedly without any commercial motive. Treating guests is pleasure for the villagers than pain. The farmer entertains the guest while entertaining himself in the process. He is not like an exploitive natured businessman which itself facilitate a clean Tourism atmosphere.

Village - Villages, located far from the city lack urban facilities, but are blessed with natural resources. Investments are made by nature in the form of water bodies, fields, forest, mountains, deserts and islands. The community structure is more homogenous and treating guests is part of the culture rather than a professional activity leading to natural environment required for such form of Tourism.

Agriculture - Rich resources in agriculture namely land, water and plants are unique from place

to place bringing diversity and creating curiosity. Each field is unique which adds to the attraction of tourists. The way of cultivation and the products are great attraction to the urban population. Indigenous knowledge of rural people is a wealth, which adds to the novelty and the curiosity of urban population. Combination of farmer, village and agriculture creates a wonderful situation which provides unlimited satisfaction to the tourist especially from urban areas.

Agri-Tourism Opportunities in India

Indian Tourism industry is growing @ 10.1% - The World Tourism organization has estimated that the Tourism industry is growing at the rate of 4% a year and that by the year 2010 there will be more than one billion tourists visiting various parts of the world. But the Indian Tourism industry is growing at the rate of 10% which is 2.5 times more than the growth rate at global level. By introducing Agri-Tourism concept, not only present growth rate is sustained but also this value addition contributes to further growth.

India has entered amongst the top 10 tourist destinations list (Conde Nast Traveller) - A leading European Travel Magazine - India is already established as one of the top tourist destinations in the World. Value addition by introducing novel products like Agri-Tourism would only strengthen the competitiveness of Indian Tourism industry in global market.

India has diverse culture and geography which provides ample and unlimited scope for the growth of this business. India has diverse Agro-/climatic conditions, diverse crops, people, culture, deserts, mountains, coastal systems and islands which provides scope for promotion of all season, multi-location Tourism products.

Increasing number of tourists preferring non-urban tourist spots (financially expressive). Hence, there is scope for promotion of non-

urban tourist spots in interior villages by establishing Agri-Tourism centres. But, adequate facilities and publicity are must to promote such centers.

Government initiatives and policies in Xth five year plan allocation has been increased from 525 crore to 2900 crores. Increased financial allocation reaffirms the government commitment. The increased financial allocation by six times could be used for capacity building of service providers, creation of infrastructure and publicity.

Role of Agriculture institutes in promotion of Agri-Tourism

Around 1000 agriculture teaching, training, research and marketing organizations are there in the country. Each institute is equipped with technically trained manpower, infrastructure for lodging, boarding, fields and other necessary facilities which could be used for promotion of Agri-Tourism concept. Urban, foreign tourist could be attracted, accommodated and exposed to agricultural situations on payment basis. This helps in efficient use of existing manpower, infrastructure on one side and generating the income to the institute. This approach is possible by just utilizing the facilities of the existing institutes in Agri-Tourism. The same facility could be used for further promotion of the concept by building the capacity of the farmers, agripreneurs in Agri-Tourism.

Thus, these centres could serve as nodal centres for promotion of Agri-Tourism concept. All the state agricultural universities, animal husbandry universities, fisheries universities, ICAR organizations, Krishi Vigyan Kendra, state, district level farmers training centers, demonstration farms and seed production farms could be brought under this concept. This would bring down economic burden of the government, efficient utilization of resources and promotion of Agri-Tourism concepts.

Market Mix Strategy

The proposed market mix strategy for the promotion of Agri-Tourism concept is as follows:

Product - The product in Agri-Tourism is seeing, believing and ultimately experiencing. This experience is unique and unmatched. The experience of climbing a tree, buffalo riding in the pond and enjoying the sugarcane juice in the field itself are unique and none of the million dollar tourist centres can create and offer such experience.

Price - (a) Customer segment pricing - Domestic and foreign tourist could be priced differently as the capacity to pay is different. For a bullock cart riding, a foreign tourist can pay one dollar where as a domestic tourist can pay only one fourth.

(b) Location pricing - Pricing in Agri-Tourism depends upon location and is important. Agri-Tourism which just offers agriculture and



rural life as an attraction can charge normal pricing, where as Agri-Tourism spots which are very close to established Tourism centres like temple towns, hill stations, around big cities can go far little bit higher charging due to added value. As the pricing in established Tourism places are high, it works out to be cheaper for tourist to stay and enjoy in Agri-Tourism spots.

