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## Empowering agro-tourism in Karnataka: Farmer-driven challenges and solutions

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### Abstract

Agro-Tourism culture which includes set of activities or operations that makes use of land of an artist or farmer to attract visitors. Agro tourism provides an opportunity to the tourists to have an authentic and enchanting practical experience of local foods, agricultural implements, practices and acquainted with the various fields and communities in the region. This research paper investigates the challenges faced by farmer owners of Agro-Tourism Centers (ATCs) in Karnataka, India. The study was conducted in four selected districts, namely Bangalore, Chikmagalur, Tumkur, and Kodagu. Ex-post-facto research design was employed, and primary data were collected from 40 ATCs, with 10 from each district. The findings challenges hinder the promotion of ATCs. The paper also presents recommendations provided by farmer owners to overcome these constraints and foster the growth of agro-tourism in the region. This research investigates the challenges like financial constraints, human resource limitations, technical obstacles, situational difficulties, and policy issues are analyzed. Recommendations include government support, comprehensive tourism packages, partnerships, customer-centric approaches, and enhanced marketing. Addressing these challenges can unlock the full potential of ATCs, benefitting the local economy and enriching tourists' experiences. By examining these challenges and the strategies proposed by the stakeholders themselves, we can pave the way for a more resilient and sustainable future for ATCs. The study underscores the multifaceted challenges faced by farmer owners of ATCs in Karnataka. It is imperative for stakeholders, including government bodies and industry players, to work collaboratively to realize the untapped potential of ATCs in Karnataka.

**Keywords:** Agro tourism, farmers, constraints, suggestions, government

### Introduction

Agro-tourism centers (ATCs) serve as unique destinations where visitors can experience the rich agricultural heritage and rural lifestyle of Karnataka. These centers play a crucial role in promoting rural tourism and providing income-generating opportunities for farmers.

In the broader sense, Agro-Tourism culture which includes set of activities or operations that makes use of land of an artist or farmer to attract visitors. Agro tourism provides an opportunity to the tourists to have an authentic and enchanting practical experience of local foods, agricultural implements, practices and acquainted with the various fields and communities in the region (Chandra Shekhar, 2022) [4].

Gannon., (1994) [5] defined Agro tourism as "A range of activities, services and amenities provided by farmers and rural people to attract tourists to their area in order to generate extra income for their business." In general, agro tourism is defined as any form of tourism that showcases the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations thereby benefitting the local community economically and socially and enabling interaction between the tourists and the locals for a more enriching tourism experience.

Today agriculture sector in India is facing acute problems like of infrastructure, warehousing, climate change, excessive rains, drought, no irrigation facilities, availability of inputs, finance and effective marketing etc., Agriculture in India is most uncertain depending on monsoon with less avenues from irrigation. Hence it is needed to supplement the income of rural folk and the Indian farmers should find an alternate means of livelihood. Since agriculture is the main occupation of the people in India there is a need to think of allied income generation strategies with agriculture, one of which is agro tourism (Chada and Bhakare, 2012) [3].

In agro tourism a native or local farmer offers tours to their agriculture farm to allow visitors to view them growing, harvesting, and processing locally grown crops such as maize, sorghum or any produce the person would not come across in their areas. Often the farmers would provide farm-stay opportunities including educational programs and recreational activities

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(Nilsson, 2002) [7]. Agri tourism can contribute to the overall income, cash flow and profitability of a farm by providing alternative income via farm products, and farming activities (Colton and Bissix, 2005) [2]. Karnataka is one of the prominent agricultural producing state and it is one of the top ten domestic tourism destinations in India, Ranking IV among the states (Hamsa *et al.*, 2015) [6] and there is a large scope and great potential to develop agro-tourism. Many Agro Tourism Centres.

The success of ATCs is contingent upon addressing various challenges faced by farmer owners. This research aims to identify and discuss these challenges and provide recommendations to enhance the prospects of ATCs in Karnataka.

