

Retaining and Encouraging Rural Youth to Choose Agriculture as Aprofession

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Introduction

In the twenty-first century, especially for emerging nations, agriculture continues to be essential to economic growth and poverty alleviation. At present, Indian agriculture is facing several emerging challenges despite the production boom that has been experienced as a result of the green revolution. Some of the problems in Indian agriculture are land fragmentation, labour shortage, depleting natural resources, climate change, low profitability, competition due to market liberalization, nutrition and gender issues etc. In such a situation, the agriculture sector needs fresh concepts, inventions, rebranding, and revitalization to overcome these ongoing difficulties. India's shifting agricultural landscape currently calls for the vigour and enthusiasm of young people. Provided there is enough opportunity, the innovative mind, energy and vigour of youth, which is the country's current demographic strength, can boost agriculture's present status. On the contrary, there is decreasing youth participation in agriculture over time. This indeed raises the question of whether there is scope for encouraging youth in the agriculture sector to bring prosperity to the sector as well as the lives of these young people.

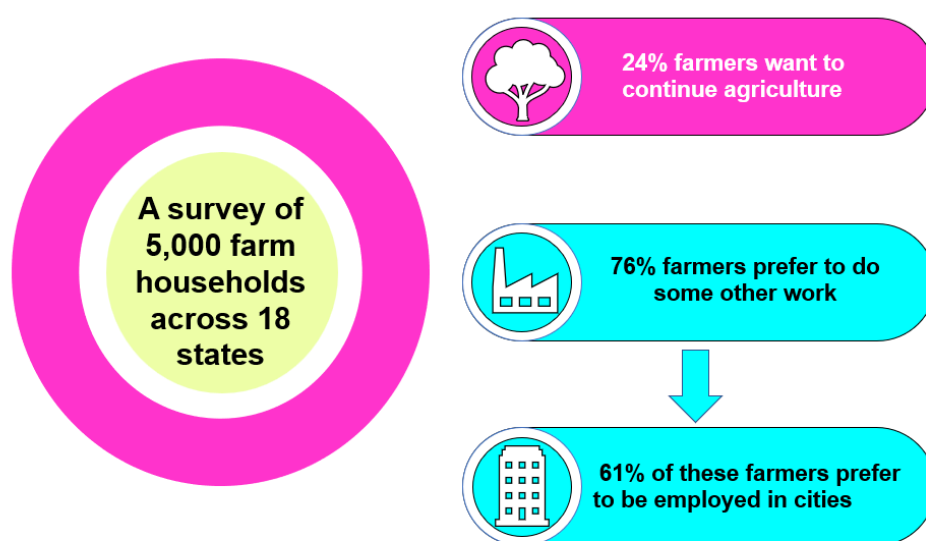
Importance of Youth in Society:

Youth play a crucial role in society as they are future leaders and decision-makers. They bring fresh ideas, energy, and enthusiasm to social and economic challenges. The countries which utilised the potential of youth in the right direction are more developed. The energy and intellect of youth act as a torch-bearer for a nation. On the contrary, the countries

which fail to realize the importance of the youth lag behind in every dimension of development. India is a country where the majority of the population lives in rural areas, therefore the role of youth is very important in the future of the country. In society, their roles are more important in constructing and adopting new social values. Rural youth can actively be involved in all the stages of agriculture.

Disinterest of youths in Agricultural activities:

The growing disinterest of youth in this sector creates a threat to the inability of farmers in the future. In this agricultural scenario, the Centre for Study of Developing Societies, based in Delhi, found that given an option majority of farmers in the country would prefer to take up some other work. The survey of 5,000 farm households across 18 states says that 76 percent of farmers would prefer to do some work other than farming and of this, 61 percent of these farmers would prefer to be employed in cities.



This migration results in “feminising agriculture”, which means women get increasingly absorbed in agricultural and allied activities. According to Census 2011, there has been a 24 percent increase in the number of female agricultural labourers between 2001 and 2011.