(c) Time pricing - Agri-Tourism units can charge higher in peak season i.e. November to January and change less during rest of the period. During rural festivals or at the time of important events Agri-Tourism units can charge more, even though it is during off season.

Place - The place where tourists are accommodated also influences the pricing. If the tourists are accommodated in villages itself with the farmer, the charging can be less where as accommodation in farms cost high. Because, exclusively for tourist purpose infrastructure is created in farm whereas existing facilities are used in farmers' house in village.

Promotion - Promotion of Agri-Tourism and strategic alliance can take place at three levels:

(a) Alliance with airlines, tour operators and foreign embassies - This alliance brings foreign tourists and upper middle class urban tourists into Agri-Tourism fold. It may not be possible for individual farmers to take up this task. Government can assist the Agri-Tourism units through promotion and co-ordination activities through central and state Tourism departments.

(b) Alliance with hotel industry - Large number of domestic tourists can be attracted through alliance with hotel industry. The hotel industry can be used to promote the Agri-Tourism concept.

Promotion by Agri-Tourism units - Basically the promotion takes place through mouth to mouth and local publicity given by Agri-Tourism units. As the absorption capacity of each unit is very less, direct marketing with little aggressive mode is enough for an Agri-

Tourism unit to survive. They can go for combined publicity on cost sharing basis and also publicise the Agri-Tourism potential in other part of the country. But, promotion of this group approach needs initial government interventions.

Policies - Some of the policy initiatives of urban government would surely help promotion of Agri-Tourism. They are:-

- Building brand identity "Incredible India".

- Rs. 60 crore budget for promoting brand.

- Xth five year plan budget increased from Rs. 525 to 2900 crores.

- An allocation of Rs. 50 lakhs per village for village Tourism has been proposed.

- The states are encouraging private public partnership in Tourism sector.

Positioning - Ultimately Agri-Tourism concept has to be positioned in the minds of tourists as "Come, pluck a fruit, smell a flower, run in the fields, lie on the hay and be lost in rural India".

Some Successful Entertainment Farming Enterprises and Techniques In Agri-Tourism: International Experience

Agri-Tourism is a viable income generating activities in many developed countries which would provide lead to promote the same with modifications suiting to our conditions. Some of the successful running models of Agri-Tourism are:

Wineries with Friday happy hours, Arts & Crafts Demonstrations, Farm Store : Exhibition of farm equipments, Roadside Stand selling fresh farm products and craft items, Processing of farm products and sale, Demonstration of Agri-activities, Sheep Shearing, Wool Processing, Fee fishing/hunting, Farm Vacations, Bed and Breakfast, Farm Tours, Horseback Riding, Cross-country skiing, Camping, Bad weather - like desert, snow fields, heavy rainfall also attract Agri-tourists, Picnic Grounds, A shady spot for visitors to rest - like a big banyan tree,

Educational Tours for school children, officers and progressive farmers, Farm Schools to teach a particular skill, Outdoor Schools which are mobile in nature teaching agriculture, Herb Walks, Workshops on interesting, emerging agriculture topics, Festivals with wide publicity and sponsorship, Cooking Demos to satisfy housewives, Pick-Your-own Pumpkin Patch, Rent-an-apple tree, Moonlight activities, Pageants, Speakers who can attract Agro-tourist narrating Agricultural experiences, Regional Themes like tribal coffee of Kerala, Andaman spices etc, Crop Art, Pizza Farm, Historical Recreations like highlighting a oldest farm etc, Log Buildings, Antique Villages, Collection of old farm Machinery, Miniature Village, farm Theme Playground for Children, Fantasyland, Gift Shop, Antiques, Crafts, Crafts Demonstrations, Food Sales, lunch Counter, Cold Drinks, Restaurant, Theme (apple town, etc.)

Issues Needing Attention For the Promotion of Agri-Tourism

Publicity - It is difficult to provide publicity to a remote Agri-Tourism unit. Hence, either collectively such Agri-Tourism operators can provide publicity or organizations, like ITDC, State Tourism development corporations, NGOs, press and tour operators can take up this responsibility. Information technology can play very important role in promotion of Agri-Tourism. An interactive website containing all details about Agri-Tourism locations and a toll free 24 hours help line can provide necessary information to Agri-tourists.

