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STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS IN AGRO-TOURISM WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO PUNJAB

DR. SARITA BAHL
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
ARYA COLLEGE
LUDHIANA

ABSTRACT

Tourism is now well recognised as an engine of growth in the various economies in the world. Agro-tourism is an innovative agricultural activity related to tourism and agriculture both. It has a great capacity to create additional source of income and employment opportunities to the farmers. Punjab is one of the major tourist centres in the India and there is large scope and great potential to develop agro-tourism. The paper aims to examine the importance of agro-tourism development in Punjab and to define a suitable framework for the of agro- tourism centres in the view of marginal and small farmers. Further, an attempt has been made to identify the challenges of the agro-tourism in Punjab. Efforts have also been made to suggest and rank effective measures to establish and promote the operations of agro-tourism in Punjab.

KEYWORDS

Agro Tourism, Strategic Implications, Rural Operations, Conventional Food, Sustainable Tourist.

INTRODUCTION

A number of countries have transformed their economies by developing their tourism prospective. Tourism has great capacity to generate large-scale employment and additional income sources to the skilled and unskilled. Today the concept of traditional tourism has been changed. Some new areas of the tourism have been emerged like Agro-Tourism. Promotion of tourism would bring many direct and indirect benefits to the people. A term 'Agro-Tourism' is a new face of tourism. An agro-tourism is farm based business that is open to the public. These specialized agro-tourism destinations generally offer things to see, things to do, and produce or gifts to buy, and are open to the public. The agro-tourism is an additional co-activity for the farmers. It provides additional income source and employment opportunity to the farmers and rural peoples. It gives new look for the agri-business. There is need of such types of activities in the Punjab. Agro tourism is defined as "Travel that combines agricultural or rural settings with products of agricultural operations – all within a tourism experience". According to Mr. Pandurang Tavare (ATDC, Pune) - "Agro-Tourism is that Agro-Business activity, when a native farmers or person of the area offers tours to their agriculture farm to allow a person to view them growing, harvesting, and processing locally grown foods, such as coconuts, pineapple, sugar cane, corn, or any agriculture produce the person would not encounter in their city or home country. Often the farmers would provide a home-stay opportunity and education".

Agro-Tourism and Eco-Tourism are closely related to each other. Eco-Tourism provides by the tour companies but, in the agro-tourism farmers offer tours to their agriculture farm and providing entertainment, education and fun-filled experiences for the urban peoples.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the benefits of agro-tourism centres in Punjab.
2. To define a suitable framework for the of agro- tourism centres in the view of marginal and small farmers.
3. To identify the challenges of the agro-tourism in Punjab.
4. To suggest and rank strategic Implications to establish and promote the operations of agro-tourism.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Agriculture is a most important occupation in the India including in the Punjab. But, today it has become unprofitable due the irregular monsoon, prices fluctuations of Agro-products and some internal weakness of the agriculture sector. Hence, there is need to do some innovative activities in the agriculture, which will help to farmers, rural peoples. Urban population is increasing day by day in the Punjab, today the urban people's world is restricted in the closed door flats, offices, clubs, television, video games, spicy fast food, computer, internet, and so on. They can see nature only on television or screen of the computers. More over some people living in the cities do not have relatives in villages and they never visited or stayed in village. These people want to enjoy rural life but there is problem of such type of facilities. Hence, it is opportunity to the farmers for development of the agro-tourism centres and serves him and create additional income source.

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The scope of the study is limited to examine the benefits and applicability of agro-tourism business in Punjab. The study includes their benefits and problems. As well as it includes appropriate framework regarding to establish the agro-tourism centres in the Punjab.

The present empirical study has incorporated the collection of both primary and secondary data for the in-depth investigation. All the information, data and opinion are collected which have a direct or indirect relevance to the information. An intensive desk research has been undertaken to collect published data. For collecting primary data, structured questionnaire has been used and 100 academicians were surveyed after pilot survey.

