

# CHAPTER 17

## Agritourism

### EMERGING LIVELIHOOD OPTION TO ENHANCE FARMERS' INCOME IN INDIA

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## Abstract

This study was conducted using the case study research method and restricted to two agritourism centers. General tourism is at its peak so connecting agriculture to tourism can enhance the livelihoods of farmers. The first case is about the Palshi Agritourism Centre at Palshi village by the well-known Indian entrepreneur and agricultural tourism advocate, Pandurang Taware. The second case is on the interventions of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Administration. To share the experiences of Pandurang Taware and to explore the opportunities in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Pandurang Taware was invited to the Andamans by the Extension Education Institute in Hyderabad and motivated Extension officers of the Andamans to promote agritourism in the Andamans. The objective of this case study was to probe the motives of starting such a concept and to get firsthand information as to how agritourism contributes to strengthening farmers through a means for supplemental income. The Palshi Agritourism Centre is the first of its kind to act as a model for many farmers to venture into such activities for sustainable livelihoods. It was started by Pandurang Taware, an enterprising individual, under the aegis of the Agri Development Trust on 110 acres of cultivated land. This project was critically monitored by Taware during its 2004–2006 gestation period. This project consisted of unique irrigation methods considering the interests of tourists in the areas of horticulture, floriculture, sericulture, winery, cattle breeding, animal husbandry, jaggery processing, and dairy farming. Hutbay in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands was promoted by the Department of Agriculture and Tourism and the Neil agritourism centers were promoted under the Public Private Partnership (PPP) model.

## Introduction

The concept of agritourism developed due to urbanization, as many people are not aware of rural background and the constraints in production of grain, fruits, and vegetables. The integration of agriculture and allied activities are not known by urban dwellers. When asked about how food grains are produced and how various products of dairy, poultry, and farm are produced, people give a variety of answers. Agritourism is mainly meant for making use of these situations by having farmers create experiential learning for people to stay, experience, and “own” the activities of the farm. The activities include staying in the natural environment in the farm itself, planting trees, milking cows, riding bullock carts, harvesting crops, threshing, and winnowing. These activities make the visitors feel happy and create a leisurely environment while enabling farmers to get extra income. Agritourism not only allows participants to stay in a village and enjoy the village-based foods but also have an opportunity to be close to where 75% of Indians live. One of the best things about staying on a farm is that guests can contribute to the place through their involvement in agricultural operations, all within a tourism experience.

The concept of agritourism was formally launched at the Agri-Tourism Development Corporation, Baramati, Maharashtra, on May 1, 2004. The concept envisages the involvement of the private sector and the farmers who are the agritourism service providers, based on the PPP. Agritourism service providers and guides need to create a congenial natural living atmosphere, which includes good hygiene and quality facilities at the center. They show visitors agricultural practices such as cultivating flowers, harvesting agricultural crops or fruits, bee keeping, dairying, and other agricultural operations. They introduce the village, the life of villagers, their culture, and their societal norms through various participatory practices. The tourists can enjoy the natural environment, fresh air, and atmosphere at the center. The tourists should be exposed to the local community, which means attending a panchyat meeting, hearing local traditional songs, attending traditionally celebrated festivals and dances, and exploring art and crafts.

Maharashtra stands third in India for population and area. It lies on the west coast of India with a 720 km long coastline along the green Konkan region. Western Ghats (also known as Sahyadri) mountain ranges have several hill stations and water bodies with semi-evergreen and deciduous forests. Several tourist centers in Maharashtra are the supporting natural environment for the agritourism centers in the state. Almost 43% of the population lives in urban areas in Maharashtra. Tourists also come from outside the state and other countries. The well-developed infrastructure such as connectivity to the roads, communication facilities, connectivity to the airports, and a well-spread network of trains attract potential tourists. The agritourism centers are an added advantage.