Transport - Reaching the remote Agri-Tourism units is the greatest challenge due to lack of approach roads and poor transportation facilities in rural areas. Tele connectivity is must which is yet to reach villages. Government should play important role in creating these facilities namely roads, transport and telecommunication to rural areas especially where Agri-Tourism units are established on

priority basis.

These efforts could be effective with private participation in partnership mode.

Accommodation - Safe and clean accommodation is must in Agri-Tourism. Urban and foreign tourists look for these minimum facilities. Orienting Agri tour operators on one hand and providing incentive to such efforts on other hand is necessary. Regular clean water supply and neat toilets are important. At the same time, it is necessary of limit modern facilities in which Agri-Tourist is not interested.

Networking - Networking public and private stakeholders at national and state level to assist the Agri-Tourism operator at remote place is necessary. This network can get policy support, infrastructure and publicity to Agri-Tourism units.

Capacity building of farmers - Farmer need to be oriented on maintenance of facilities, hospitality and public relation which he is not aware.

Safety of tourists - Agri-Tourism units are located in remote areas which lacks roads, medical facilities, telecommunication and

sometimes threat from theft and wild animals. Hence, support of local population is must besides facilities for emergency medical care.

Public - Private Partnership - Agripreneurs, farmers' organizations, co-operatives, NGOs and agribusiness companies can take up these ventures with the help of farmers and government agencies tour operators. Transporters and hospitality industry would also benefit in the process.

Challenges and Strategies

Many Indian farmers are currently involved in or are considering the use of agritourism as a means of diversifying their farm operations. How they will accomplish this is the challenge. The full growth potential for agritourism can only be achieved if strategies to address their challenges are developed and implemented. The following sections identify these overriding challenges and recommend strategies to address them.

Agritourism Industry Recognition

While the number and diversity of agritourism and value added businesses are growing in India, there is limited recognition of its

development potential. Support varies significantly between states. Individual Farmers have played a significant role in enhancing the viability of the agritourism and value-added processing sector. Those farmers who are involved with agritourism activities can also become members of regional tourism associations in order to participate in broader tourism marketing initiatives. The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries is currently the primary government agency providing indirect support to agritourism (small farmers finance scheme, fresh water fisheries development finance, to build the farm water lake, install drip irrigation plant; horticultural cultivation subsidies, food processing finance support, etc) followed by assistance from the Ministry of Rural Development (clean village scheme), Tourism and Culture, MTDC mahabraman Scheme and (bed and breakfast) scheme.

Recommend Strategy - Establish an Indian Agritourism Council (IAC) as the body responsible for coordinating product development, marketing and training for all agritourism initiatives in India. The primary mandate of the



IAC should be to address the key issues identified in this report. This Council should be comprised of a combination of government and private sector agricultural and tourism representatives from across India who will guide the IAC in its strategic activities. The Council members should be selected based on their familiarity with product development and marketing tactics in their respective sectors. They should also have a demonstrated commitment to building strategic partnerships between agricultural and tourism operations. The ongoing funding of the IAC should be derived from a combination of government and private sector sources. After initial start-up government funding support (e.g. 3-5 years) for the IAC, a public-private sector matching fund formula for the sustained operation of the Council should be established. Revenues for the private sector portion of this funding should come from agricultural associations, agritourism operators, food processing companies and distributors, and tourism operators using agricultural attractions as portions of their product portfolios.

Supportive Agritourism Policies and Regulations

A broad range of policies and regulations affect the operations and viability of most farms operations. The main policy and regulation challenges facing the agritourism industry are as follows:

- At all government levels there is a lack of understanding concerning how existing regulations and policies impact agritourism operations.
- No Policies and regulations with respect to the appropriate size of facilities and the use of land for agritourism activities.
- Policies are perceived to be developed without consultation with farm operators and without an analysis of the potential impacts on agritourism operations.
- There is a lack of consistency in regulation interpretation by government administrators.
- There is a limited awareness

and understanding of existing (if either) agritourism policies and regulations amongst farmers. As well, many farmers are unaware of how to obtain information on these regulation and how to apply them to their specific operations.

Recommend Strategies - The IAC should initiate programs which increase awareness and understanding of the Agri Tourism amongst governments and farmers. The following are possible strategies for increasing overall awareness and understanding.