The present study is an attempt to analyze various strategic Implications of agro-tourism business in Punjab. To find out the most significant strategic measure, Garrett's ranking technique was used. As per the method, respondents have been asked to assign the rank for all the factors and outcome of such ranking have been converted into score value with the help of the following formula.

Percent Position = $\frac{100(R_{ij}-0.5)}{N_j}$ where

R_{ij} = Rank given for ith item by the jth respondents
 N_j = Number of items ranked by jth respondents.

The present position of each rank thus obtained was converted into scores by referring to the table given by Henry Garrett. Then for each factor the scores of individual respondents were added together and divided by the total number of respondents. These mean scores for all the parameters were arranged in the order of their ranks and inferences were drawn. The secondary data data has been furnished from the related articles, research papers, reports and 11th plan document of the government of India. Some data has been furnished from the websites of the government of India and Punjab, as well as ministry of agriculture. Some ideas have been taken from the Tourism Development Corporation of Punjab.

WHO CAN START AGRO-TOURISM CENTRES?

The individual farmer can start agro-tourism who have minimum two hector land, farm house, water resource and is interested to entertain the tourists. Apart from the individual farmer, agricultural co-operatives institute, Non-Government organisations, Agricultural Universities, and agricultural colleges may start their centres. Even Grampanchayats can start such centres in their operational areas with the help of villagers and farmers.

REQUIREMENTS TO AGRO-TOURISM CENTRES

Researcher has identified the minimum requirements for the agro-tourism centre. To develop agro tourism in their farm, the farmer / farmers must have basic infrastructure and facilities in their farm as follows:

INFRASTRUCTURE

- Accommodation facilities at same place or alliance with nearest hotels.
- Farmhouse, which has the rural look and feel comfortable along with all minimum required facilities.
- Rich resources in agriculture namely water and plants at the place.
- Cooking equipments for cooking food, if tourist have interested.
- Emergency medical care's with first aid box.
- The well or lake or swimming tank for fishing, swimming
- Bullock cart, cattle shade, telephone facilities etc
- Goat farm, Emu (Ostrich bird) farm, sericulture farm, green house,

FACILITIES SHOULD PROVIDE

- Offer authentic rural Indian / Punjabi food for breakfast, lunch and dinner.
- Farmers should offer to see and participate in the agricultural activities.
- Offer an opportunity to participate in the rural games to the tourist
- Provide information them about the culture, dress, arts, crafts, festivals, rural traditions and also give possible demonstration of some arts.
- Offer bullock cart for riding and horse riding, buffalo ride in the water, fishing facility in your pounds or nearest lake.
- Offer fruits, corns, groundnuts, sugarcane and other agro-products as per availability.
- Show local birds, animals and waterfalls etc and give authentic information about them.
- Must provide safety to tourists' with the support of alliance hospitals.
- Arrange folk dance programme, *folk songs, bhajan, shabad etc.*
- Available some agro-product to purchase to the tourist.

OTHER MISCELLANEOUS

- Offer pollution free environment to the tourists.
- Try to create interest about the village culture for the future tourism business.
- Introduce the tourists with imminent persons of your village.
- Employ well-trained staff or comedy persons with good communication skill to entertain the tourist.
- To have authentic information regarding to the railway and bus time table for the help of tourists.

Farmer can also provide other additional facilities to their requirements for the better satisfaction of tourists.

LOCATION FOR THE AGRO-TOURISM CENTRE

Location is most important factor for success in the agro-tourism. The location of the centre must easy to arrive and have a good natural background. Urban tourists are interested into enjoying the nature and rural life. So, farmers should develop their centre in the rural areas only which have a beautiful natural background to attract urban tourist in your farm.

The place of agro-tourism centre must need easy accessible by roads and railways. Tourists want to enjoy some historical and natural tourist places along with the agro-tourism. Hence, the centre should be developed near of these tourist places. It is more beneficial to both tourist and farmers..