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands were established in 1956 with a total area of 8,250 sq km and a population density of 46 per sq km. Out of the 572 islands, 37 are inhabited. Andaman and Nicobar Islands have beautiful beaches, with many places to visit such as the Cellular Jail, a colonial prison of great historical recognition; a water sports complex; and museums. Keeping in view the importance of the development of tourism in the islands, the administrators and policymakers seriously thought of

developing agritourism by taking advantage of the tourist flow. They aimed at attracting the tourists to stay in the farms in the natural environment rather than in the closed hotels. This facilitated the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Administration to promote agritourism in the islands. There are many such efforts started from Neil Island to Hutbay, where they have created models to motivate farmers to venture in to these type of activities which will be helpful to the farmers for betterment of their livelihood.

## Methodology

The researchers observed and analyzed the changes in the agricultural sector by agro-based tourism as case studies from the state of Maharashtra and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Other sources are also used by the investigators while collecting data. It was also defined by Robert K. Yin that case studies are based on empirical inquiry that's based on the factual information in real-time in which the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used (Yin, 1984). The investigators personally visited these two service providers, interviewed the agritourism service operators, and gathered primary data with in-depth discussions (Ahire et al., 2018).

The present investigation was conducted by using the case study research method during 2012–13 and 2018. Maharashtra State and the Union Territory (UT) of Andaman and Nicobar Islands were purposively selected as the concept of agritourism was initially started in the state of Maharashtra and the tourism spots of UT Andaman have great potential for developing agritourism. The investigators are familiar with the areas of both states. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands fall under Extension Education Institute jurisdiction. This helped in developing rapport with agritourism service providers and getting firsthand information for documentation with the help of government departments. The investigator has visited four agritourism centers each in Maharashtra and Andaman and Nicobar Islands, selected randomly to document as case studies.

There is plenty of scope and potential in agritourism centers not only in Maharashtra, but also in several other states that promote various rural culture-based tourism. Agriculture Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC, Pune) is the main organization in the Pune District that supports promoting this activity for achieving income, employment, and economic stability in rural areas. Based on these special features and wide network of agritourism centers in Pune and nearby areas, the Pune District was selected by the investigator to document the first case of agritourism.

The Hutbay agritourism center in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands was promoted by the Department of Agriculture and Tourism, and the Neil agritourism centers were promoted under the PPP model.

## Results & Discussion

### Agri & Rural Tourism Training, Research & Development Centre

Pandurang Taware, who hails from Sangavi, Taluka Baramati, District Pune, completed his B. Sc. in computer science, and holds 6 acres of irrigated land with sugarcane cultivation, looked after by his parents. After his education, Taware observed farming over a period of 8 to 10 years and the cultivation practices followed by his parents and fellow farmers from other villages and their harsh life. He observed that agriculture is a continuous business, a full-time activity for farmers throughout the year. Erratic rainfall and price fluctuation in markets for agricultural commodities are the major factors to gain profit from agriculture, but they rarely happen in favor of farmers. This has forced Taware to develop a concept of agritourism as a subsidiary business for the farmers.

The Agri and Rural Tourism Training, Research, and Development Centre was established in 2004 at Baramati, Pune (Maharashtra). It is a totally dry land belt with rocky soils and very low rainfall. Taware began the center under the aegis of Agri Development Trust on 110 acres of cultivated land. Taware critically monitored the project during 2004–2006. It included unique irrigation methods and considered the interests of tourists in the area of horticulture, floriculture, sericulture, winery, cattle breeding, animal husbandry, jaggery processing, and dairy farming.

Taware developed this business model as a viable unit based on the premise that urban population is leaning toward nature and has a strong desire for family-oriented recreational activities in a rural setup. This project was carefully carved and considered the requirement of the urban population and the boost in the tourist sector. It has been running successfully since 2006 and currently is thriving in providing an inexpensive getaway to a large majority. This project is now very feasible and spread over its popularity among the large number of tourists.

Currently, Taware is operating as a president and managing director of Pune-based ATDC Private Ltd and fully involved in sales and marketing of agritourism. He has set up his own office in Pune with a mission to promote agritourism for achieving income, employment, and economic stability in rural communities in India; and to help develop and promote a range of activities, services, and amenities provided by farmers and rural people to attract urban tourists to their area, thus providing opportunity for urban people. He has started his own agritourism activities by acquiring the 30 acres of land in the small village of Palshi, Taluka Baramati, District Pune.