Identifying an Advocate for the Industry - The IAC should be the primary advocate for the development of appropriate agritourism and value-added sector policies and regulations in India. It should lead initiatives that support the development of more effective and useful regulations, as well as the realistic interpretation of those guidelines.

Working With Government for More Effective Regulations - The IAC should conduct workshops with government agencies (e.g. ministries, regional Districts, municipalities, Land Reserve Commission, etc.). To encourage the development of effective agritourism policies and regulations, as well as consistent interpretation of their intent.

These workshops should address:

- Methods of insuring a consistent and clear interpretation of existing regulations affecting the availability and continuity of financial support for these farm operations.
- Tactics for the communication of information concerning appropriate forms of farm operations as defined by the IAC Assessment Authority.
- Approaches for increasing awareness amongst regulators about the impact of existing regulations on the long term viability of farm operations.
- Methods for streamlin in the implementation of policies and regulations which relieve legislated

burdens that are currently confronting farmers.

- *Methods for developing, maintaining and communicating information* (e.g. print or on-line manual or directory) of all relevant rules and regulations for agritourism. Included in this manual or directory should be a list of advisory contents that could assist other farmers in their interpretation of these policies and regulations.

- Methods for ensuring that government agencies consult with farm operators in the development of new policies and regulations.

- Methods of providing "primer" programs to farmers wanting to develop agritourism and related value-added businesses or to those existing farm operators who want to be updated on the regulations and policies.

Supportive Agritourism Financing

Some agritourism and value-added processing enterprises can be launched with very little money while other will require significant financial support. The main challenge for agritourism operators is accessing funds provided by financial institutions. The challenge exists because:

- There is a lack of farmer awareness of how to approach financial institutions.
- There are problems obtaining the necessary "equity" position to acquire funding.
- Financial institutions have limited awareness of the value and benefits of the agritourism.
- Related value-added processing and are often reluctant to support funding in these factors.
- Within the farming community, there is some intimidation about applying to financial institutions for agritourism funding.

Recommended Strategies - The IAC should be proactive in obtaining financial support for agritourism and value-added processing businesses. It should educate farmers about the types of financial assistance programs available and the procedures required

to apply for such support. It should undertake the following strategies:

Create Effective Relationships between the Farm Owner and Financial Institutions - There is a need to educate financial institutions about the value and benefit of the sector to agriculture and tourism businesses. Using this document's findings as a foundation, the IAC should initiate an awareness campaign that increases understanding of the agritourism sector within the financial community. In addition, the IAC should organize workshops that build relationships between farmers and financial institutions; Such workshops should address topics such as:

Agritourism related funding programs available from financial institutions. Numerous existing programs can assist farmers in expanding their business opportunities.

Each of the programs should be unique in its source of funds and application requirements capital

and economic performance requirements of lending institutions; and development of effective business plans.

Provide Information to Assist in the Application Program - In order to access financial assistance, farm owners are required to develop effective business plans. These business plans need statistical information on the markets for agritourism and value-added products, as well as industry norms concerning expenses and revenues. The IAC should monitor initiatives that have been recommended in this report. Additional surveys should be conducted on a 2-5 year basis to provide time series information on the growth of the sector. Marketing information is also required. This report provides a foundation of market information concerning agritourism travelers. However, more current information from emerging studies (e.g. Tourism Attitude and Motivation Study) is needed. The IAC should work with the Ministry of Rural Devel-

opment, Tourism and Culture to obtain more information which profiles travelers interested in agritourism. As well, a standardized on-site visitor survey could be conducted on an industry wide basis, with the implications of the findings presented in annual or semi-annual IAC workshops.

Effective Training programs

Adding even a small agritourism or value-added processing business to an existing farm operation may require more time and attention than expected by farmers. The ability to train and properly manage good employees is critical to success. Tapping into existing training opportunities that relate to customer service and marketing as well as tourism business management practices is required.

Recommended Strategies

Encourage Effective Hiring Practices - The IAC should establish and implement training programs dealing with hiring employees, customer service, business plan development and marketing.



Information sources such as those produced for the Opportunity Analysis for Farm-Based Businesses study provide a good start for the development of such training programs. IAC should coordinate with Tourism Industry Institute's professionals to find out whether the existing manuals and training programs from FHRAI Training Institute that might be adaptable to Indian agritourism industry.

