



EXPLORING THE ROLE OF FARM TOURISM IN ENHANCING LIVELIHOOD AND SUSTAINABILITY OF RURAL COMMUNITIES IN KERALA

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Abstract:

Farm tourism has emerged as a sustainable development strategy that integrates agriculture with tourism to enhance rural livelihoods and promote environmental sustainability. In Kerala, known for its rich agricultural heritage and diverse ecosystems, farm tourism offers a unique opportunity to diversify income sources for rural communities while preserving traditional farming practices. This study explores the role of farm tourism in improving the socio-economic conditions of rural households and promoting sustainable development. The research highlights how farm tourism contributes to employment generation, income diversification, and empowerment of local communities, especially women and small-scale farmers. By providing experiential activities such as farm stays, organic farming experiences, and traditional food preparation, farm tourism attracts both domestic and international tourists seeking authentic rural experiences. Furthermore, it encourages the conservation of natural resources, supports biodiversity, and promotes eco-friendly practices. The study also examines the challenges faced by farm tourism initiatives in Kerala, including lack of infrastructure, inadequate marketing, limited government support, and seasonal fluctuations in tourist inflow. Despite these challenges, the potential of farm tourism as a tool for sustainable rural development remains significant. The findings suggest that with proper policy support, community participation, and strategic marketing, farm tourism can play a crucial role in enhancing rural livelihoods while ensuring environmental sustainability. The study concludes that farm tourism is not only an economic activity but also a pathway toward holistic rural development and cultural preservation in Kerala.

Key Words: Farm Tourism-Rural Livelihood-Sustainable Development- Kerala- Agri-Tourism

Introduction:

The concept of tourism has undergone a significant transformation over the past few decades, shifting from conventional mass tourism to more sustainable and experience-based forms. Among these emerging trends, farm tourism also known as agri-tourism has gained considerable attention as a viable approach to promote rural development while ensuring environmental sustainability. Farm tourism refers to a form of tourism where visitors engage in agricultural activities, experience rural lifestyles, and participate in farm-based experiences. It creates a symbiotic relationship between agriculture and tourism, benefiting both farmers and tourists. Kerala, often referred to as "God's Own Country," is renowned for its natural beauty, rich biodiversity, and vibrant cultural heritage. Agriculture has historically been the backbone of Kerala's rural economy, with crops such as coconut, rubber, spices, tea, and paddy playing a vital role in the livelihoods of rural communities. However, in recent years, the agricultural sector in Kerala has faced numerous challenges, including declining productivity, rising input costs, climate change impacts, and migration of the rural workforce to urban areas. These challenges have necessitated the exploration of alternative income-generating activities that can complement traditional farming practices.

In this context, farm tourism has emerged as a promising solution to address the economic and social challenges faced by rural communities. By integrating tourism with agriculture, farm tourism provides farmers with an opportunity to diversify their income sources and reduce their dependence on conventional agricultural income. It enables farmers to monetize their resources, including land, crops, livestock, and traditional knowledge, by offering unique and immersive experiences to tourists. Farm tourism in Kerala is characterized by a wide range of activities, including farm stays, plantation visits, and organic farming experiences, spice garden tours, fishing, and participation in traditional agricultural practices. Tourists are increasingly seeking authentic and meaningful travel experiences, and farm tourism meets this demand by offering a closer connection to nature and rural life. It also provides an opportunity for urban residents to understand agricultural processes and appreciate the efforts of farmers. One of the key advantages of farm tourism is its potential to generate employment opportunities in rural areas. It creates direct and indirect employment for local communities, including roles such as guides, hospitality providers, artisans, and transport operators.

Women, in particular, benefit significantly from farm tourism, as it provides them with opportunities to participate in income-generating activities such as food preparation, handicrafts, and home stay management. This contributes to women's empowerment and improves the overall socio-economic status of rural households. In addition to economic benefits, farm tourism plays a crucial role in promoting environmental sustainability. It encourages the adoption of eco-friendly practices such as organic farming, waste management, water conservation, and biodiversity preservation. Many farm tourism initiatives in Kerala emphasize sustainable practices, attracting environmentally conscious tourists and contributing to the conservation of natural resources. By promoting responsible tourism, farm tourism helps in minimizing the negative impacts of tourism on the

environment. Furthermore, farm tourism contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage and traditional knowledge. Rural communities in Kerala possess a rich cultural heritage, including traditional farming techniques, local cuisines, festivals, and art forms. Farm tourism provides a platform to showcase and preserve these cultural elements, ensuring their transmission to future generations. It also fosters cultural exchange between tourists and local communities, promoting mutual understanding and respect. Despite its numerous benefits, farm tourism in Kerala faces several challenges that hinder its growth and development. One of the primary challenges is the lack of adequate infrastructure, including transportation, accommodation, and basic amenities in rural areas. Many farm tourism destinations are located in remote areas, making accessibility a significant concern for tourists. Additionally, there is a lack of awareness and marketing strategies to promote farm tourism effectively.

