



## Initiatives to Attract and Retain Youth in Farming

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**ABSTRACT:** Youth play a vital role in the successful transformation of farming in India. The younger generation will be interested in taking the farming as a profession only if farming becomes both economically and intellectually attractive. The rural population is about 70%, and the indications are that the migration of rural youth to cities is around 45% in the country, which is quite alarming. Attracting and retaining youth in agriculture is critical for Indian Agriculture as India is losing more than 2,000 farmers every single day since 1991, the overall number of farmers has dropped by 15 million. Role of young farmers, as both drivers and agents of change in agriculture needs to be recognized and emphasized. Most of the innovations require skilled and well trained young farmers with enthusiasm and passion for farming and ability to take risks. Capitalizing young people in the agricultural sector is crucial in improving agricultural productivity, food security and the economy.

**Keywords:** Agriculture, Attract and Retain youth, Migration, youth in farming.

### INTRODUCTION

In India youth unemployment as a percentage of youth population is 10 per cent for males and 11 per cent for females and averaged 15.50 percent. More than half of India's population is under the age of 25, with 65 percent of the population under 35. The rural population is about 70 percent, and the indications are that the migration of rural youth to cities is around 45 percent in the country, which is quite alarming (Chander, 2013). Unfortunately, only around 5 percent of the rural youth is currently engaged in agriculture. As per the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Status of Education Report (2017), a significant proportion of youth aged 14 to 18 years are working (42 percent), regardless of whether they are enrolled in formal education or not. Of these, 79 percent work in agriculture, almost all on their own family's farm. Yet only 1.2 percent aspire to become farmers. Agriculture is currently pushed to the bottom of the list of viable livelihood options (Katyal and Katyal 2018).

There are nearly 15 million farmers less than there were in 1991 and over 7.7 million farmers less since 2001, as the latest census data show. On an average, that is about 2035 agrarians losing 'Main Cultivator' status every single day for the last 20 years. Census tells that there are 95.8 million farmers for whom farming is their principal occupation. That is less than 8 percent of the population (Down from 103 million in 2001 and 110 million in 1991). Include all marginal farmers (22.8 million), and that is still less than 10 percent of the population. Even all cultivators and agricultural laborers count together; the number would be around

263 million or 22 percent of the population (Sainath, 2013). Youth migration from rural to urban areas to find employment has been increasing – to date around 30% of 315 million migrants are youth. According to a World Bank report, half of India's population would be urban by 2050. Simultaneously, it is predicted that the proportion of agricultural workers in the entire workforce will fall from 58.2 percent in 2001 to 25.7 percent by 2050 (PIB, 2018).

#### Strengths of Youth

- More educated than their elders
- More knowledgeable due to internet and electronic media
- Much more enterprising
- Looking for a change in lifestyle
- Willing to work hard and taking risk
- A huge human capital available to be utilized in the best interest of the country

#### Challenges faced by young farmers

i) Lack of access to and control over productive resources (land, capital, seeds, etc) and markets

In many cases, young farmers have to wait until they inherit family land. So, young small-scale farmers do not have access to credit because they are not heads of their families, which is a legal necessity, or they do not have the required collateral since these assets are normally still in the names of their parents.

ii) Inadequate skills and knowledge on production, processing, and business

Young farmers lack requisite experience, training and technical know-how and skills to raise farm productivity, such as agricultural technology, farm

management, agri-enterprise business development, and marketing. Skill development and technology transfer are believed to be the keys for “model youth farming”. These have been included neither in government programmes nor in the school curriculum. Many institutions do not understand what today's youth aspire to, despite their preference for new technologies. With a lack of encouragement, support, and promotion of adequate knowledge and skills relevant to technology and farming modernization, young farmers do not see much of a future in agriculture (Wobst, 2010).

iii) Globalization, uncertainties, and variability in prices. Other reason is agricultural price volatility. The high prices of agricultural inputs such as fertilisers, insecticides, seeds and low price for agricultural products makes farming unprofitable. Secondly, agriculture is a very risky enterprise, which requires a lot of risks and yet has low returns. The young farmers don't have access to the market and most of them depend on middlemen to dispose off their produce at reasonable prices. Traders take advantage of the farmers' vulnerability and manipulate prices of agricultural commodities. Farmers are facing increased unpredictability as a result of changing climate trends (Anonymous, 2015).