**Review of Literature**

Agri tourism is symbiotic association of agriculture sector, tourism industry and farm business which has become popular in the 2010s in Konkan region of India where paradigm shift from “onshore tourism” to “offshore tourism” is being observed in Goan Tourism industry. As the carrying capacity of most of the famous beaches has reached a maximum threshold level, it is imperative to shift the attention of tourists to the hinterlands which have been blessed with the enchanting scenic beauty of agriculture farms, plantations and natural forest (Barbuddhe & Singh, 2014) [1]. Taware (2013) [8] Three important factors contributing to the success of agritourism include farmer, village, and agriculture. Combination of these three components creates a wonderful situation which provides unlimited satisfaction to the tourist especially from urban areas. (Taware, 2013) [8].

**Methodology**

The current study was conducted in four selected districts *viz.*, Bangalore, Chikmagalur, Tumkur, and Kodagu districts of Karnataka state. Ex-post-facto research design was adopted for conducting the study. The primary data was collected from 40 Agro Tourism Centres (ATCs) of four selected districts, comprises of 10 ATCs from each district. 40 farmer owners of

ATCs one owner from each ATCs was selected as respondents for the study. The simple random sampling technique was employed in selecting the respondents for the present investigation.

**Results and Discussions**

**Constraints as expressed by farmer owners of agro-tourism centers**

This part highlights about the several constraints faced by owners of agro-tourism centers. These constraints are explained under 5 different parts, financial, human resource, technical. situational and policy challenges and ranks were assigned based on the response from the respondents.

The data presented in Table 1 clearly highlights that the majority of agro-tourism center owners (97.5%) find the High cost of labor as a significant financial challenge. This can be attributed to various reasons, the diverse range of activities offered by agro-tourism centers, demanding a considerable workforce. The need for skilled labor in tasks such as farming, guided tours, outdoor agricultural activities drives up labor costs. Additionally, many of these laborers work regularly that leading them to demand higher wages.

The constraint high cost of land development, initial investment identified by 95 percent and ranked second. This is due to the fact that agro-tourism centers often require substantial investment in land development, infrastructure, constructing accommodations, setting up recreational areas and other facilities to provide a quality experience to visitors.

Other constraints observed were, “Lack of insurance coverage”, with 92.50per cent of owners expressing this concern which was ranked third. Following closely, the fourth-ranked constraint, indicated by 87.50per cent of owners, was the "Lack of awareness about credit and subsidy facilities for ATC." Additionally, the fifth-ranked constraint, mentioned by 77.50per cent of owners, pertained to the "Low profits from the products" offered at the centers. Lastly, the last ranked constraint, expressed by 75 per cent of owners, related to the "High maintenance cost" incurred in running and preserving these agro-tourism establishments.

**Table 1:** Financial challenges faced by the owners in promotion of ATC (n=40)

I	Financial challenges	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
1.	High cost of labor	39	97.50	I
2.	High cost of land development and initial investment	38	95.00	II
3.	High Maintenance cost	30	75.00	VI
4.	No insurance coverage	37	92.50	III
5.	Low profits from the products	31	77.50	V
6.	Lack of awareness about credit and subsidy facilities for ATC	35	87.50	IV

Table 2 highlights the human resource challenges faced by farmer owners of ATCs. The constraint "Weak communication skills," was reported by majority (97.50%) of the respondents it was ranked first. The second-ranked constraint was "Poor management skills," expressed by 90 per cent of the respondents.

Other major constraints faced by agro-tourism center owners

were, the most prominent was the lack of mindset for a commercial approach that was expressed by 82.50per cent of farmers. Another significant challenge, acknowledged by 77.50per cent of farmers, was the non-willingness of tourists to purchase farm products and Lack of organized effort like farmer organizations identified by 72.50per cent of farmers that is ranked last among human resource challenges.