Migration of rural youth: A Big Challenge

Unfortunately, there is a continuous increase in the migration of rural youth to urban areas. Large numbers of youth are moving away from rural areas to urban areas. In many cases, agricultural labour migrates to urban areas because urban wage rates in even the



unorganized sector are better than those prevailing in agriculture (Mehrotra et al., 2013). India has lost more than 2,000 farmers every day since 1991 and the total number of farmers has decreased by 15 million (Sainath, 2013). The migration of the rural population to cities is around 45 percent in the country which is quite alarming. Out of the total migrants from rural to urban areas, youth account for 30 percent. If this migration rate continues, there will be a big problem for our food security.

Why are youth turning away from agriculture?

The National Commission on Farmers of 2006 headed by Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, first raised the issue of the participation of rural youth in agricultural development. The farming sector is facing several problems today like indebtedness, climate change, inadequate Govt. support and credit, unregulated market, land degradation, infrastructure, low return, perception of low status associated with farm activities etc. which makes youngsters lose interest in agriculture (Chaudhary and Chaudhary, 2013). Some of the most important factors for youth to shift out of agriculture are attraction towards white-collar jobs, assured income of service etc. (Sherawat and Sharma, 1994). People expressed that this kind of work is better than agriculture even if they do not provide employment security, income security or social security. The average size of operational land holding is also declining in rural areas due to land fragmentation. It has decreased from 1.35 ha per individual in 2000-01 to 1.10 ha per individual in 2010-11 (Agricultural Census, 2011). This phenomenon might compel many to shift to urban areas due to the lack of land resources left back home.

Unemployment vs Youth?

The Periodic Labour Force Survey for the period 2017-18, reported a significant increase in unemployment rates for the youth segment of the population. A more serious concern is the increasing joblessness among educated youth (15-29 years), which went up nearly three times from 6.10 percent in 2011-12 to 17.80 percent in 2017-18. In particular, the technical degree holders have been noted to fare the worst with their unemployment rate at 37.30 percent, closely followed by those who are postgraduate and above (36.20 %), graduates (35.20 %), and youth with formal vocational (33%). For young women, the unemployment situation is grave in terms of labour force participation as well as a lack of jobs. According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CIME), the rural unemployment rate stood at 8.75 percent in June 2021 (Financial express).



Attracting Youth to Agriculture

Agriculture in India has huge potential to create jobs. The agriculture sector which comprises a lot of activities ranging from crops and livestock to fisheries is still seen as one of the sectors which expected to offer many job opportunities. To attract rural youth towards agriculture, it needs to be transformed into a high-profitable venture with low risks and stable income. Adoption of integrated farming system (IFS) models, precision farming, organic farming, protected cultivation, vertical farming, pisciculture, sericulture, lac farming and apiculture are some other potential options to attract youths to agriculture. Market demand for processed horticultural products and exotic flowers and vegetables etc. has opened a new pathway to gain maximum profit from minimum land resources. Dairying has emerged as one of the most rewarding sectors mainly due to a wide range of new products. The Government is funding processing facilities to increase employment opportunities and also minimise the wastage of produce due to the perishable nature of products. Agri-India Hackathon is organised to invite innovative solutions in the field of farm mechanisation, precision farming, supply chain and logistics, post-harvest and food-tech, waste-to-wealth and green energy.

Role of Extension in attracting youth to agriculture

Extension services provide educational and technical support to youths and aspiring agricultural entrepreneurs. This can include information on new technologies and best practices, access to resources and networks, and training in business management and financial planning. Extension services can also help young people understand the potential opportunities in agriculture, including the potential for profitable and sustainable enterprises. By providing the necessary support and resources, extension services can play a key role in encouraging and empowering the next generation of farmers and agricultural leaders. Mass media and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can also be used to build interest among youth in agriculture. Social media too can play a vital role in encouraging and making young farmers aware of the possibilities in the agricultural sector. Success stories of the innovative young farmers can be disseminated through radio, TV and newspapers to motivate them. One such example is Digital Green which works through people-based extension systems using participatory videos. It creates a platform for educated youth to come forward in serving the agricultural community in a participatory model. Operating in group

mechanisms like farmers' organizations, cooperatives, farm youth clubs and farmer producers' groups can facilitate credit access from several institutional sources.



