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Research Note

Entrepreneurship and agribusiness education for rural development

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Abstract

The promotion and development of agribusiness and agro-industry in India can play an important role in diversification of economic activities and generation of value-addition to agricultural produce in rural India. This kind of approach will also have positive impact on agricultural and labour productivity in addition to creating employment opportunities for the majority of the rural population. However there exist a training gap between the actual and desired level of technical and managerial skills among the farmers required for promotion of agribusiness & agro industry in rural India. To develop human resources for agribusiness and self-employment, tailor-made educational and training programmes for entrepreneurship development, agribusiness management and extension are needed. It is high time that all agricultural students are given business orientation through tailor-made courses in business management and entrepreneurship development to empower them to take up self-employment. State Agricultural Universities (SAUs) have strong first-hand experience of rural problems on one hand and a reservoir of multidisciplinary experts on the other. There is a need to strengthen agribusiness and entrepreneurship education through recruiting trained staff, development training of the existing staff, close inter departmental collaboration and effective agricultural extension programmes. The efforts are also required to create a strong interface between SAUs and industry through their involvement in development of course curriculum, providing internship opportunities and on campus recruitment of university students in agro-based industries.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, agribusiness education, entrepreneurship

Introduction

Generation of employment opportunities plays central role in overall socioeconomic development of a nation. In current scenario where further employment generating capacity of agriculture is under doubt, small and medium enterprises in the rural non-farm sector hold the potential for further employment. However, it is not uncommon that farmers start business and soon close it down, either due to its non-profitability or technical reasons. A major cause for such failures has been lack of technical and managerial training on the part of farmers. State Agricultural Universities (SAUs) and Deemed Universities (DUs) for agricultural research and education can play a major role in imparting need- based short-term training in agribusiness and entrepreneurship development to farmers. Moreover, curricula of the agriculture undergraduate programmes need to be focused towards entrepreneurship development so that young pass outs from universities are able to start new enterprises rather than seeking employment in an already volatile job market.

Role of agricultural universities in small business education

Some business schools outside National Agricultural Research System (NARS) e.g. IRMA, MANAGE, IIMA, NIAM, IIML etc., have taken lead in agribusiness education. SAUs have included agribusiness education as a part of their curriculum. However, SAUs and DUs are better placed for imparting such an education due to a number of reasons. First, these institutions (SAUs) have practical and first-hand knowledge of farm business and could delineate research questions in the area, develop extension programmes and conduct teaching programmes that reflect real needs and issues of agribusiness in rural areas. The skills and management concepts emphasized in finance, business management and record keeping courses taught to agricultural marketing and farm management students are related more closely to agripreneurs and small business in agriculture than business courses emphasizing corporate management structure and skills (Lee, 1994) [1].

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There is a need for reorientation of traditional farm management, finance and agribusiness courses to a small business curriculum that appeal to new production areas within the agricultural sector as well to students with interests outside agriculture. Secondly, agricultural economists are expert at in risk management, decision analysis, mathematical programming and farm level studies and other tools useful to small business enterprise. Thirdly, NARS has its spread across the country and contains a vast reservoir of scientific and technical staff; which can be trained and deployed to serve this sector in view of the changes taking place in international trade scenario.

Agribusiness programme can be integrated with agricultural science programmes at undergraduate level. It is essential that technical knowledge is complemented with working knowledge of small business industries in order to understand business problems and conduct a successful business enterprise. A key factor affecting the success of such a programme will be its linkage with business schools and collaboration with industry. Research and extension programmes in the area of entrepreneurship and agribusiness can directly solve the problems of agricultural sector apart from enriching the teaching programme with suitable case studies.

Training need assessment

In order to understand what professional training of farmers

are needed, a survey was conducted in Haryana in 2018 representing crop growers, vegetable growers, floriculturists, poultry farmers, extension workers and researchers. A total of 50 farmers, 50 extension workers and 50 researchers were interviewed and asked to give relative weightage to different training areas needed for farmers. The results of the survey are presented in Table-1. It can be observed that farmers and extension personnel view technical and farm management training, as the most important area whereas researchers perceive that training in application of already available information is the most important area. However, financial management and marketing management training when taken together, as these are the core areas for any agribusiness training, comprise the most important area of training. It simply justifies the premise that a greater emphasis should be given on business component of the agricultural education.

A recent initiative by Small Farmers Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC) and MANAGE to impart short term training to potential agripreneurs is a major step in entrepreneurship development. However, this training leaves much to be desired both in terms of theoretical coverage and practical exposure to participants. Unless there is an institutional framework to monitor the quality of such efforts, very low percent of trainees would either plan or start a small business and be able to manage it professionally.

Table 1: Weightage for professional training of farmers as perceived by agriculturists (Percent)

Category	Technical information and Farm management techniques	Information application	Financial management	Marketing management
Farmers	31.45	25.63	20.45	22.47
Extension workers	37.10	20.59	16.56	25.75
Researchers	17.84	30.55	23.49	28.12

Conclusion

It has been realized now that the promotion and development of agribusiness and agro-industry in India can play an important role in diversification of economic activities and generation of employment opportunities for the majority of the rural population, particularly the educated rural youth. This can also improve the productivity of agricultural labour. However, there exists a training gap between the actual and desired level of technical and managerial skills among the farmers required for promotion of agribusiness & agro industry in rural India. This requires development of infrastructure and supporting services such as transportation, banking and electricity for rural households. To develop human resources for agribusiness and self-employment, tailor-made educational and training programmes for entrepreneurship development, agribusiness management and extension are needed. These programmes should be developed based on specific characteristics of local resources and labour as well as the market trends. It is high time that all agricultural students are given business orientation through tailor-made courses in business management and entrepreneurship development to empower them to take up self-employment. SAUs have strong first-hand experience of rural problems on one hand and a reservoir of multidisciplinary experts on the other. There is a need to strengthen agribusiness and entrepreneurship education through recruiting trained staff, development training of the existing staff, close inter departmental collaboration and effective agricultural extension programmes. The efforts are

also required to create a strong interface between SAUs and industry through their involvement in development of course curriculum, providing internship opportunities and on campus recruitment of university students in agro- based industries.

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