**Table 2:** Human resource challenges faced by the farmers in promotion of ATC (n=40)

II	Human resource challenges	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
1.	Lack of mindset for commercial approach.	34	82.50	III
2.	Weak communication skill	39	97.50	I
3.	Lack of organized effort like Farmer organizations	29	72.50	V
4.	Poor management skills	36	90.00	II
5.	Non-willingness of the tourists to purchase farm products.	31	77.50	IV

Table 3 explains the technical challenges faced by owners of Agro- Tourism centers (ATCs). Among the technical challenges identified, the most prevalent one was the insufficient literature available for agro tourism practice, ranked first with 97.50 per cent of the farmers expressed it as a major technical constraint, it may be due to the fact that the majority of agro-tourism center owners encounter difficulties in accessing comprehensive information as there is a lack of extensive literature available on this subject. The second-highest ranked technical challenge is the lack of training in hospitality and management, which was reported by 92.50 per cent of the farmers. This finding suggests that many farmers

may lack the necessary skills and knowledge in hospitality and management that are crucial for providing quality services to the customers. The absence of proper training programs in these areas were felt by the farmers. Various other constraints were reported by agro-tourism center owners, including the inability to introduce more activities, accounts for by 90 per cent of the respondents, 82.50 per cent of owners highlighted the lack of medical facilities as a significant constraint, 80 per cent of respondents expressed the challenge of limited transportation to reach interior rural locations. Lastly, 75 per cent of farmers cited the non-availability of inputs as a major constraint they faced.

**Table 3:** Technical challenges faced by the owners in promotion of ATC (n=40)

III	Technical challenges	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
1.	Insufficient literature for agro tourism practice	39	97.5	I
2.	Inability to introduce more activities	36	90	III
3.	Lack of transportation to interior rural places	32	80	V
4.	Lack of medical facility	33	82.5	IV
5.	Non-availability of inputs	30	75	VI
6.	Lack of training in hospitality and management	37	92.5	II

The results of the study on situational challenges faced by owners of agro tourism centers (ATCs) are presented in Table 4 among the situational challenges, unfavorable weather conditions were reported as the most significant obstacle, ranking first with majority (92.5%) of respondents. This finding highlights the vulnerability of agro tourism centers to

adverse weather conditions. Limited and irregular power supply was the second most common challenge reported by the owners, with 85 per cent of farmers expressing it and ranking second. And Less tourists during peak agricultural activities ranked third (42.5%) among the situational challenges.

**Table 4:** Situational challenges faced by the owners in promotion of ATC (n=40)

IV	Situational challenges	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
1.	Less tourists during peak agricultural activities	17	42.50	III
2.	Unfavourable weather conditions	37	92.50	I
3.	Limited and irregular power supply	34	85.00	II

The results from Table 5 indicate the policy challenges faced by farmer owners of agro tourism centers (ATCs). Among the policy challenges, "Lack of government support" was reported as the most significant constraint, with majority (95%) respondents identifying it as a major challenge. This indicates that a majority of the farmers believe that the government's support and intervention are lacking in the promotion of ATCs. The second most prominent challenge

reported by the owners of ATCs was the "Complexity in getting a license from the government." This challenge was identified by 32 respondents, representing 80 per cent of the sample. Another significant challenge reported by the farmers was the absence of a "specific policy for the promotion of agro tourism." This challenge was highlighted by 77.50 per cent of the respondents.

**Table 5:** Policy resource challenges faced by the owners in promotion of ATC (n=40)

V	Policy challenges	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
1.	Lack of government support	38	95.00	I
2.	Complexity in getting license from Govt	32	80.00	III
3.	No specific policy for promotion of agro tourism	31	77.50	III

**Suggestions given by farmer owners of agro-tourism centers to overcome the constraints**

Table 6 indicates the suggestions expressed by owner farmers of agro-tourism. From table, it is evident that the most common suggestion, given by all of the farmers (100%), is "Provide sufficient fund for agro-tourism development by Government." This suggestion is ranked first, indicating that farmers strongly emphasize the need for financial support from the government to foster the growth and development of their agro-tourism centers.