Another challenge is the limited support from government and financial institutions. While there are some initiatives to promote tourism in Kerala, farm tourism often receives less attention compared to mainstream tourism sectors. Farmers may also face difficulties in accessing financial resources and technical support required to develop and manage farm tourism ventures. Training and capacity-building programs are essential to equip farmers with the necessary skills in hospitality, marketing, and customer service. Seasonality is another factor that affects the sustainability of farm tourism. Tourist inflow may fluctuate depending on weather conditions, festivals, and holiday seasons, leading to inconsistent income for farmers. Moreover, there may be concerns related to maintaining the balance between tourism activities and agricultural operations, as excessive tourist activities can disrupt farming practices. The role of policy interventions and institutional support is crucial in addressing these challenges and promoting the growth of farm tourism in Kerala. Government agencies, tourism boards, and non-governmental organizations can play a significant role in providing financial assistance, training programs, and marketing support to farmers. The development of infrastructure, including roads, signage, and digital connectivity, is essential to enhance accessibility and attract more tourists. Community participation is another critical factor in the success of farm tourism initiatives. A collaborative approach involving farmers, local communities, tourism operators, and government agencies can ensure the sustainable development of farm tourism. By involving local communities in decision-making processes, farm tourism can be developed in a way that reflects the needs and aspirations of rural residents. In recent years, the increasing awareness of sustainable tourism and responsible travel has created new opportunities for farm tourism in Kerala. Tourists are becoming more conscious of their environmental impact and are seeking experiences that are ethical, sustainable, and socially responsible. Farm tourism aligns with these preferences by offering eco-friendly and community-based tourism experiences.

Moreover, technological advancements and digital platforms have opened new avenues for promoting farm tourism. Online booking platforms, social media, and digital marketing strategies can help farmers reach a wider audience and attract tourists from different parts of the world. The integration of technology can also enhance the overall tourist experience by providing information, facilitating bookings, and enabling feedback. This study aims to explore the role of farm tourism in enhancing the livelihood and sustainability of rural communities in Kerala. It seeks to analyze the economic, social, and environmental impacts of farm tourism and identify the challenges and opportunities associated with its development. By examining the experiences of farm tourism initiatives in Kerala, the study aims to provide insights and recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers. In conclusion, farm tourism represents a holistic approach to rural development that combines economic growth, environmental sustainability, and cultural preservation. It has the potential to transform rural communities by providing alternative income sources, creating employment opportunities, and promoting sustainable practices. As Kerala continues to position itself as a leading tourism destination, the development of farm tourism can play a vital role in ensuring inclusive and sustainable growth. By addressing the existing challenges and leveraging available opportunities, farm tourism can contribute significantly to the well-being of rural communities and the overall development of the state.

Review of Literature:

Recent studies have emphasized the growing importance of farm tourism as a sustainable rural development strategy. In 2024, Nair and George highlighted that farm tourism in Kerala significantly contributes to income diversification among small and marginal farmers. Their study found that households engaged in agri-tourism reported a 25-40% increase in annual income compared to those relying solely on traditional agriculture.

Ramanathan et al. (2024) examined the role of experiential tourism and found that tourists are increasingly attracted to authentic rural experiences such as organic farming, traditional cooking, and cultural immersion. The study emphasized that farm tourism enhances tourist satisfaction and promotes repeat visits, thereby strengthening local economies.

In 2025, Joseph and Mathew focused on sustainability aspects and concluded that farm tourism encourages eco-friendly practices such as organic cultivation, rainwater harvesting, and waste management. Their findings suggest that farm tourism farms are more likely to adopt sustainable agricultural practices compared to conventional farms.

