

Agriculture and Tourism Development

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Abstract

Newly available lands, an agricultural based workforce and a push into tourism led to this research examining the state of agricultural tourism development in a transitioning region. Interviews with key public and private sector personnel, coupled with an evaluation of official policies and plans, were used in this qualitative case study to explore the state of agricultural tourism development (opportunities and barriers) and the role that stakeholders play in its creation. This research not only found common geographic and technical barriers but also endemic mental and behavioural characteristics of the local populace, which hinder agricultural development and, by extension, agricultural tourism. Negative attitudes towards agriculture and a lack of entrepreneurial spirit pervade, which hampers agricultural tourism development. Hence, this research shows that local attitudes towards agriculture play an important role in successfully diversifying agriculture via tourism. Many studies focus on the addition of tourism to an agricultural product without first ensuring the successful production of agricultural products themselves so that agricultural tourism can develop. Hence, this research asserts the need for the agricultural industry to upgrade its products to meet expected tourism standards before moving into agricultural tourism. Additionally, for the successful development of agricultural tourism, there needs to be a focused and sustained plan aimed at changing the mindset of the local populace towards agriculture and entrepreneurship, coupled with the government providing a facilitative environment conducive to developing agricultural tourism.

Keywords: Agriculture, Tourism Development and Agricultural Tourism

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between tourism and agriculture can be said to be one that ranges from opportunity to conflict. Telfer (1996) notes it as being “on a continuum from conflict through coexistence to symbiosis”. He goes further to state that “within this continuum agriculture and fishing can be seen as being more than sources for food for they may contribute positively to tourism experiences through the landscapes and rural activities which visitors can observe” Many studies focus on the linkage between tourism and agriculture as being one of food supply and production. This involves the transfer of farm produce to hotels and restaurants (Richardson-Ngwenya & Momsen, 2011). The issue of food supply and production is tied both to the opportunities and conflicts noted above and will be discussed in further detail below. Bélisle (1983), outlines four ways in which tourism can influence agriculture, which also fall within the dichotomy of opportunity and conflict, stating that: it can modify agricultural employment by attracting labor out of agriculture (competition for labor); reduce availability of agricultural land through an increase in use of land for recreational purposes (competition for land); modify land values and land use in areas surrounding tourism developments; and create incentives for local farmers to expand and diversify their production (and possibly improve techniques) to meet tourism food demand.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To identify the barriers and challenges of developing agricultural tourism initiatives in this transitioning region
- To identify and describe current and future agricultural tourism initiatives
- To establish how the private sector has fostered development of these initiatives
- To identify what the public sector should do to enhance future agricultural tourism initiatives in Tamil Nadu and other regions that are considering agricultural tourism as a development option

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The field research took place over an eight-week period from July 24th to September 12th, 2020. This timeframe resulted from convenient timing for the researcher as well as availability of the respondents. Due to the varying availability of respondents, all three methods of data collection noted 'Methods of Data Collection' occurred simultaneously. During the fieldwork period (July-September 2020), The researcher collected various tourism and agricultural policy and plans and visited agricultural tourism ventures that were currently in operation. Documents collected from respondents during various interviews allowed for additional background information for subsequent interviews. The combination of these methods allowed for a holistic coverage of the issues and provided a realistic picture of the future development of agriculture and tourism in Tamil Nadu. The completion of the data analysis and write-up took place between September and April 2020.

DISCUSSIONS

Factors Affecting Development: During the interview process there were several environmental and geographic characteristics identified by respondents that affected and continue to have an impact on agricultural production today in Tamil Nadu. By extension, these factors also influence the tourism industry. The following factors affect quality, quantity and the consistency of agricultural production in Tamil Nadu. Weather was a factor that contributed to agricultural production issues. In particular, seasonal conditions associated with the rainy and dry seasons affect production as does the hurricane season. Agricultural Officer A noted that during the hurricane season, only certain low lying crops such as sweet potatoes and pumpkins can be planted as they would be least affected by the high winds.