Liability and Risk Management Programs

When farmers invite customers on to their land and encourage them to purchase products and services, they are obligated to take measures to insure that no unreasonable harm occurs to their customers. This liability also applies to farmers who may be renting or leasing land and facilities. The extent of farmer liability depends on the status of the visitor, but it is normally greatest for public and/or business 'invitees'. All Indian farmers involved with agritourism should develop and use a comprehensive farm risk management and liability protection program. In India, the key challenge related to liability management is the high cost and availability of liability insurance. As a result, some farm ventures may operate without appropriate liability insurance, leaving the farmer at significant risk. Farmers need a stronger understanding of why risk management programs are needed and how such initiatives can help to reduce insurance costs.

Recommended Strategies

Encourage Adoption of Risk Management Programs - The IAC should play a leading role in encouraging agritourism operators to develop and implement effective risk management programs which clearly identify the benefits of risk management programs and the steps required to establish safe visiting environments for tourists. It should disseminate this information through agricultural meetings, workshops, and print materials.

Product and Service Quality

Control

Like many other consumers, travelers visiting farms are also concerned with getting good value for their money. Consequently, it is important to strive for the highest product and/or service quality that can be delivered. This should happen on a consistent and on-going basis. The challenges facing the agritourism industry with respect to the delivery of a quality products and service are:

- Information on traveler expectations of agritourism product quality.

- Awareness of the benefits of meeting expectations for product quality standards.

- Awareness of appropriate pricing and its relationship with quality standards.

Recommended Strategies

Establish Quality Standards - For agritourism in India to be credible, specific efforts should be placed on developing a quality standards system. These are standards which should guide general business requirements (i.e. meeting health standards) as well as relate to customer service and products sold. Several of Indian tourism businesses have developed various "Codes of Conduct" which are promoted by tourism organizations such as the GHRAI or the Indian Hotel Industry.

These voluntary guidelines provide examples of operating principles which could be adapted by agritourism operators. In addition, Indian Tourism Department offers opportunities for tourism related businesses to attain recognized quality product standards. For instance, last year the tourism department implemented the unique program called the "Atiti Devo Bhava" India wide customers service program. Similarly Tourism department's approved bed and breakfast accommodation Guide Program provides a standard for quality control of lodging facilities. From an agricultural perspective, quality product control occurs in a variety of ways.

Encourage the Use of Quality Standards - The key to ensuring the effectiveness of this initiative is training and awareness of what constitutes a quality product. The IAC in association with agritourism operators should develop a code of conduct associated with the delivery of agritourism products and services. As part of the establishment of quality programs, an industry based assessment program to audit quality of on-site safety and health activities on farms could also be developed. Agri Tourism Baramati unit is a potential model for such an assessment program.

The Ten Commandments of Good Service:

- Guests are the most important people in any business.

- Guests are not dependent on us - we are dependent on them.

- Guests are not an interruption of our work - they are the purpose of it.

- Guests do us a favour when they call - we are not doing them a favour by serving them.

- Guests are part of our business - they are not outsiders.

- Guests are not cold statistics; they are human beings with feelings and emotions like our own.

- Guests are not to be argued with.

- Guests are those who bring us their wants - it is our job to fill those wants.

- Guests are deserving of the most courteous and attentive treatment we can give them.

- Guests are the lifeblood of the farm and ranch recreation business.

Strategic Partnership Developments

Wherever a mutual benefit can be found, businesses should attempt to capitalize on the advantages of creating productive partnerships. Some partnerships are formed among similar tourism or value added processing businesses and interested government agencies. This often occurs in order to pool their resources for a com-

mon goal. Others may be formed to reduce risk, co-op competition, create economies of scale, improve market coverage, improve market image, or to trade information or products in exchange for expertise. The Singapore Tourism has encouraged the development of strategic alliances through its Product Club program. The program has brought small and medium sized businesses together to create strategic alliances in tourism sectors related to festivals and events, skiing and snowboarding, golfing, bed and breakfast accommodation, ecotourism, health spas, and themed food and beverage businesses.

Their partnerships have focused on creating new and innovative tourism products and packages. The challenges facing Indian agritourism industry with respect to the creation of productive partnerships are related to the limited awareness of the potential value of partnerships:

A. Within specific types of agricultural industries and between related but different types of industries (e.g. agritourism and/or value-added processing and tourism industry accommodation suppliers).