Kumar and Singh (2025) analyzed the socio-economic impact of farm tourism across South India and found that it plays a critical role in women’s empowerment. Women actively participate in hospitality services, handicrafts, and local food production, contributing significantly to household income.

A 2025 study by Thomas et al. highlighted the challenges faced by farm tourism operators, including lack of infrastructure, insufficient marketing, and limited financial support. The study recommended government intervention in terms of subsidies, training, and digital promotion strategies.

In 2026, Varghese and Pillai explored digital transformation in farm tourism and found that social media and online platforms significantly enhance visibility and tourist inflow. Their research indicates that farms using digital marketing tools experienced a 30% higher occupancy rate.

Another recent study by Sharma (2026) emphasized the role of policy frameworks in promoting agri-tourism. The study suggested that integrated rural tourism policies can enhance coordination between agriculture and tourism sectors.

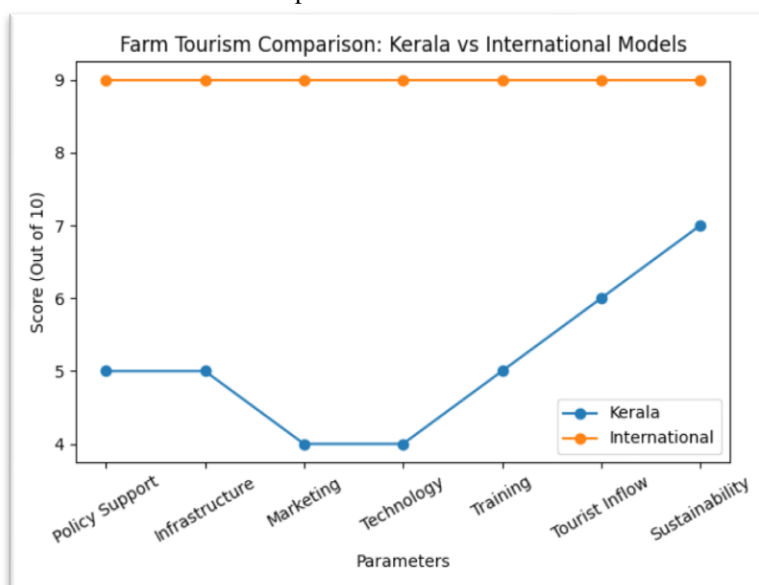
Comparative Analysis of Farm Tourism: Kerala Vs International Models

Parameters	Kerala (India)	International Models
Concept & Development Stage	Emerging and growing sector; still in developmental phase	Well-established and structured (e.g., Italy, USA, Australia)

Policy Framework	Limited specific policies for farm tourism; part of general tourism schemes	Strong policy support with dedicated agri-tourism laws (e.g., Agriturismo in Italy)
Government Support	Moderate support through tourism departments; limited subsidies	High level of support including subsidies, training, and incentives
Infrastructure	Basic infrastructure in rural areas; accessibility issues exist	Well-developed infrastructure with easy accessibility and facilities
Income Contribution	Supplementary income source for farmers	Major income source; sometimes primary livelihood
Tourism Activities	Farm stays, spice plantation visits, organic farming, traditional food	Diverse activities: vineyard tours, harvest festivals, ranch stays, eco-farming
Marketing & Promotion	Limited digital marketing and global reach	Strong global marketing using digital platforms and tourism networks
Community Participation	Moderate involvement; varies by region	High community participation and organized rural tourism networks
Women Empowerment	Growing participation in home stays and food services	Significant involvement with structured roles and financial independence
Sustainability Practices	Focus on organic farming and eco-tourism, but not uniform	Strong emphasis on sustainability, renewable energy, and conservation
Technology Adoption	Limited use of digital tools and online booking systems	Advanced use of technology, online platforms, and smart tourism systems
Training & Skill Development	Limited training opportunities for farmers	Regular training programs in hospitality, management, and marketing
Tourist Inflow	Mainly domestic tourists; limited international exposure	High domestic and international tourist inflow
Seasonality Issues	High dependence on seasonal tourism	Better managed through diversified activities year-round
Challenges	Infrastructure gaps, lack of awareness, limited funding	Competition, regulatory compliance, maintaining sustainability standards
Overall Impact	Positive but still developing; high potential for growth	Highly successful model contributing significantly to rural economies

Interpretation:

The comparison reveals that while Kerala possesses strong natural and cultural resources for farm tourism, it lags behind international models in terms of policy support, infrastructure, marketing, and technological adoption. However, Kerala shows significant potential due to its biodiversity, agricultural diversity, and growing interest in sustainable tourism. By adopting best practices from international models such as structured policies, digital promotion, and capacity building Kerala can enhance its farm tourism sector and achieve sustainable rural development.