BENEFITS OF AGRO-TOURISM CENTRES

Agro-tourism is a way of sustainable tourist development and multi-activity in rural areas through which the visitor has the opportunity to get aware with agricultural areas, agricultural occupations, local products, traditional food and the daily life of the rural people, as well as the cultural elements and traditions. Moreover, this activity brings visitors closer to nature and rural activities in which they can participate, be entertained and feel the pleasure of touring. Agro-Tourism has the potential to change the economic face of traditional agriculture. The benefits of agro-tourism development are manifold. It would bring many direct and indirect benefits to the farmers and rural people. Some of the benefits are following:-

- Employment opportunities to the farmers including farm family members and youth
- Additional income source for the farmers to protect against income fluctuation.
- Cultural transformation between urban and rural people including social moral values
- Farmers can improve their standard of living due to the contacts with urban people.
- The urban people can understand the rural life and know about the agricultural activities.
- It supports the rural and agricultural development process.
- Help to reduce burden on other traditional tourist centres.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AGRO-TOURISM AND TRADITIONAL TOURISM

Agro-tourism is also a tourism business but it is different from the common tourism because it has a base of agriculture and rural lifestyle. Generally tourism has provided to see and enjoy the natural places as well as some heritages. But, agro-tourism has a tourism including experience, education and cultural transformation. It varies in special from general tourism in the following manner:

- It provides pollution and noise free sites for travel and tourism at rural background.
- The cost of food, accommodation, recreation and travel is minimum in agro-tourism
- Agro-tourism can satisfy the curiosity of urban people about sources of food, plants, animals, and industrial agro-raw materials.
- It provides information about the rural handicrafts, languages, culture, tradition, dresses and lifestyle.
- A family environment at the tourist place, is one of the most important characteristics in the agro tourism
- In the agro tour, tourists not only see and watch agriculture farms but also they can participate in the agricultural activities and experience the farming.
- It provides natural situations to watching, Birds, animals, water bodies etc
- Agro-tourism could create awareness about rural life and knowledge about agriculture
- It also provides opportunity for education through experience of farming and knowledge about the rural life including entertainment. Agro-tourism is an instrument of urban-rural connectivity through the tours.

AGRO-TOURISM POTENTIAL IN PUNJAB

There are many tourist centres in Punjab which are the supporting natural environment for the agro-tourism centres in Punjab. Although, Punjab has a total 22368 thousand hector area under the agriculture and 36122 thousand of livestock (cow, buffaloes, goats etc.). Principal crops include rice, wheat, pulses, turmeric, onions, cotton, sugarcane and several oil seeds including groundnut, sunflower and soya bean. The state has huge areas, under fruit cultivation of which mangoes, bananas, grapes, melons and water melons etc.

Punjab is blessed with a rich and diversified cultural heritage. The state has several communities belonging to different religions, and a number of festivities colours the culture of Punjab with the spirit of exuberance. More than 4.11 (43 percent of total) crore populations is living the urban areas of the Punjab, which

will can becomes a customers' of the agro-tourist centres are located in the rural areas. Other than nature and culture there is an enough road and rail connectivity in urban rural areas to travel in rural Punjab. Punjab abounds in numerous tourist attractions ranging from pilgrimage, a rich tradition of festivals, art and culture. Some following notable factors are helpful to the agro-tourism in Punjab.

- Tourist places are already exist to support Agro-Tourism.
- Good communication and transport facilities.
- Green house cultivation of long stem cut flowers, vegetables, fruits etc.
- State has wide area under horticulture Punjab now is a major horticulture state.
- Punjab is already established as one of the top tourist destination in the world.
- Punjab has major producer of fruit, spices, medicinal and aromatic plant allowed under horticulture in India.
- There are an increasing number of tourists preferring non-urban tourist spots
- Punjab has diverse Agro-climatic conditions, diverse crops, people, deserts, mountains, which provide scope for promotion of all season, multi-location agro-tourism
- Some of the popular folk dances in rural Punjab are Bhangra and Gidhha. Culture of Punjab is very rich with a great variety. It gives a unique identity to the rural Punjab.