Ongoing Initiatives: Another major initiative highlighted by respondents is the Agro-tourism Demonstration Farm, which when complete, will utilize the Railway. The Agro-Tourism Demonstration Farm is borne from collaboration between the Government of India and other countries. This farm will include "an agricultural field station, a modern green house, a tea house and a farm located at the turn-around point of the Indian Railways, giving visitors an opportunity to tour the farm as well as pick and pay for fruit. The farm will also feature cultivation of vegetables."

Future Opportunities: Respondents saw that, with the combination of these two industries, there were quite a few opportunities for growth and expansion into other areas. When questioned about the type of developmental opportunities that would be available through the linking of agriculture and tourism, the number one response was 'experiential' referring to things such as farm-stays and pick and pay type ventures among other things.

Benefits to development: An overarching positive impact was on the effect of the food import bill as well as foreign exchange leakage. The perception was that the development of agricultural tourism would lead to a decrease in the food import bill, as well as lessen foreign exchange leakage.

Private Sector Action: The theme ‘Private Sector Action’ identifies the private sector stakeholders that affect agricultural development and tourism development, and explores the link between the two. This theme goes further to identify the impact these stakeholders have on current initiatives as well as some of the challenges they face. Using a compilation of interview data, the diagram below highlights the stakeholders noted as being relevant to the development of agricultural tourism.



This theme looks at these groups individually and considers how they can affect the potential development of agricultural tourism.

Public Sector Options: Several options became apparent on how the public sector may enhance future agricultural tourism initiatives. Firstly, there was some thought that government needed to have policies that are more effective when it came to tourism ventures. These policies should include stipulations to ensure the support of local produce and products.

Understanding these climatic constraints is the first step in moving towards improved technologies and techniques that would allow for mitigation. As mentioned earlier, in India there are ongoing programs and projects to help in upgrading farms and farming techniques, such as the Agricultural Resource Management Project. This Project includes the building of dams and water catchments areas, the teaching of new irrigation techniques to farmers such as plastic mulching, and the introduction of shade and green houses for controlled growing environments, all of which can all help off-set some of the negative environmental factors related to rainfall irrigation that negatively impact agricultural production. Even though there are the six ongoing projects mentioned earlier, realization on the effects of production make take some time. Nevertheless, these efforts are in line with previous research that suggests that farmers need sufficient training and technical support in order to produce appropriate higher quantities and quality of produce. The type of tourism also influences the type of hotels or accommodations available. Studies have found that larger, international hotels buy less local produce than smaller, locally owned hotels. The perception of agriculture is one of lowliness. Although there appears to be some understanding that the development of agriculture is imperative for the country, it appears that there is not enough prestige in working in the agricultural industry. Hence, there needs to be a change in perception for agriculture to develop any further in extension agricultural tourism. The question becomes how does one alter or change this perception.

SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

- Continue Garden programs and implement them in each school at every level.
- Implement curriculum geared towards particular topics such as entrepreneurship, tourism, agriculture, agricultural tourism, agri-business, food security, organic foods, health and nutrition (starting from primary/elementary schools through to high school)
- Develop appropriate supplemental materials that also feature examples and data from throughout the region
- Provide training to teachers so that they may be able to effectively deliver knowledge to students
- Ensure that field trips, work placements, workshops and conferences are integral parts of these programs as they will provide students with real life examples of these ventures currently underway, provide some experience for them, and allow them to interact with persons in the field
- Develop competitions in schools geared towards entrepreneurship with specific focus on tourism, agriculture and agricultural tourism development
- Using media campaigns along with the implementation of the school programs will aid in affecting a wider cross-section of the population.
- Heighten community awareness of farmers through Farmer profiles, which highlight local farms, what they produce, contact information etc.
- Use local entertainers, athletes and high-profile personnel in ad campaigns that encourage the consumption of local produce and products
- Organize Cooking shows/competitions which utilize the use of local ingredients
- Develop and feature local brands in supermarkets having special discounts/prices during certain time periods

Findings from this study resulted from data gathered mainly from government entities, and lacked input from the 'lay local person' who would be the entrepreneur who invests in agricultural tourism. Hence, research geared towards understanding the perspectives of local persons on the potential for agricultural tourism development would be beneficial. Such research would aid in understanding how local persons view this type of development as well as their possible interest in this type of development.

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