Scope of Agritourism in Maharashtra
(with reference to challenges in development)

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Abstract:
Agritourism is a very latest concept and form of tourism in India. It gives an opportunity to experience the real enchanting and authentic contact with real life. Promotion of Agri tourism needs conceptual convergence with rural tourism, health tourism and adventure tourism. Agri-tourism in state of Maharashtra has witnessed the growth in the past years and helped additional income to the farmers. My study basically concentrates on the future scope of Agritourism in Maharashtra in relation to the challenges in development. In order to develop Agritourism as a viable option or form of tourism it is important to have an advisory service in place to make it sustainable.

Key words: Agri tourism, Promotion, Farmers, Advisory services
Introduction:

Agritourism is the latest concept in the Indian tourism Industry specially with the standard of living in India changing and with more and more people migrating to the cities of India, the hectic work life schedule are compelling people to try out unsaid locations and forms of tourism.

“Agri tourism includes opening up farms to visitors from urban areas, and letting them to take experience of rural life. Apart from telling them about the various crops and how they are sown and harvested, agri tourism exposes tourists to traditional food, handicraft, culture, music and language. Tourists can get an experience of rural activities such as bullock cart rides, milking cows and goats and picking farm fresh fruits and vegetables etc”.

Pigram and Jenkins [1994] argue that the fluctuating and politically sensitive nature of the rural sector and the contribution of tourism to Gross Domestic Product, employment and incomes have given rural tourism an opportunity to gain greater prominence. Agriculture is the main sector of Indian Economy. Around 65 percent of the population is directly or indirectly dependent of agriculture. Out of total GDP around 13 percent GDP comes from agriculture sector. Providing additional income generating activities to existing agriculture would certainly increase contribution of agriculture to national GDP. Agro tourism is one such new concept of tourism which has recently started becoming popular in Maharashtra. It is a field with potential to develop. Certainly as a newly developing field it has its own share of challenges and management issues to face. The issues like guest host relationship, sustainability, economic feasibility are important for any new tourism development at a destination. It is more so in the case of agro tourism as it has a direct impact on the host culture and rural community as a whole.

Objectives:
1. To study the ongoing Agri-tourism initiatives & existing schemes to promote agro-tourism in Maharashtra as per the tourism policy of Maharashtra 2016.
2. To find out the strategic role of advisory services in sustenance of Agro-Tourism in Maharashtra.

Methodology:
- The research is mainly carried through desk research i.e., secondary sources like maps, photographs, books, internet web sites, dissertations, doctoral level research work, journals, newspaper clippings and conference material etc.,
- Personal interviews with selected agro-tourism entrepreneurs with a questionnaire and discussions with stakeholders in tourism & other related government officials.
Literature Review:

The dictionary meaning of Agritourism is tourism in which tourist’s board at farms or in rural villages and experience farming at close hand (Dictionary of the English Language, 2000). Barbieri and Mshenga (2008) define Agritourism as “any practice developed on a working farm with the purpose of attracting visitors.” McGehee, Kim, and Jennings (2007) explain Agritourism as “rural enterprises which incorporate both a working farm environment and a commercial tourism component.” Marques (2006): “a specific type of rural tourism in which the hosting house must be integrated into an agricultural estate, inhabited by the proprietor, allowing visitors to takepart in agricultural or complementary activities on the property.” Sonnino (2004) “activities of hospitality performed by agricultural entrepreneurs and their family members that must remain connected and complementary to farming activities.” Sharpley and Sharpley (1997) “tourism products which are directly connected with the agrarian environment, agrarian products or agrarian stays.” Agritourism is a form of niche tourism that is considered as a growth industry in many parts of the world, including Australia, Canada, the United States, Srilanka, and the Philippines. (Wikipedia, Agritourism – evolution, 2012). Other terms associated with Agritourism are "agritainment", "value added products," "farm direct marketing", and "sustainable agriculture". Laurie S. Z. Greenberg (2006) noted about Agritourism business in U.S., “Nature tourism and Agritourism are the two fastest growing segments of the tourism market in the U.S., with 30% growth expected in the period 1997-2007. According to one nationwide study conducted by Barry JJ, Hellerstain D. in 2004, 62 million Americans visited farms one or more times in 2000, which corresponds to almost 30% of the population. As mentioned by Dan Bernardo, Luc Valentin, and John Leatherman (2004) —Agritourism and other forms of on-farm diversification have grown into an increasing requirement for financial stability in farm businesses across western Europe. Indian policy makers had conventionally neglected tourism industry as it was considered to be a luxury segment benefiting only few. As then, the Indian financial system depended a lot on agriculture, the government policies had always aimed to develop agriculture and other allied areas. Tourism was always looked as an industry serving the privileged instead of being accepted as a means to provide employment with good “multiplier effect”. In 1955, the first Planning Commission of India had placed tourism industry 269th in its priority list. The Union Budget granted the tourism industry much needed “Infrastructure – Status.”
Analysis

Agri- Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) was established on 16th May 2004 in Maharashtra. “Its aim is to promote Agro Tourism to help rural youth to earn good respectable living in the village and on the farm itself. First ever International Agri-Tourism day was celebrated on 16th May, 2008 in Pune. The ‘Tenth Five Year Plan’ opened up following opportunities for agro-tourism in India.