The researcher visited Agri and Rural Tourism Training, Research, and Development Centre in Palshi village and observed that Taware has planted 4,000 tree species such as Siris, Acacia, *Mellingtonia hortensis*, *Azadirachta indica* (neem), Rain tree, *Alstonia regia*, *Peltophorum ferrugineum*, Golden bamboo, Teak, and several other tree saplings. The fruit plants include mango, sapota, guava, and coconut. Several ornamental and flowering plants growing such as hibiscus, periwinkle, and jasmine are mostly hardy and suitable for dry land cultivation. These plants are irrigated with a drip irrigation system, and water is lifted from the watershed pond.

**Figure 17-1. Tree plantation at Palshi.**



**Figure 17-2. Teak plantation at Palshi.**



**Figure 17-3. Coconut plantation at Palshi.**



**Figure 17-4. Huge infrastructure at Palshi Village, Baramuti.**



Taware has taken a loan of Rs. 2.5 crore from Janta Sahkari Bank Pune for infrastructure development such as 10 rooms with attached western toilets and bathrooms, 10 rooms of Indian style with attached toilets and bathrooms, two dormitories for 25 people each, a conference hall with seating capacity for 100 people, and a dining hall with seating capacity for 200 people. The center also has a huge watershed pond with a size of 55 mts by 55 mts of 2 crore liters of water storage capacity. An open well has little water as the area is rocky and it is difficult to get water from the ground.

This specific project of agritourism generates an annual revenue of about Rs. 65 lakhs (2012–13). This stems from various primary sources as day and night camp, secondary sources as summer camp for three-days duration, and other sources as training for farmers for seven-days duration. The charges for day and night camp are around Rs. 600–700 per person, summer camp for three-days duration is around Rs. 2500–4000 per person and Rs. 10,000 per person for farmers training for seven days. Taware is also paying Rs. 2.75 lakhs per month on a loan installment. He is satisfied with the present level of his business. During the financial year 2012–13, around 10,000 tourists visited including some from 14 countries.

This project is implemented with the involvement of farmers from the nearby villages. Therefore, the farmers are also involved in sharing the revenue generated. This keeps the farmers motivated and attached to the project. The farmers also directly benefit as they can market their products to the tourists. Women's self-help groups get ready customers for their handicrafts, leaving high profit margins. Tourists comprise education groups such as school children, college students, business management colleges, corporates, families, and foreign tourists. Similar results were reported by Gopal et al. (2008).

As a part of the other sources of revenue generation, the center has trained 1,500 farmers since 2007, and 370 farmers have started their own agritourism centers.

The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) has recognized Taware's efforts and applauded his work. He is also a recipient of several awards such as the National Tourism Award for 2008–09 from the vice president of India; finalist of the Global Tourism for Tomorrow Award 2011 by the WTTC, London; winner of Global Responsible Tourism Award 2011 by Responsible Travel, London; and winner of Responsible Tourism Award 2012 by Wild Asia, Malaysia, for his innovative concept of agritourism and successful business model for sustainable agri-rural tourists.

**Figure 17-5. Overhead tank for water supply at Palshi.**



**Figure 17-7. Inside view of the rooms.**



**Figure 17-9. Common practice followed by a woman for drying grains.**



**Figure 17-6. Stay facility at Palshi.**



**Figure 17-8. Huge watershed pond at Palshi.**



**Figure 17-10. Pandurang Taware with school students at his center.**



While developing the infrastructure at Palshi for tourists, Taware has engaged local people such as masons and laborers and used all the natural resources readily available at his farm at Palshi. The material such as natural boulders and gravels are used for construction, which helped him to reduce costs. Sixteen workers handle the day-to-day tourism activities on payment of Rs. 5000–7000 per month per person, which means that 16 families have food security.

During tourists' visits, the local artisans, pot makers, and farmers are informed by the center to bring their handicrafts and agricultural produce so that the tourists can buy directly from the producers. This concept opted by Taware made him more popular among the local villagers. Whenever the vegetables and other grocery items are required, a simple phone call works for Taware and he will get the things at his centers from the local farmers and vendors. Farmers and vendors are also happy as they are getting the maximum benefit from their products. Otherwise, farmers must travel 30 kms away to visit Baramati Market or 100 kms to visit Pune Market to sell their produce.

