



Original Article

Youth and Agri-Tourism: Pathways to Sustainable Rural Development in India

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Abstract

Agri-tourism has emerged as a promising approach to diversify rural economies, provide supplementary income to farmers, and preserve cultural traditions while promoting environmental sustainability. In India, with its predominantly agrarian economy, the potential of agri-tourism is substantial. This study investigates the awareness, perceptions, and suggestions of college youth regarding agri-tourism and its role in sustainable rural development. Primary data were collected from 132 students through a structured Google Form questionnaire. Quantitative analysis (frequencies, percentages, mean scores) and qualitative thematic analysis were applied. Results revealed that 90.2% of respondents were aware of agri-tourism, though depth of knowledge varied. Students strongly associated agri-tourism with rural employment (91%), farmer income diversification (88%), cultural promotion (89%), and environmental sustainability (87%). Key barriers included lack of awareness (68%), financial constraints (63%), poor infrastructure (58%), and insufficient government support (55%). Over 54% of students expressed interest in starting their own agri-tourism venture, while more than 80% agreed that agri-tourism aligns with the vision of *Viksit Bharat 2047*. The study concludes that youth are not only aware but also willing to engage in agri-tourism, provided that awareness programs, skill training, entrepreneurship support, and infrastructural improvements are implemented.

Keywords: Youth, Agri-Tourism, Rural Development, Sustainability

Introduction

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing sectors in the global economy, generating employment, income, and cultural exchange. Among its diverse forms, agri-tourism has gained momentum as a sustainable development model. It enables visitors to experience rural lifestyles, farming activities, and cultural traditions, while farmers benefit from additional income and community empowerment. India's large rural population and agricultural base make agri-tourism particularly relevant. States like Maharashtra have pioneered agri-tourism initiatives, supported by the Maharashtra State Agri-Tourism Development Corporation. Farm-stay models in Pune, Baramati, and Satara districts have shown success in attracting both domestic and international tourists. However, infrastructural challenges, financial constraints, and lack of awareness hinder widespread adoption. Youth are central to the growth of agri-tourism. As future entrepreneurs, consumers, and promoters, their role is crucial in ensuring sustainability. Their preference for experiential, eco-friendly, and culturally immersive tourism aligns well with agri-tourism. With India's vision of *Viksit Bharat 2047* emphasizing inclusive development, youth engagement in agri-tourism can become a strategic pathway for rural transformation.

Literature Review:

Agri-tourism has gained prominence as a sustainable model for rural development, offering economic diversification, cultural preservation, and ecological balance. It plays a crucial role in enhancing rural livelihoods through tourism-linked agricultural practices (Kale Bilas Sakharam, 2025). Agri-tourism contributes directly to income generation and employment opportunities for farmers and local communities (Kale Bilas Sakharam, 2025). Similarly, it is described as a paradigm shift capable of revitalizing rural economies through sustainable practices

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(Khatri, 2023). Youth engagement is a critical factor in the success of agri-tourism initiatives. Research emphasizes the importance of involving rural youth in agribusiness and nature-positive farming, as they bring innovation, energy, and alignment with sustainability goals when properly supported (Kumar Mukesh & Dhingra Atul, 2024; Rana et al., 2024). The behavioral patterns of young adults toward agro-tourism also indicate a growing entrepreneurial interest among students (Vasavada, 2021). Cultural preservation through agri-tourism is another recurring theme. Agri-tourism can safeguard agricultural heritage by promoting local cuisine, folk traditions, and festivals (Kumar Mukesh & Dhingra Atul, 2024). This aligns with the Ministry of Tourism's draft strategy for rural tourism, which positions agri-tourism as a vehicle for achieving *Aatmanirbhar Bharat* through community-based tourism and indigenous practices (Draft National Strategy & Roadmap for Development of Rural Tourism in India An Initiative towards Aatmanirbhar Bharat Government of India Ministry of Tourism National Strategy & Roadmap for Development of Rural Tourism in India An Initiative towards Aatmanirbhar Bharat Contents, 2021). Quantitative approaches to tourism analysis provide methodological insights valuable for assessing agri-tourism's impact (Provenzano & Baggio, 2020). A student-centric perspective analyzing perceptions and attitudes toward agri-tourism also supports the focus on youth awareness and willingness in the current study (K Y et al., 2023).

Policy and institutional frameworks are essential for scaling agri-tourism. Sustainable tourism policies emphasizing ecological balance and inclusive growth are necessary to ensure long-term viability (Council on Energy, Environment and Water, n.d.). Practical case studies have demonstrated successful agri-tourism models, highlighting the importance of replicable best practices and government support (Raj & Todd, 2018). Challenges and opportunities in the Indian context include infrastructural gaps, financial constraints, and lack of awareness, which remain major barriers to agri-tourism growth (Shuya et al., 2024). Nonetheless, targeted interventions can significantly enhance agri-tourism's contribution to rural income generation (Hari Koli, 2023). An informal yet insightful analysis also points to the growing popularity of agri-tourism among youth, indicating a rising trend that warrants structured support and policy attention (Sharma S, 2019). Collectively, these studies provide a robust foundation for understanding the multifaceted role of agri-tourism in India. They highlight its potential to empower youth, preserve cultural heritage, and drive sustainable rural development, while also identifying the structural and policy-level challenges that must be addressed to unlock its full potential.

