

Attracting and Retaining Youth in Agriculture

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Youth are expected to play a vital role in the much-anticipated transformation of agriculture in India. According to national youth policy, persons in the age group of 15-35 are defined as young. At present, 35% of the total population is in the age group of 15-35 years, out of which 75% live in rural areas. Migration of rural youth to cities is around 45% in the country, and it is estimated that only about 5% of youth are engaged in agriculture. In developed countries, skilled workforce is in the range of 60% to 90% of the total workforce, whereas in India, the skilled workforce is as low as 5% (20-24 years age group). There are challenges in empowering the youth to improve their skills and to remain in the agriculture as a source of livelihood in rural situation. Creation of successful economic models in the villages is crucial to catalyse and energize youth to become entrepreneurs in rural areas and guide others in their vicinity. Creating interest and building confidence among rural youth in agriculture, is difficult but not impossible, as the available evidences of profitable agriculture have proved under varied situations.

Retaining youth in agriculture, is therefore strongly linked to agriculture. There is a noticeable increase in the migration of rural youth to urban areas, in search of better livelihood opportunities due to the apparent differences in basic amenities, communication, health and education facilities between rural and urban area. Realizing the importance of rural youth in agricultural development especially from the point of view of food security of the country and to empower rural youth, the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has initiated a programme on “Attracting and Retaining Youth in Agriculture (ARYA) during 2015-16. Under this scheme, special efforts are being taken up to attract the rural youth under the age of 35 years in agriculture to provide income generating opportunities and engage them in agriculture. Strategies for Attracting and Retaining Youth in Agriculture.



Agricultural extension services can effectively encourage youth participation to transform agriculture as they are willing to adopt new ideas and technologies. Some of the effective extension strategies could be more NGO participation, counselling and guiding rural youth, creating awareness about youth programmes, entrepreneurship development, promotion of scientific farming and agri-business. An exclusive nation wide extension programme may be launched to address the issues concerning rural youth to mobilize them towards greater participation in agricultural production activities. Mass media and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can also be used effectively to attract youth attention into agriculture. Success stories of the innovative young farmers or agripreneurs may be disseminated through radio, TV and newspapers to motivate other young farmers. Community radio and social media too can play vital role in encouraging and making young farmers aware about the possibilities in agricultural sector.

The difficulty in accessing credit facilities in the country often restricts youth to opt for farming. Therefore, an effective credit linkage mechanism especially designed to promote young farmers is required. Extension agencies can guide young people to find creative ways to finance their agricultural projects, or to start up a business further down the agricultural value-chain. Operating in group mechanisms like farmers' organizations, cooperatives, farm youth clubs and farmer producers' groups can facilitate credit access from several institutional sources. Care should be taken by governing agencies that there is enough transparency and accessibility of youth institutions and organizations and transparent communication network among them.

A strong commitment to youth development as a priority area by State Agricultural Universities (SAUs) and other institutes engaged in agricultural education would be a significant step toward redirecting attention and commitment of resources to meet significant goals of linking youth to agriculture. The vast network of agricultural universities and colleges can play a leading role in inculcating self-confidence and capabilities in the students required for taking up agriculture as a profession. Farm-graduates can begin with launching of agri-clinics and agri-business centres (ACABC) in villages as rural enterprises. ACABC schemes as already under operation, should be extended for accommodating larger numbers of agricultural graduates in villages to startup new rural enterprises. Training on product



processing, value addition, marketing, advertising, branding can be offered and organized largely by agricultural extension agencies. Promotion of agro-tourism will also provide opportunities for youth to get ideas to create new livelihood options. Capacity building, technical skill development, building 'soft' skill such as communication, leadership, business skills and mobilization of young farmers to take up high-tech ventures and micro enterprises are other areas that are to be taken care of by the present extension system.

Role of Extension Person to Attract Youth in Agriculture

- **Motivation** - As young people see the neglect and backwardness of the rural areas, they lose inspiration and often see little hope for their own futures.
- **Training** - Many young people will have been formally educated but still lack the skills required to make a living in the rural areas. Often youth is ill-prepared and ill-equipped for the demands of rural development.
- **Involvement** - Often young people feel isolated and unable to get involved in local rural development activities. They have no representation and no means of making their voice heard.
- **Opportunities** - There are too few programmes which attempt to reach young people, or projects which seek to integrate the youth into rural development activities.