*Highlights from the MTDC Tourism policy 2016 on rural tourism:*- (Source MTDC Tourism Policy 2016).

- The state offers a unique tourism proposition through its rural landscape (approx. 55% of the state area). This strategy aims to promote rural tourism as the primary tourism product to spread tourism and its socioeconomic benefits to rural and the surrounding regions. This will lead to a balanced and far-reaching growth in the state, thus improving the economic situation at the village level.
- The objectives for promoting rural tourism are as follows:
  1. Through agri and rural tourism provide/education to the public and promote the products of the farm and generate additional farm income.
  2. Provide rural experience to urban residents.
  3. Allow diversification of income opportunities to farms and ranches that can help buffer fluctuating markets.
- **Action Plan**
  The DoT, Government of Maharashtra will invite stakeholders from the Tourism Department, local players practicing agri and rural tourism and tour operators to develop guidelines and establish support on the following:
  1. Setup a government interface to cater to the needs of the agri-tour operators. This interface will coordinate and provide linkages with regional/local/concerned government bodies.
  2. Define quality standards and services and promote the identified best practices.
  3. Diversify the range of products and services. Offer support to smaller operators to evolve in the value chain.
  4. Collaboration of agriculture and tourism industry through local procurement of resources
  5. Infrastructure development and marketing support.
  6. Evaluate latest market trends and develop framework for better legislation as per the changing market scenario.
  7. Develop local infrastructure, market linkages (both backward and forward integration) and academic centers.
  8. Special promotion packages for distressed areas in the state.
  9. Establish certification and affiliation system.
10. Simplify procedures and establish a single window clearance mechanism.  
11. The above points can be practiced keeping in mind the following points:  
12. Such activities should be an extension of agricultural activities, rather begin an outright commercial venture.  
13. The primary occupation/source of income for any person undertaking Agri tourism should be agriculture/cultivation activities.  
14. A maximum of 20% of the total land available should be undertaken for construction of dormitories, rooms, and tents; rest of the land should be reserved for cultivation and agricultural activities.  
15. For units with up to eight rooms, no Town planning permission will be required for construction of rooms and facilities. Units with above eight rooms will be considered as a commercial activity and the town planning permission will be required.  
16. The units should be plastic-free zones.  
17. At least one educational tour/visit to such units to be made mandatory for students from class V to class X.  
18. Additional incentives will be provided to rural and agri tourism units, which will be decided by the DoT.

Formation of Agri-Tourism Development Corporation.  
ATDC’s mission is “To promote agriculture tourism to achieve income, employment and economic stability in rural communities in India. To encourage the activities, services and amenities 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’s Role in Agri-Tourism:  
• Prepare Agri Tourism project report and business plan for each applicant agriculture farm.  
• Help to facilitate the financial support from Nationalize banks, institutes and government agencies to built agri and rural tourism facilities and infrastructure like accommodation, sanitation, approach road etc.  
• Conduct Agri Tourism Business Training Program.  
• Conduct Seminars and conferences on agri-tourism business.  
• Provide sales and marketing support.  
• Co-ordinate tours from urban areas to the farms.  
The trust decided to experiment Agri-Tourism concept on a pilot scale on its own 110 acres model farm, Malegaon, Baramati. Prior to setting up the successful Pilot Agri and Rural Tourism Project in Maharashtra, Malegaon, Baramati Taluka, Dist. Pune in October, 2005 a market survey was conducted by ATDC with sample size of 2,440.
The analysis of the survey was:
• 35% do not have relatives in village.
• 43% never stayed or visited village.
• 57% never visited dairy farm.

This survey promoted to experiment Agri-Tourism in the 110 acre model farm of the agriculture development trust.

**Facts of Agritourism in Maharashtra:**
Agritourism in Maharashtra has witnessed a tremendous growth from its establishment. It has created a vast impact on the lives of the farmers as well as rural community. The below shown representations are the proof of the development.
Conclusion:

The above analysis shows that most of the entrepreneurs who are embracing Agritourism as a viable option for alternate income are in the age group of 40-55. That shows that maturity levels of the farmers are playing an active role in the development of Agritourism centers in Maharashtra.

While discussing the issues with the farmers, it was observed that there exist some challenges in promoting agri-tourism. Lack of awareness among farmers, lack of training opportunity to learn about agri-tourism and execute projects and absence of policies and infrastructure support that can support agri-tourism projects are some of the major challenges. Advisory service here can play major role in overcoming these knowledge and training barriers. Apart from providing necessary training to acquire knowledge and skills by farmers and entrepreneurs, advisory service could assist authorities in establishing rules and regulations for proper functioning of agri-tourism center and promoting & marketing of agri-tourism products. In order to ensure smooth support from the AS, initially some senior and middle level advisors pool should be created through proper training on Agritourism, right from the agriculture produce to the concept of tourism and service management skills. The team must be selected very carefully considering their real interest on agri-tourism and be trained locally and internationally giving them a broader experience in agri-tourism.

Models and Strategy:-

Agri tourism in order to succeed in any state has to work on a Catalyst which may join the four major stakeholders/Services. The Advisory service could be the catalyst which can work to ensure the proper success of the model.
Some recommended strategies:-

- Supportive Agritourism Policies and Regulations.
- Supportive Agritourism Financing.
- Effective Training Programs.
- Product and Service Quality Control.
- Strategic Partnership Development.
- Marketing Programs.

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