Objectives:

1. To assess the awareness of agri-tourism among college youth.
2. To analyze perceptions regarding the socio-economic, cultural, and environmental benefits of agri-tourism.
3. To identify barriers and challenges to agri-tourism development.
4. To examine students' willingness to engage in agri-tourism as participants or entrepreneurs.
5. To evaluate the role of agri-tourism in sustainable rural development aligned with *Viksit Bharat 2047*.

Data and Methodology:

This study employed a descriptive survey research design to investigate the awareness, perceptions, and entrepreneurial interest of college youth regarding agri-tourism and its role in sustainable rural development. The target population consisted of undergraduate students in their final academic years, selected through convenience sampling. A total of 132 respondents participated in the study, with data collected via a structured Google Form questionnaire. The instrument included both closed-ended and open-ended questions to capture quantitative metrics and qualitative insights. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and mean scores based on a Likert scale. These measures provided a clear understanding of students' levels of awareness, perceived benefits, developmental pathways, and barriers related to agri-tourism. In parallel, qualitative data from open-ended responses were subjected to thematic analysis, allowing for the identification of recurring suggestions and attitudes toward agri-tourism initiatives. This mixed-methods approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of youth perspectives, combining statistical accuracy with narrative depth. The methodology was designed to align with the study's objectives and to generate actionable insights relevant to policy, education, and rural entrepreneurship.

Data Presentation (Results):

1. Demographic Profile of Respondents: The demographic data collected from 132 college youth reveals a youthful and predominantly rural sample. A majority of respondents (68%) were between the ages of 17 and 19, indicating that the study primarily captures the perspectives of students in the early phase of their undergraduate education. The gender distribution was skewed towards females, with 71% female and 29% male participants. This suggests a strong female representation in rural academic settings. Additionally, 87% of respondents came from rural backgrounds, reinforcing the relevance of the study to rural development and agri-tourism initiatives.

2. Awareness and Knowledge of Agri-Tourism: Awareness of agri-tourism among students was notably high, with 90.2% indicating that they had heard of the concept. However, when asked to self-assess their level of knowledge, only 27% rated it as excellent, while 35% considered their understanding good. Another 29% had only basic knowledge, and 9% had no knowledge at all. This disparity between awareness and depth of understanding highlights the need for targeted educational programs and experiential learning opportunities to deepen students' grasp of agri-tourism.

3. Perceived Benefits of Agri-Tourism: Students demonstrated a strong recognition of the multifaceted benefits of agri-tourism. A significant 91% associated it with employment generation, while 88% saw it as a means to provide additional income for farmers. Cultural preservation was acknowledged by 89% of respondents, and 87% linked agri-tourism to environmental sustainability. These findings suggest that youth perceive agri-tourism not merely as a tourism model but as a holistic development strategy that integrates economic, cultural, and ecological dimensions.

4. Pathways to Rural Development: When asked about specific pathways through which agri-tourism could contribute to rural development, students emphasized employment creation (70%) and skill development (60%) as top priorities. Income

diversification was also recognized by 60% of respondents, while 55% highlighted eco-tourism and conservation. Youth entrepreneurship was identified by 50%, indicating a moderate level of interest in business opportunities. However, only 32% associated agri-tourism with the promotion of local products, suggesting a gap in understanding of market linkages and value addition.

5. Barriers to Agri-Tourism Development: Students identified several barriers that hinder the growth of agri-tourism. The most cited challenge was lack of awareness (68%), followed by financial constraints (63%) and poor infrastructure (58%). Additionally, 55% pointed to insufficient government support, and 49% noted the seasonal nature of agri-tourism as a limiting factor. These responses align with existing literature and underscore the need for systemic interventions, including policy reforms, financial assistance, and infrastructure development.

6. Youth Willingness to Engage in Agri-Tourism: The entrepreneurial potential among youth was evident, with 54.6% expressing a willingness to start their own agri-tourism ventures. Likert scale responses further supported this enthusiasm, with mean scores of 3.86 for agri-tourism as a source of employment and 3.90 for training youth in entrepreneurship. Moreover, over 80% of students agreed or strongly agreed that agri-tourism aligns with the national development vision of *Viksit Bharat 2047*. These findings highlight the readiness of youth to actively participate in agri-tourism, provided that enabling conditions are in place.

7. Suggestions from Open-Ended Responses: Qualitative insights from open-ended responses revealed several constructive suggestions. Students advocated for awareness campaigns through colleges and social media, the creation of affordable and student-friendly tourism packages, and the introduction of internships and skill development programs. Infrastructure improvements—such as better transport, sanitation, and internet connectivity—were also emphasized. Furthermore, students called for entrepreneurship support through subsidies and incubation centers, and recommended cultural integration through food festivals, folk music, and traditional games to enhance the tourist experience.

