

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

My dear readers of Journal of Extension Education,

Recently, I had a chance to visit the Southern Regional Research Centre of ICAR- Central Sheep and Wool Research located in Mannavanur, a remote village in Kodaikanal, situated in the Western Ghats of India – which happens to be my previous place of posting. The centre offers a unique agri-tourism experience with its sheep and rabbit farms, wherein visitors can observe these animals and learn about their management. The term “*agriturismo*” was coined in Italy in the 1980’s and India has been showing interest in this ‘agriculture + tourism’ concept since early 2000s. Maharashtra, Kerala and Punjab/Haryana are the prominent states for agri-tourism in India, with Maharashtra being a pioneer in developing and promoting the concept.

Several studies in USA reveal the growing role of Extension in agri-tourism, especially in integrating the farmers’ needs (suppliers) with the visitors’ expectations (consumers) . Schmidt et al., (2022) suggest the following strategies for enhancing Extension’s role in this sector.

- Specialized and comprehensive training is needed to increase the number and levels of expertise of agritourism Extension specialists. State tourism departments could offer annual tourism summits and regional tourism-related workshops to provide opportunities for Extension specialists to improve their tourism-related knowledge, as well as network with other tourism industry professionals, which may lead to further collaboration and related initiatives.
- A national network of agritourism extension professionals could be formed to provide training, resources, and models for extension delivery and institutional and ecosystem frameworks. In some regions, a conceptual shift to fully integrate agritourism into agricultural viability (e.g., farm business development, agricultural zoning) instead of an “add-on” activity, may bolster understanding and support of the sector. In other regions, better collaboration with the tourism industry is warranted.
- To encourage investment in agritourism extension, more research is needed to validate and quantify the benefits of agritourism. One possibility would be to analyze the connection between funding agritourism extension and changes in agritourism earnings over time. In addition, there is an opportunity to package existing research into a toolkit to make the case for agritourism to universities, local decision makers, and other Extension professionals.

Though still in its infancy unlike the US, agri-tourism is an emerging sector in India with immense potential to bridge the rural-urban divide and support agricultural livelihoods.

This issue of JEE has papers on topics such as Perceptions of farmers about water pollution, impact of kitchen gardens as an empowering initiative and University-Industry collaboration in the dairy and poultry sectors. Do send your feedback on these papers to editorextension@gmail.com.

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