The second-highest ranked suggestion, with 97.50 per cent was "A complete tourism package should be provided to encourage ATC." This indicates that farmers recognize the importance of offering comprehensive tourism packages to

ATCs. These packages, that encompass various aspects of agro-tourism experiences, can attract a larger number of tourists and provide them with a satisfying and fulfilling visit. Another significant suggestion, with a frequency of 95per cent and ranked third, is "Develop contacts with schools, colleges, NGOs, clubs, organizations, etc., to increase visitors." This highlights the farmers' understanding that establishing partnerships and connections with educational institutions and organizations can help increase the number of visitors to their agro-tourism centers. Collaborating with these entities can lead to promotional opportunities and a broader reach of ATCs.

Other important suggestions expressed by them were "Understand the customers' wants, their expectations and

serve them" ranked fourth, "Ministry of tourism should support and promote ATC" (90%, ranked fifth) and "Provide sales and marketing support" (77.5%, ranked ninth). These

were some of the major suggestions expressed by owner farmers of ATCs.

**Table 6:** Suggestions given by owners practicing agro-tourism to overcome the constraints (n=40)

Sl. No.	Statements	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
1.	A complete tourism package should be provided to encourage ATC	39	97.50	II
2.	Provide sufficient fund for agro tourism development by Government	40	100.00	I
3.	Coordination and cooperation among Centre and state government to motivate agro-tourism entrepreneurs	33	82.50	VIII
4.	Support from local institutions for promotion establishment and maintenance of infrastructure for agro tourism	35	87.50	VI
5.	Ministry of tourism should support and promote ATC	36	90.00	V
6.	Improved communication skills on the part of the farmer	26	65.00	XI
7.	Adequate training should be provided to the farmers regarding various aspects of agro tourism	35	87.50	XIII
8.	Provide sales and marketing support	31	77.50	IX
9.	Organsing tours from urban areas to the farms	35	87.50	VI
10.	Promote a wide publicity of the agro tourism centre by newspaper, televisions and all possible advertisement means	34	85.00	VII
11.	Develop contacts with the Schools, Colleges, NGOs, clubs, organizations etc., to increase visitors	38	95.00	III
12.	Understand the customers wants, their expectations and serve them	37	92.50	IV
13.	Developing own website and update from time to time to attract the tourists	33	82.50	VIII
14.	Developing a good relationship with the tourist for future business and chain publicity	30	75.00	X
15.	Develop different agro-tour package for different type of tourist and their expectations	28	70.00	XI
16.	Maintaining an address book and comments of the visited tourists for future tourism business	27	67.50	XII
17.	Transport facilities should be improved	35	87.50	VI
18.	Planning and making arrangements to address the situational problems	31	77.50	IX
19.	Narration about special activities of the ATC to the visitors	36	90.00	V

## Conclusion

The study underscores the multifaceted challenges faced by farmer owners of ATCs in Karnataka, ranging from financial and human resource constraints to technical, situational, and policy challenges posing significant barriers to the growth and sustainability of ATCs. Financial constraints, including high labor and land development costs, hinder the economic viability of ATCs. Human resource challenges, such as weak communication and management skills, affect the quality of visitor experiences. Technical issues, like a lack of training and insufficient literature, impede the development of ATCs. Situational challenges, such as adverse weather conditions and irregular power supply, disrupt operations. Policy challenges, particularly the absence of government support and complex licensing procedures, hinder the sector's growth. The recommendations provided by ATC owners, including financial support, comprehensive tourism packages, and collaboration with educational institutions, offer a roadmap for overcoming these challenges. Addressing these obstacles is critical not only for the success of ATCs but also for the promotion of rural tourism and the economic well-being of the region. It is imperative for stakeholders, including government bodies and industry players, to work collaboratively to realize the untapped potential of ATCs in Karnataka.

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