



e-ISSN:2582-7219



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH IN SCIENCE, ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY

Volume 5, Issue 11, November 2022



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

Impact Factor: 7.54



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Role of Technology Mission in Promotion of Agri-Entrepreneurship in Rajasthan

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ABSTRACT: Farmers growing grains and vegetables in their fields in western Rajasthan are now sorting and grading their processed agricultural products with machines. Taking advantage of subsidies, incentives and land conversion offered by government agencies during the pandemic, cultivators in the State are fast turning into entrepreneurs. With the agro-industry setting its firm foot in nondescript rural areas, mainly in Jodhpur district, chains of warehouses, cold storage facilities and food processing units have been established on agricultural land in a big way. Despite the adverse circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, as many as 617 agro-projects are in the pipeline with an estimated investment of ₹1,255 crore.

KEYWORDS: Rajasthan, Agri-entrepreneurship, processing, cultivators, projects, investment, farmers

I. INTRODUCTION

Farmers have evinced a keen interest in setting up units for oilseeds, pulses, spices, groundnut, cotton, milk and grain processing along with warehouses and cattle feed enterprises. While becoming financially self-sufficient, farmers are also providing employment to the village youths. Support for entrepreneurship in the farmer community came through the State government's agro-processing, agri-business and agri-export promotion policy adopted in 2019. The ambitious scheme gives subsidy on capital investment and interest to farmers and entrepreneurs for setting up agro-processing industries and developing infrastructure. Mohan Ram Chaudhary,[1,2] who established an agro-industry at Mathania village in Jodhpur's Osian tehsil, told The Hindu that the decreasing ground water level had created difficulties for his farming activities. "When I came to know of the new scheme, I submitted a project report for a groundnut decortication unit. The loan and subsidy were approved in the pandemic," he said.[3,4]

Woman farmer Munni Sankhla, known as a progressive cultivator in the region, has installed an onion-garlic dehydration plant in her agricultural field. Ms. Sankhla said her unit had started exporting onions and garlic, available locally in good quantity, after value addition. Farmers were also getting fair prices for their produce through such units. As part of the policy, farmers and their organisations are given a 50% grant, or a maximum of ₹1 crore, of the project cost, while other eligible entrepreneurs get the grant of 25%, or a maximum of ₹50 lakh. To reduce the cost of operation, farmers are given interest subvention at the rate of 6% for five years on getting term loans.[5,6]

A transport businessman and a medical professional are among the entrepreneurs who have launched their agri-business ventures in Jodhpur district's Tinwari village. Having received 25% subsidy in the non-farmer category, they have installed solar power panels in their units to reduce dependence on electricity.[7,8]

Bhaskar A. Sawant, Principal Secretary, Agriculture, said the value addition to agricultural products would directly benefit the cultivators by facilitating the sale of processed items at fair and remunerative prices. "The State government's initiative during the pandemic has encouraged farmers and youths to become entrepreneurs and generate jobs for others," he said.

The State government has so far sanctioned a subsidy of ₹119 crore in the sector, after more than 85 farmers set up their enterprises, and the non-agricultural entrepreneurs established 250 units by investing ₹496 crore. A large number of other units have also started functioning after getting loans from banks. With an immense potential for agro-products, Rajasthan is set to emerge as a leading State in the much sought-after domain on the strength of the policy.



The role of middlemen is also expected to shrink with the measures for supporting post-harvest storage, transport, and direct linking of farmers with the market. Shiv Ram Parihar of Balarwa village, who has set up a spice processing enterprise, said farmers could store their commodities with the creation of warehouses and get loans to meet their immediate needs without the compulsion to sell the produce immediately after harvesting.[9,10]

Agro-food business in Rajasthan Agro-food business is a multi-billion dollar industry in the Rajasthan region. This sector contributes to the livelihoods of both farmers and farm laborers in Rajasthan as well as small and medium-sized businesses. In addition, it creates jobs and stimulates the local economy in rural areas. The agro-food business in Rajasthan is estimated to have a share of about 40% of the total agro-food business in India. It contributes 39% of the total value of goods and services and employs 24% of the total workforce.

Rajasthan produces a wide variety of fenugreek, mustard, bajra, cumin, coriander, etc., in a number of different forms. The most common are processed into flour, which is made into bread or baked into biscuits, cake, or pastries. Fenugreek seed oil is also made from fenugreek in Rajasthan. In addition to producing oilseeds and oil, Rajasthan is also a major producer of Chana and masoor dal, both of which are processed into a variety of products. The largest producer of dal in India is from Rajasthan. [11] The state is also a major producer of both red and whole masoor rice, which is used in traditional dishes such as rajma (red kidney bean) and halva.

II. DISCUSSION

Rajasthan is also the leading producer of milk in North India. Saras Milk product brand of Rajasthan Cooperative Milk Producer Union has its outlets in the capital, Jodhpur (HQ), and other major cities such as Jaipur and New Delhi. The state has several smaller dairies as well, which produce a wide range of milk-based products such as butter, yogurt, and cheese. The most well-known cheese is 'Rajasthan', which is a yellowish cheese with a strong aroma.