Being of a farming background and experienced in running the agritourism center and involved in developing resorts in the country, Taware is also encouraging other fellow farmers to come out into small ventures of agritourism models, which will support their livelihood and improve their lifestyle.

**Figure 17-11. Foreign tourists at Palshi Village practicing yoga.**



**Figure 17-12. Foreign tourists in traditional dress at Palshi.**



**Figure 17-13. Foreign tourists in a traditional Maharashtrian.**



**Figure 17-14. Foreign children with goats at Palshi.**



## Agritourism: Andaman & Nicobar Islands Experiences

To explore the opportunities in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and to give importance to the need to promote agritourism to enhance the livelihoods of farmers of the islands, Extension Education Institute Hyderabad has organized a week-long training program on agritourism by inviting Pandurang Taware from Pune, Maharashtra. The objective of conducting this training program is to orient the Extension officers on agritourism and to share the experiences of practicing farmer Taware.

**Figure 17-15. Hutbay agritourism center.**



**Figure 17-16. Investigators on the way to tourism center.**



**Figure 17-17. Extension trainee officers visiting tourism center.**



## Agritourism Model: Neil Island

This model is a multisector integration model, touching on tourism, agriculture, and disaster management. Neil Island (now known as Shaheed Dweep), one of the Andaman Islands, has a presence on the tourism map of India for its vast and beautiful beaches with white, fine sand, and coral reefs. Neil is also known as the Vegetable Bowl of Andaman due to its hardworking and progressive farmer population, mostly of Bengali origin.

With the development of beach tourism, the farmers who had lands adjoining the sea were the major beneficiaries. But Neil also has about 41.6 ha of hilly land. The farmers with hilly land were being left behind in the race to adopt tourism. The Department of Agriculture has four farms on Neil Island, which includes a hilly land plantation of 0.4 ha. That particular hilly land was mentioned in the book of tourism interest called *Lonely Planet*, widely referred to by tourists.



The 2004 tsunami wreaked havoc on the islands, causing the islanders to prepare for any future events. Special relief measures were developed in which relief materials for such situations were stored on all the islands for use during such calamities. In Neil, those relief items were stored at Neil Kendra village, which is close to the sea, and in case of a tsunami or similar events, it will be washed away first. Moreover, being a tourist hot spot, if a tsunami alert comes, most of the people, being new to the place, may not find the road to the nearest highest point to save their lives.

Due to the increase in tourism, the land value increased. Poor farmers were always eager to sell their land as the rates were considered to be very high. In many cases, it sold for several crores of Indian rupees, which the farmers could not earn from the land in their entire lives with traditional agriculture. However, it was also observed that those farmers who took up agritourism were better off than ones who sold their lands.

Keeping in mind all of these issues, a model agritourism project was conceptualized on the 0.4 ha hilly land in the departmental farm. The idea behind the project is to use the departmental farm in a more profitable way, in which usually the income is generated mostly through collection and sale of coconuts. As the view from the top of the hill was beautiful and was already mentioned in *Lonely Planet*, it could be developed into a major tourist attraction.

The plantation already has various fruiting plants such as mango, sapota, guava, and coconut. With inclusion of a sale point to the hill, the visitors can be served farm fresh products. Ten ecofriendly huts were developed for staying. A restaurant was also developed on the hilltop.

As this hill is the nearest highest point, a road was developed from the main road to the hilltop with proper sign board at the main road showing information like “way to highest point” to be taken in case of tsunami alert. The tsunami relief materials will be stored on the top, so that people reaching for rescue can use the materials. Finance for the project has been arranged through National Agriculture Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), Disaster Management and Tourism.

The unit was to run through a PPP model:

- Public (government departments such as Agriculture, Tourism, Forest, Disaster Management)
- Private (assets and infrastructure developed by administration and leased out to local unemployed youths)
- Panchayat (elective village council will be looking after the management)
- Partnership (all working together)

The agritourism model has the potential to improve the financial situation of farming while teaching the population to understand and value the important role of the farmer as well as the path that food takes to get to their tables.

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