B. between non-similar and seemingly unrelated businesses (e.g. agritourism and/or value added processing and equipment suppliers).

Recommended Strategies

Create Product Partnerships

- Through networking and workshops, the IAC should:

Encourage the development of partnerships between agritourism and value-added processing businesses and other types of businesses at the regional level. Develop networking partnerships between researchers and agritourism organizations to provide the farmers with information on product and marketing partnerships occurring world wide. The Internet is a tool which can facilitate this networking of ideas and information.

Marketing Programs

Farmers who do not have ex-

perience in marketing a service business often overlook the importance of this function. Even the best managed agritourism business can be unsuccessful if prospective customers are unaware that it exists or do not know what it has to offer. Beyond the development of strategic partnerships some of the critical marketing challenges facing the agritourism industry are related to the limited:

- Use of available channels of distribution.

- Regional tourism awareness of the sector's potential

- Marketing abilities of many farm operators.

The IAC should encourage stronger and more effective marketing of agritourism across India.

Recommended Strategies

Develop and Promote Thematic Images of Indian Farm Experiences - The creation of a world wide image of Indian agritourism experiences will help strengthen growth opportunities and provide new marketing avenues. Such an approach was successful for other tourism sectors including Incredible India, Kerala Tourism, Goa Tourism, etc; specific to agritourism, the Maharashtra region has been successful in increasing the awareness of its farm touring experiences.

Incredible India is the classic



example that has adopted the concept of a common image for all of its regional and sectoral marketing. These marketing materials have consistent images and layout on their front covers.

There are others several examples in wine tourism destinations where the focus has gradually shifted from centering on wine production techniques to an emphasis on wine tourism experiences that combine visits to wineries and vineyards with a broader range of tourism products and services.

This imaging can also incorporate the value-added processing activities. The emphasis on the opportunity to see the processing of farm produce and to purchase these products on the farm complements the farm produce and to purchase these products on the farm complements the farm touring experience. Therefore both agritourism and value-added processing opportunities should be included in the development of national image.

Create Marketing Materials for Reaching the Market Place

- To support the image of Indian farm experiences, marketing materials should be developed or distributed to consumers. These materials should include regional brochures which provide visitors with specific information on farm



experiences (e.g. what experiences are offered, where are they located and how can they be purchased?)

The Product Guides do this in part by including descriptions about farm-based leisure activities. Furthering marketing initiatives of this kind serves to effectively promote the agritourism industry. There are media avenues that individual farmer and agritourism associations can use to reach a wider marketplace. Examples include TOURISM DEPARTMENT website, or toll free number or call centre which can be used by the general consumer to obtain travel information and to book their holiday; the Product guide which is placed at all visitor information centers; as well as regional tourism association brochures. Similarly, communication channels can be developed between agritourism operators and consumers via well designed websites. An example of a well-designed agritourism website is www.agritourism.in.

Conflict Management Programs

While agritourism can create benefits for farm and tourism operators, it can also increase the chances of conflict between primary farming pursuits and more leisure travel activities. Planning for controversial issues and the expectations of guests can lessen the potential conflict between the

working farm and the visitors. These conflicts may relate to issues of noise, smell, farming practices, and disease control. In each of these situations, it is important to establish clear communication strategies on what should be expected on-site with respect to the character of the agritourism experience. For instance, with a heightened public awareness of the potential dangers of animal disease dissemination by farm visitors, it is critical that agritourism organizations such as the IAC develop clear guidelines concerning access to farm sites by visitors.

A current crisis, which is damaging many agricultural and rural tourism businesses, is the bird flu disease epidemic that started in the north Maharashtra now is the concern over the potential spread of the disease is causing strict quarantines of farms and major restrictions on access to and travel within the North Maharashtra countryside.

This includes visits by school field trips, rural tours and conferences. Farms, parks, zoos, horse racing venues, rural footpaths, and rural heritage attractions, have been prohibited from visitors or are under quarantine in order to reduce the risk of any further spread of BIRD FLU disease.

Recommended Strategies

The IAC should develop a clear and co-coordinated approach to dealing with crisis management challenges that may confront the agritourism industry.

It should: review and take lessons from the tourism communication approaches used in Europe to address recent animal disease outbreaks; and develop policies and guidelines for agritourism partners on the most effective ways of managing public relations associated with such events.

FORM IV

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I, Ashok Kini Hosdurg, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.