Data Analysis and Interpretation (Discussion)

Awareness and Knowledge: The findings indicate that a substantial proportion of respondents (90.2%) are aware of the concept of agri-tourism. However, only 27% of students reported possessing an excellent level of understanding, while the remainder demonstrated varying degrees of familiarity. This disparity suggests that although agri-tourism is widely recognized among youth, comprehensive knowledge remains limited. The results underscore the necessity for targeted educational interventions, such as curriculum integration and experiential learning, to deepen conceptual clarity and practical understanding.

Perceived Benefits: Respondents exhibited a strong consensus regarding the multifaceted benefits of agri-tourism. A significant majority associated it with employment generation (91%), income diversification for farmers (88%), cultural preservation (89%), and environmental sustainability (87%). These perceptions reflect a holistic appreciation of agri-tourism as a strategic tool for rural transformation, encompassing economic, socio-cultural, and ecological dimensions. The data affirm that youth recognize agri-tourism not merely as a leisure activity but as a development-oriented model with long-term impact.

Development Pathways: In terms of developmental potential, students identified local employment creation (70%) and skill development (60%) as the most critical pathways. Youth entrepreneurship was acknowledged by 50% of respondents, indicating moderate interest in agri-tourism as a business opportunity. However, only 32% recognized the role of agri-tourism in promoting local products, revealing a gap in awareness regarding market linkages and value chain integration. These insights suggest the need for capacity-building programs that emphasize entrepreneurship, product branding, and rural enterprise development.

Barriers to Development: The analysis of perceived barriers reveals that lack of awareness (68%), financial constraints (63%), and inadequate infrastructure (58%) are the most prominent challenges. Additionally, 55% of students cited insufficient government support, while 49% pointed to the seasonal nature of agri-tourism as a limiting factor. These findings mirror broader national challenges and highlight the structural impediments that must be addressed to unlock the sector's full potential. Policy reforms, improved access to finance, and infrastructure development are essential to mitigate these constraints.

Youth Willingness and Strategic Alignment: The study reveals a promising level of entrepreneurial intent among youth, with 54.6% expressing willingness to initiate agri-tourism ventures. Furthermore, Likert scale responses yielded high mean scores for agri-tourism as a source of employment (3.86) and for training youth in entrepreneurship (3.90). Notably, over 80% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that agri-tourism aligns with the national vision of *Viksit Bharat 2047*. These findings affirm that youth are not only receptive to agri-tourism but also view it as a viable mechanism for inclusive and sustainable rural development.

Findings

The study yielded several key insights into the awareness, perceptions, and entrepreneurial interest of college youth regarding agri-tourism:

- A substantial 90.2% of students were aware of agri-tourism, though only 27% demonstrated excellent knowledge, indicating a gap in depth of understanding.
- Students strongly associated agri-tourism with employment generation (91%), farmer income diversification (88%), cultural preservation (89%), and environmental sustainability (87%), reflecting a multidimensional appreciation of its benefits.
- Development pathways most recognized included local employment (70%), skill development (60%), and youth entrepreneurship (50%), while promotion of local products (32%) was less emphasized.
- Major barriers identified were lack of awareness (68%), financial constraints (63%), poor infrastructure (58%), and insufficient government support (55%), highlighting systemic challenges.

- Over 54% of respondents expressed willingness to initiate agri-tourism ventures, and more than 80% agreed that agri-tourism aligns with the national vision of *Viksit Bharat 2047*, underscoring youth readiness to contribute to rural transformation.

Conclusion

The research concludes that college youth possess high levels of awareness and favorable perceptions of agri-tourism. They view it as a strategic instrument for sustainable rural development, capable of generating employment, enhancing farmer livelihoods, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting ecological balance. The entrepreneurial inclination among youth, coupled with their alignment to national development goals, positions them as critical stakeholders in the agri-tourism ecosystem.

However, the study also reveals persistent barriers—particularly in awareness, financing, infrastructure, and policy support—that must be addressed to translate youth enthusiasm into actionable outcomes. Bridging these gaps through targeted interventions will be essential to harness the full potential of agri-tourism as a transformative sector in India's rural economy.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen youth engagement in agri-tourism and promote sustainable rural development:

1. **Awareness Programs:** Organize campus workshops, rural immersion tours, and digital campaigns to enhance understanding of agri-tourism.
2. **Curriculum Integration:** Introduce agri-tourism modules, field visits, and experiential learning in higher education institutions.
3. **Skill Development:** Launch certificate courses in organic farming, eco-tourism, hospitality, and rural entrepreneurship.
4. **Entrepreneurship Support:** Establish incubation centers, provide start-up grants, and offer financial aid for youth-led agri-tourism ventures.
5. **Infrastructure Enhancement:** Upgrade rural transport, sanitation, internet connectivity, and eco-friendly accommodations to improve tourist experiences.
6. **Policy Frameworks:** Develop state and national agri-tourism policies that prioritize youth participation and align with *Viksit Bharat 2047*.
7. **Cultural Integration:** Promote local cuisine, folk traditions, handicrafts, and festivals to enrich agri-tourism offerings and preserve heritage.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper

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