The NITI Aayog published a report to establish the effectiveness of MSPs where it stated that only 10 per cent of the farmers were informed of the MSPs before the sowing season. After having sowed their crops, 62 per cent of the farmers were informed about the MSPs. The MSP pricing policies work only if the farmers know about the pricing policies when deciding on which crops to grow (Deshpande, 2017).

iv) Lack of participation in agricultural governance. The involvement of farmers in major agricultural decision-making processes is not well represented and therefore, has little or no voice. As such, young farmers' challenges and concerns are rarely addressed or even brought to emphasis since they have been excluded from agricultural policy creation and decision-making processes (Anonymous, 2015). Few national youth policies addressing the specific needs of young people have been formulated and implemented. Policies often lack the element of diversity of the youth and are largely focused on the non-poor urban men (Bennell, 2007).

#### **Government Initiatives**

**1. Krishi Vignan Kendras.** KVK's major mission is to provide need-based vocational training to farmers, farm women, and rural adolescents in order to transform their knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and thereby, raising their standard of living. During the years 2012-12 to 2016-17, the number of trainings conducted were 2,29,025 for which 12,81,403 youth attended (NILERD, 2017).

**2. NABARD Farmer's Clubs.** The policy support by NABARD for the Farmers' Club Programme is focused on connecting technologies to the members of farmers' clubs, while at the same time facilitating their access to market through

— Capacity building of members of Farmers' Clubs including leadership training.

— Linkage with technology/markets

— Self Help Groups (SHGs)/Joint Liability Groups (JLGs) formation

— Forming Federations of Farmers' Clubs/Producers' Groups/Companies

The broad objective of establishing Farmers' Clubs is to create wealth for the farmers by credit counselling, technological counselling and market counselling in their areas of functioning. For the next three years, the NABARD would provide each club with a financial assistance of Rs. 10,000 each year. This amount is intended to be utilized by the club members for meeting routine expenditures related to formation, maintenance, and the organization of awareness programmes. Most of the farmers' clubs have a significant number of rural youth (Chander, 2013).

**3. Skill training of Rural Youth.** The aim is to provide skill-based training to the rural youth in agri-based vocational areas of agriculture and allied areas, with the objective of increasing rural employment and to develop trained workforce for carrying out farm and non-farm activities. National Institute of Agriculture Extension Management (MANAGE) under Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare will coordinate this work from the national level. The training activities will be done by SAMETIs created at the state level. District level co-ordination will be done by ATMA. Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Nehru Yuva Sanghathans, Farmers Training Centers and/or any other training institutions identified at the State/District Level will impart training to Rural Youth (GoI, 2015).

**4. National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM).** The objective of NRLM is to provide opportunities for wage employment and skill development to rural youth who are unskilled or under-skilled in different aspects of agriculture production and processing, and hence the National Skill Development Mission and the National Skill Qualification Framework are aggressively working towards the objective of skill development to enhance the capability of the rural young people, so that they could be efficiently employed in rural areas. Need-based experiential skill learning with the support of the public sector banks/ organizations in the rural areas is, therefore, the basis for the success of Rural Self Employment Training Institutes (RSETIs) to be set up in each district to train such youth under NRLM (Likhi, 2013). NRLM requires appropriate decentralized convergence of skill development programs which are currently being managed by several central ministries, especially the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC).

**5. Agricultural Skill Council of India (ASCI).** In response to the demand for skilling the labour force in the agricultural sector, the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) proposed the creation of the Agricultural Skills Council of India (ASCI), which may be an ideal institution to train the rural youth. ASCI was established in January 2013 as a Section 25 company under the Companies Act of the Ministry of Company Affairs, with the objective of enhancing capacity of agricultural sector and bridging the gap between laboratories and farms. ASCI intends to train, certify, and accredit 56.5 million farmers, wage workers, entrepreneurs, and extension workers over the next

decade through its training partners (Hedge *et al.*, 2015).