SUPPORT TO THE AGRO-TOURISM IN PUNJAB

Promotion of Agro-Tourism involves some more important stakeholders namely Ministry of Agriculture and rural development ministry of the state and central governments. To promote domestic tourism, thrust areas identified by the government of India are development of infrastructure, product development and diversification, development of eco-adventure sports, cultural presentations, providing inexpensive accommodation etc. The government also has realized the importance of agro-tourism. It has accorded high priority to tourism as an instrument of employment generation and poverty alleviation in rural and backward areas by developing the potential of agro tourism to supplement farm incomes, and heritage tourism to promote village development. *AGRICULTURE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION –ATDC* of Punjab has main promoter of this activity in the Punjab. ATDC is promoting to agriculture tourism for achieving income, employment and economic stability in rural areas. Help boosting a range of activities, services and amenities, provided by farmers and rural people to attract urban tourists to their area thus providing opportunity to urban people to get back to the rural roots". ATDC is now providing following facilities to the farmers of Punjab;

- Prepare Agro Tourism project report and business plan of the each applicant agriculture farm.
- Help facilitate the financial support from Nationalize Banks, Institutes and Government Agencies to built Agro and Rural Tourism facilities and infrastructure like accommodation, sanitation, approach road etc.
- Conduct Agro Tourism Business Training Program.
- Conduct seminars and conferences on agro tourism business Conduct lectures of the successful National and International Farmers in agro tourism business
- Provide sales and marketing support.
- Conduct and coordinate tours from urban areas to the farms.
- Arrange National as well as International Agro Tourism Centre study tours.
- ATDC has entertained National as well as International visitors

CHALLENGES OF THE AGRO-TOURISM IN PUNJAB

The Punjab has a greater potential of the development of the agro-tourism centres due to the good natural and climatic conditions. But there are some challenges in the process of agro-tourism development in the state. Major challenges and problems are follows;

- Lack of perfect knowledge about the agro-tourism
- Weak communication skill and lack of commercial approach of the small farmers
- Lack of capital to develop basic infrastructure for the agro-tourism
- Ignorance of the farmers regarding to such type of activities
- Presence of unorganized sector in the Agro-Tourism industry.
- Ensuring hygiene and basic requirements considering urban visitors
- Farmers have small size holding, low quality land and little or no access to credit or irrigation.

EFFECTIVE MEASURES FOR SUCCESS IN AGRO-TOURISM

Agro-Tourism is a one of the business activity. So, farmers have must of commercial mind and some marketing techniques for the success. For the better success in the agro-tourism you should follow the following things;

- Give a wide publicity of your tourism centre by news papers, television etc. Use all possible advertisement means.
- Develop contacts with the schools, colleges, NGOs, clubs, unions, organisations etc.
- Train your staff or family members for reception and hospitality.
- Understand the customers' wants and their expectations and serve.
- Charge optimum rent and charges for the facilities on the commercial base
- Use artificial local resources to entertain and serve the tourist.
- Develop your website and update time to time for attract foreign tourists.
- Take their feedback and comments about the service and suggestions for more development and modification
- Develop a good relationship with the tourist for future business and chain publicity
- Develop different agro-tour package for different type of tourist and their expectations.
- Preserve an address book and comments of the visited tourists for future tourism business.
- Behave sincerely with the tourists and participate with them.
- Small farmers can develop their agro-tourism centres on the basis of cooperative society.