Government initiative to promote agri-business in Rajasthan

1. The government has taken a step to make agro-business flourish and help farmers increase their income. In order to do so, the state launched the 'Rajasthan Agro-Market Exposition & Fairs' in October 2016. This was the first time that exhibition was organized by any government in the country.[12,13]
2. Rajasthan Agro-processing, Agri-business & Agro-export Promotion Policy, 2019 - This policy has been formulated to promote the agro-processing industry in the state, which includes the production, processing, and marketing of agricultural products. It has also been formulated to promote the agri-business industry, which focuses on the production of crops, and the agro-export industry, which focuses on the export of crops.
3. Food parks - Food parks are a new way to experience the local cuisine and culture of Rajasthan. Food parks are located in unique places, such as lakeside restaurants, heritage sites, and even inside shopping malls. They offer a variety of dining experiences, such as sitting down at a restaurant with a view of the lake, and eating at a heritage site. The food at a food park is usually cheaper than traditional restaurant cuisine, but the quality of food is usually as good as or better than in traditional restaurants.[14]

Reasons to invest in Rajasthan Agro-Food Business

1. They have 6 food parks, and one mega Food Park, which is located in Ajmer.
2. 2 zones for agro-export
3. Has 8 inland container depots
4. Excellent network of roadways and railways for easy transportation of products.
5. Rajasthan has the highest rank in the stand-alone Export Preparedness Index 2020 among the landlocked states.



III. RESULTS

The inspiring story of flourishing agro-industry in Rajasthan, subsequently turning farmers into entrepreneurs, is a case in point looking at the dismal situation of the farmers countrywide after the new agricultural laws.[15,16]

Even amidst the dreading covid-19 pandemic, as many as 617 agro projects are in the pipeline with an investment of 1.255 crores. Such prospects in the agricultural industry are attributable to targeted government policies with effective implementation. Rajasthan government has been keen to recognise the farmer community and improve their well-being by promoting entrepreneurship by adopting its agro-processing, agri-business and agri- export promotion policy in 2019. In addition, certain incentives, subsidies and land conversion offered by the government during the pandemic have helped utilise their agricultural skills into an entrepreneurial venture.

On the surface level, most of the country's population is employed in the agriculture sector, which still suffers from disguised, seasonal, cyclic, and other unemployment problems. Under conventional farming techniques, a lack of resources and adequate financial capital takes a heavy toll on the farming sector. Taking down an approximate analysis- about 40- 60% of the Indian population works in the agriculture sector, contributing about 15- 18% to India's GDP.

This presents a grim scenario with disproportion in the economy and poses an urgent need to implement a balancing mechanism. The Rajasthan agriculture model is laudable in this sense as it creates agriculture entrepreneurship by establishing a circular income flow model, initiating a free flow of cash. The farmers of Rajasthan are ready to invest due to subvention and government onus which offers minimal risk.[17,18]

When prices are skyrocketing and the overall economy is slumping, it is crucial to integrate the agriculture sector with the mainstream. Seeing the nationwide farmers protest, it is self-evident that the new agriculture laws put in place by the union government did not consider the actual situation and the needs of the farmers. The farmers in distress argue that the new laws give a better stake to the private sector, eliminates Minimum Support prices, thus, making them vulnerable to the private market mechanisms.

Good governance entails that a well-defined policy formulated effectively benefits the targeted community. The Rajasthan model puts across as a commendable example of great administration where the targeted group is the direct beneficiary of the government schemes. Financial independence, self-sustainability, increased employment, women empowerment, the dignified standard of living are the objectives covered under its ambit.

The union government needs to draw lessons from this model and recognise the farmer community as an asset to the economy. It needs to re-analyse the new agricultural laws, take suggestions of a joint committee comprising various stakeholders and then alter the law accordingly. It needs to deeply study the agricultural economy, draw statistical analysis and employ a negotiated decision-making system with the opposition parties for inclusivity and deliberation on different viewpoints, thus leading to a well-analysed policy formulation. A government must keep up to the expectations of the people it represents and work for its cause. Rajasthan Model is the farmer's model, and the Union government effectively needs to extract lessons from it.[19]

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The Rajasthan government is working on a strategy to increase farmers' income, according to officials. "The steps include providing seeds of improved varieties at an affordable rate so that there is an increase in productivity and income. The government is also holding campaigns and deliberations with farmers in every corner of the state to improve farming techniques," officials said.[20]

According to estimates, agriculture and allied sectors contribute over 25 per cent to the gross state domestic product. For fiscal year 2022-23, Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot had presented a separate Budget on agriculture, which made a provision of Rs 1,705 crore to benefit over 400,000 farmers with drip irrigation. Similarly, the state has approved the construction of 9,738 farm ponds, for which the Budget offered a subsidy of Rs 825 crore. The state is issuing work orders for setting up 22,807 solar pumps for farmers, for which it is giving a subsidy of Rs 61.58 crore. The work is also on to provide 1,000 drones with a cost of Rs 40 crore to gram seva sahakari samitis and farmer organisations to help farmers spray pesticides effectively in less time and at a low cost. Seeds of 1 million bajra or pearl millet mini kits worth Rs 78 crore and 200,000 micronutrients and organic pesticide kits have been distributed to small and marginal



farmers under the Mukhyamantri Beej Swavalamban Yojana. Besides, the government is floating a proposal to set up an organic commodity board and centres for excellence for micro irrigation at divisional headquarters. [21]

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Impact Factor
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