**6.**The ACABC (Agri-Clinic and Agri-Business Centre) programme, launched in 2002 by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare of the Government of India in association with MANAGE, SFAC, and NABARD, motivates unemployed agricultural graduates to venture into agribusiness by providing relevant training, mentoring, and credit linkage (Som *et al.*, 2019)

**7.** The Government of India, in its recent times has introduced a plethora of youth-oriented programs such as Skill India, Pradhan Mantri Krishi Vikas Yojana, Start-up India, and Stand-up India for promoting youth empowerment and entrepreneurship (Singh *et al.*, 2016).

**8. Attracting and Retaining Youth in Agriculture (ARYA).** Realizing the significance of rural youth for agricultural growth, especially from the context of food security of the country, ICAR has launched a programme named "Attracting and Retaining Youth in Agriculture". Under this strategy, special efforts will be made to attract rural young under the age of 35 to agriculture, thus restricting the rural youth migration to cities.

The objectives of this programme are as follows:

i) To attract and empower youth in rural areas to engage in various agriculture, allied, and service sector enterprises for sustainable income and gainful employment in selected districts

(ii) To empower Farm Youth to form network work groups to engage in resource and capital-intensive tasks such as processing, value addition, and marketing, and

(iii) To establish functional linkages with other institutions and stakeholders for the convergence of opportunities available under various schemes/programs for the sustainable development of youth.

**Operational Mechanism:** The project will be carried out in 25 districts, one in each state, by KVKs in the respective districts in collaboration with technical partners from the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) institutes, Agricultural Universities, and others. One or two entrepreneurial development units shall be established at the KVK level itself to be operated as an entrepreneurial training unit(s) for agricultural youth. The KVKs shall also facilitate the agricultural youth to set up different entrepreneurial units on their farm or in the farm of a group of youth.

**Identification of Youth:** Each KVK will cover around 200 youth below the age of 35. The youth will be selected on the basis of their gender and social status. The implementing KVK will evaluate the capability of each individual candidate (youth) for identifying a particular appropriate agricultural venture for him/her. The District Committee constituted at the KVK level for the implementation of ARYA project shall also give general guidance in identifying promising youth with entrepreneurial skill. Besides developing entrepreneurial skills, the youth will also be trained in the required skills for identified enterprises. Entrepreneurial units will be established at their location in the selected district based on the market

potential of the enterprise and availability of funds. Apiary, mushroom, seed processing, soil testing, poultry, dairy, goatry, carp hatchery, vermicompost, etc. are possible entrepreneurial activities.

Economic models need to be developed for youth in the village, such that youth get attracted to agriculture and the rural condition as a whole improves. Skill development among rural youth will act as a catalyst in increasing their confidence and motivate them to take up farming as a profession, and it will also pave the way for new employment opportunities for underemployed and unemployed rural youth in the areas of secondary agriculture and other service-related fields in rural regions. These trained youth groups become the role model for other youths; showing them the potential of agri-based enterprises and training other farmers.

The ARYA plan will be governed by a number of committees formed with the approval of the competent authority in the ICAR. An Apex Committee, a Steering Committee, Zonal Committees, and District Committee would all be set up for the administration and proper execution of the ARYA scheme (Singh *et al.*, 2016).

For the purpose of assisting eligible community members in upgrading traditional skills and/or acquiring new critical skills in financial accounting, business development, computer literacy, and any other areas that will result in gainful employment opportunities, the project establishes Village Poverty Reduction Committees (VPRC) for the purpose of allocating funds for skill development and training. The VPRC organizes festivals in each village, creating awareness of this initiative and sensitize youth towards skill training and opportunities for employment. A database of individuals aged 18–35 is created, which includes qualifications and competencies as well as preferred training. Youth with previous training and having the appropriate skills are encouraged to attend job fairs conducted once a month in each district, wherein local and multinational companies hire job seekers. Unskilled youth are assigned to training programmes based on their background and current skill set (Balaji, 2016).