TABLE 1 – ACADEMICIANS VIEWS REGARDING STRATEGIC MEASURES TO DEVELOP AGRO-TOURISM IN PUNJAB (%age of Respondents)

S. No.	Measures	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
1.	Wide publicity of tourism centre	27	13	16	7	11	6	5	9	2	4	100
2.	Train staff for hospitality	8	12	18	3	15	8	10	17	7	2	100
3.	Understand Customers' Expectations.	18	1	4	12	5	19	30	2	6	3	100
4.	Optimum charges for facilities.	12	7	22	2	14	6	4	10	8	15	100
5.	Take customers' Feedback	26	14	9	6	20	11	2	1	5	6	100
6.	Develop good relationship	3	8	25	4	2	18	9	16	13	2	100
7.	Develop website to attract foreign tourists	5	11	1	3	27	10	12	6	19	7	100
8.	Develop different agro-packages	3	5	24	9	2	15	4	5	32	1	100
9.	Preserve address book.	6	8	13	1	7	22	17	12	10	4	100
10.	Develop Agro-tourism centres on the basis of co-operative society.	11	27	5	4	19	2	23	1	5	3	100
Garret Table Value		82	70	63	59	52	49	42	38	30	19	

(Source: Primary Data)

TABLE – 2 ACADEMICIANS' RATING OF STRATEGIC MEASURES TO DEVELOP AGRO-TOURISM IN PUNJAB ACCORDING TO HENRY GARRET TABLE

S. No.	Measures	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total Garret Score	Average Garret Score	RANK
1.	Wide publicity of tourism centre	2214	910	1008	406	572	288	210	333	60	72	6073	60.73	I
2.	Train staff for hospitality	656	840	1134	174	780	384	420	629	210	36	5263	52.63	IV
3.	Understand Customers' Expectations.	1476	70	252	696	260	912	1260	74	180	54	4534	45.34	X
4.	Optimum charges for facilities.	984	490	1386	116	728	288	168	370	240	270	5040	50.40	V
5.	Take customers' Feedback	2132	980	567	348	1040	528	84	37	150	108	6010	60.10	II
6.	Develop good relationship	246	560	1575	232	104	864	378	592	390	36	4977	49.77	VI
7.	Develop website to attract foreign tourists	410	770	63	174	1404	480	504	222	570	126	4723	47.23	IX
8.	Develop different agro-packages	246	350	1512	522	104	720	168	185	960	18	4785	47.85	VIII
9.	Preserve address book.	492	560	819	58	364	1056	714	444	300	72	4879	48.79	VII
10.	Develop Agro-tourism centres on the basis of co-operative society.	902	1890	315	232	988	96	966	37	150	54	5630	56.30	III

(Source: Calculated from Henry Garret)

It has been observed from Table 1 and 2 that academicians rank wide publicity of tourism centre as most significant strategic measure to promote agro-tourism in Punjab with 60.73 average Garret score, coverage by newspapers, television and all other possible advertisement means can be used. Customers' feedback has been considered as second important step to be taken with average Garret score 60.10 in promotion of Agro-Tourism in Punjab. Take their feedback, comments about the service and suggestions to more development and modification. Academicians are of the opinion that Agro – tourism centres should be developed on the basis of cooperative society by farmers with small holdings. Proper training of staff for hospitality has been given fourth rank with 52.63 average Garret score. Family members can be trained for reception of tourists. Fifth prominent strategy has been considered as optimum charges with 50.40 average Garret Score. Reasonable rent and charges for other facilities or services on the commercial base should be there to attract and sustain tourists. Further good relationships should be established with tourists and participate with them. Address book should be preserved with comments with suggestions from the visited tourists for future tourism business. Different agro-tour packages for different types of tourists according to their expectations should be developed, own website can also be developed and updated information can be communicated through it to attract foreign tourists. Agro – tourism will contribute to the national integration, preserves natural and cultural environment as well as enriches social and cultural lives of the people.

CONCLUSION

It is a good opportunity to develop an agro-tourism business in Punjab. But there is a problem of low awareness about this business in the farmer and problem of the finance and proper view in the farmers of the Punjab. Hence, the agriculture departments of the districts', Agriculture Universities should try to give orientation about it and provide some innovative ideas regarding to the Agro-Tourism. The government should try to provide optimum financial aids to the agro-tourism activities in the Punjab by the grants and institutional finance. Bank should make available best possible financial help for the agro-tourism activities in the Punjab. Union of the agro-tourism service providers is also an additional requirement of these farmers which helps to the agricultural tourism network in the India including Punjab.

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