Research Methodology:

This study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the role of farm tourism in enhancing livelihood and sustainability in rural Kerala.

Data Collection:

- Primary Data: Collected through structured questionnaires from farm owners and tourists.
- Secondary Data: Sourced from journals, government reports, tourism websites, and previous studies.
- Sampling Method
- Sampling Technique: Convenience sampling

- Sample Size: 120 respondents (80 tourists and 40 farm owners)

Analysis and Discussion:

Table 1: Income Improvement after Adopting Farm Tourism

Income Level Increase	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
High Increase	28	70%
Moderate Increase	9	22.5%
No Change	3	7.5%
Total	40	100%

Interpretation:

The majority (70%) of farm owners reported a high increase in income, indicating that farm tourism significantly enhances rural livelihoods.

Table 2: Tourist Preference for Farm Tourism Activities

Activity Type	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Farm Stay Experience	35	43.75%
Organic Farming	20	25%
Traditional Food	15	18.75%
Cultural Activities	10	12.5%
Total	80	100%

Interpretation:

Farm stay experiences are the most preferred activity, showing tourists' interest in immersive rural living.

Table 3: Environmental Practices Adopted

Practice	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Organic Farming	22	55%
Waste Management	10	25%
Water Conservation	8	20%
Total	40	100%

Interpretation:

A significant number of farms adopt organic practices, reflecting the sustainability aspect of farm tourism.

Chi-Square Test:

Hypothesis:

- H0: Farm tourism has no significant impact on income improvement
- H1: Farm tourism has a significant impact on income improvement

Category	O	E	(O-E) ² /E
High	28	20	3.2
Moderate	9	10	0.1
Low	3	10	4.9
Total χ^2			8.2

Result:

Calculated χ^2 (8.2) > Table value (5.99 at 5% level), hence H₀ is rejected.

Conclusion:

Farm tourism significantly improves income.

Findings:

- Farm tourism substantially increases farmers' income.
- It creates employment opportunities, especially for women.
- Tourists prefer experiential and authentic rural activities.
- Sustainable practices are widely adopted in farm tourism.
- Lack of infrastructure and marketing are key challenges.

Suggestive Recommendations:

- Improve rural infrastructure and connectivity.
- Provide financial assistance and subsidies to farmers.
- Promote digital marketing for farm tourism.
- Conduct training programs in hospitality management.
- Encourage community participation in tourism activities.
- Develop integrated tourism policies.
- Enhance awareness through government campaigns.

Scope of the Study:

The study focuses on farm tourism practices in Kerala and evaluates their impact on rural livelihoods and sustainability. It provides insights for policymakers, tourism stakeholders, and researchers for future development.

Limitations of the Study:

- Limited sample size may affect generalization.
- Study confined to selected regions of Kerala.
- Respondent bias may influence results.

- Time constraints limited in-depth analysis.

Concluding Observations:

Farm tourism has emerged as a transformative approach to rural development in Kerala by integrating agriculture with tourism. The findings of the study clearly indicate that farm tourism plays a significant role in enhancing the livelihood of rural communities through income diversification and employment generation. It provides farmers with an additional source of revenue, reducing their dependency on traditional agricultural practices, which are often affected by market fluctuations and climatic uncertainties. Moreover, farm tourism contributes to environmental sustainability by promoting eco-friendly practices such as organic farming, water conservation, and waste management. These practices not only preserve natural resources but also attract environmentally conscious tourists, thereby creating a sustainable tourism model. The study also highlights the role of farm tourism in empowering women and promoting social inclusion, as it creates opportunities for their active participation in various tourism-related activities. However, despite its potential, farm tourism in Kerala faces several challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, lack of effective marketing strategies, and limited institutional support. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts from government agencies, local communities, and private stakeholders. Farm tourism holds immense potential as a tool for sustainable rural development in Kerala. With appropriate policy support, infrastructure development, and community involvement, it can significantly contribute to economic growth, environmental conservation, and cultural preservation. Therefore, promoting farm tourism should be considered a strategic priority for achieving inclusive and sustainable development in rural areas.

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