(Image Source: Digital Green)

Government Initiative to attract Youth to Agriculture:

The government of India is announcing different schemes to harness the potential of youth and to take benefit of demographic dividends holistically. These schemes are based on the principle of social inclusion, gender equality and sustainable development of rural areas. Some of the schemes and steps are:

Attracting and Retaining Youth in Agriculture (ARYA) Scheme:

This scheme ARYA was launched by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) in 2015-16. This program is planned to be implemented through Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK-Agriculture Science Centres) in 25 states of our country. Each KVK would train about 200 to 300 youth in taking up agriculture's allied and supplementary activities to keep the rural youth attached to agriculture. Finally, the trained young entrepreneurs would be assisted in preparing project reports for seeking bank loans. As per the ARYA report, 20119 Under the 4280 youths in various groups have been oriented to establishing micro-entrepreneurial units in 25 districts. Major Enterprises undertaken by the youths are Mushroom Production Poultry, Lac Cultivation, Pig Farming, Beekeeping, Fishery, Goat Farming, Broiler duck farming, Value Addition and Nursery Management.



Agri-clinics and Agribusiness Centres (ACABC) Scheme in India:

Agri-clinics and Agribusiness Centres (ACABC) scheme is implemented in 2002 by the Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare, Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, and the Government of India to foster entrepreneurship in agriculture. Through this scheme, fresh and unemployed agricultural graduates have been imparted training for 2 months on entrepreneurship in agriculture and transformed into agripreneurs through the establishment of need-based agribusiness ventures. The scheme has support from NABARD for extending loan facilities to agripreneurs. MANAGE and SFAC are training the fresh and unemployed agricultural graduates through nodal training institutes identified all over the country. According to a study on the Agri-clinics and Agribusiness Centres (ACABC) Scheme in India, 32 distinct activities led to the establishment of 28,512 agri-ventures between April 2002 and January 2020 in various Indian states.

Skill Development in Agriculture

Due to the increase in population, the demand for food and Agri produce also increases and there is a requirement for a specific set of skills in the field of agriculture. Considering the above factors, the Agriculture Skill Council of India was set up in January 2013 as a Section 25 company under the Companies act of the Ministry of Company Affairs for building capacity in the Agriculture Industry and bridging the gap between laboratories and farms.

Start-up India & Stand-up India

Start-up India, Stand-up India initiative of the Government of India will boost entrepreneurship among the youth, create new job opportunities and help set up a network of start-ups in the country. The scheme will create an entire start-up ecosystem that would be set

up and will work as a friend, mentor and guide for start-ups through their entire journey of entrepreneurship.

Opportunities

The share of agriculture and allied sector to the national GDP in 2014-15 was 17 percent which was almost 51.90 percent during 1950-51 (Wagh and Dangre, 2016), but the opposite picture appeared in the year 2020-21 during covid scenario when other sectors shrank extensively, agriculture was the only sectors to show positive growth of 3.40 percent. In that period India has seen the Agriculture and allied sector share in Gross Value Added (GVA) was 20.19 percent. At the same time, due to the lockdown, the workforces who were working in the urban areas were returning to their native place. This has created a scope for retaining them in their traditional field of occupation. As per the 2019 NASSCOM report, India is home to more than 450 agri-tech start-ups, growing at a rate of 25 percent on a year-on-year basis. During the nationwide lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, agri-tech start-ups stepped up and connected farmers with buyers on digital platforms. Some start-ups helped farmers by even direct selling the products to consumers.

Conclusion:

The development of youth determines the development of the community and the country as a whole. The socio-economic development and prosperity of the rural areas depend upon the youth of the country. They are precious human assets that can play an important role in nation-building activities if opportunities are provided. Meanwhile, the massive reverse migration of people, most of them youth, from urban areas to villages during the nationwide lockdown due to the pandemic has emphasised the importance of ARYA as a potential source of employment generation.

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