**9.** Indeed, the government should make an effort in designing and establishing a programme much like NYAP, which will make people under 35 years of age more entrepreneurial and more involved in agribusiness by developing new markets for their products and value-added agricultural products. The programme could play a critical role in not only integrating young farmers with young entrepreneurs for mutual learning and growth but also help young entrepreneurs develop in a sustainable manner. It supports socially responsible investments that take into account global and local environmental problems.

Most of the youth enterprises that the program supports are either dealing with agro-products or agro-processed products. NYAP can also support the establishment of modern market information services and ICT-enabled marketing and trading. Setting up NYAP Clubs to sensitize and train the next generation on how they can create their own enterprise and marketing opportunities. The NYAP Program, without doubt, will provide new

channels of marketing and attract young entrepreneurs to the agribusiness sector and provides a collaborative strategy of linking the youth groups from the farm to marketing.

The groups should concentrate in diversified aspects such as input supply, farming systems, consultancy base, market survey and marketing, as well as value addition. Unique concepts such as eco-tourism, nursery business, turf management, organic farming, contract farming, soil-less culture, aquaculture, and integrated farming systems require an awareness-raising and skill-development programme. Moreover, strategies and policies for youth with agriculture-based education who are not from agrarian background should be devised, with the goal of empowering them through project support for agri-business (Kapadiya *et al.*, 2016).

10. The Student 'Rural Entrepreneurship and Awareness Development Yojana' (READY) programme envisaged in the XII Five Year Plan aims at inculcation of entrepreneurship among the youth. It combines RAW and Experimental Learning courses to prepare student READY with the experience at grass root level and entrepreneurial skills. The broad network of agricultural universities and colleges should play a pivotal role in inculcating in students the requisite self-confidence and competencies to be able to take up agriculture as a career. Agri-clinics and agri-business centres can be started as rural enterprises by farm graduates (Balaji, 2016).

#### **Other Initiatives:**

1. ASEAN-India Farmers Exchange was instituted by the ASEAN (Association of South East Nations) Ministers in recognition of the need to promote innovation and entrepreneurship amongst the youth so as to attain more sustainable development in agriculture in the region. This is a programme that aims at creating awareness amongst the youth and the innovative farmers on the tremendous career openings in the agriculture sector. The first Exchange Visit was conducted in Malaysia in November 2012, concurrently with the 2012 ASEAN Farmers' Week and the Malaysian Agriculture, Horticulture, and Agro-tourism (MAHA) International, and was followed by the second Exchange Visit conducted in India last December 19-30, 2012, wherein farmers from nine ASEAN member states attended (Anonymous, 2012).

2. Another initiative which aimed at bringing together young agriculture experts on a same platform was the Young Professionals' Platform for Agricultural Research for Development (YPARD), established in November 2006. It is one of the dynamic networks with over 4,500 members from 117 countries dedicated to the exchange of information among youth and involvement in critical discussions in agricultural research for development (Anonymous, 2013).

#### **3. Doubling farmer's Income**

To double farmers' actual income from 2015-16 to 2022-23, an increase of income by 10.41 percent per annum is required. To augment increase in output and revenue, there are four types of sources

1. Infrastructure development initiatives
2. Technology
3. Policies and procedures

4. Institutional structures. Drivers of livestock growth may include improved herd quality, better feed quality, increased artificial insemination, shorter calving intervals and lower age at first calving. Better price realization, efficient post-harvest management, competitive value chains, and the adoption of associated activities an easily account for one-third of the rise in farmers' income. The mere assurance of MSP for farm produce, either through a competitive market, or by remuneration through government intervention would itself be sufficient in most of the states for a substantial increase in farmer's income (Chand, 2017).

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

Evidence from several sources points to growing youth disinterest in farming. The immense workforce of youth presently available in the country can be engrossed with careful alteration in the present mechanism of this sector alone. This automatically will contribute for resolution of the crisis of both, youth unemployment and migration. What is currently needed is formulation of appropriate policies and strategies for attracting and retaining young people in this sector so that Indian agriculture can experience a new stature in the hands of young and enthusiastic farmers.

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