



Youth Engagement in Agritourism: An Analysis of Opportunities and Barriers in Kollam District, Kerala

Stella S.

Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Fatima Mata National College, Kollam, Kerala



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Abstract

Agritourism, a burgeoning sector at the intersection of agriculture and tourism, holds immense potential for rural revitalization, especially for creating new livelihood opportunities for young people. This study investigates the key opportunities and significant challenges faced by youth in initiating or participating in agritourism ventures in the Kollam district of Kerala, a region with a strong agricultural base and cultural richness. Using a mixed-methods approach, including a survey of 50 local youth, the research reveals a striking gap between high awareness (84%) and low actual participation (44.9%) in agritourism activities. The findings indicate that while youth are interested in entrepreneurial ventures and are particularly attracted to aspects like local food experiences and organic farming, their engagement is primarily hindered by a lack of proper training (22.4%), financial constraints, and a significant social stigma associated with agricultural work (40%). The study also highlights the crucial role of digital platforms, with social media and educational institutions being the primary sources of information. This research underscores that to effectively harness the potential of agritourism for rural development, targeted interventions are necessary. Recommendations are proposed to address these barriers through strengthened training and financial support, improved infrastructure, and strategic awareness campaigns designed to shift social perceptions and brand agriculture as a modern, innovative, and rewarding career path.

Keywords: agritourism, youth engagement, rural development, entrepreneurship, social stigma, livelihood opportunities, sustainable development

Introduction

The global tourism landscape is undergoing a profound transformation, with a growing demand for authentic, experiential, and sustainable travel that fosters a deeper connection to local cultures and environments. In response, agritourism has emerged as a significant and rapidly growing industry. This form of rural tourism creatively links the agriculture and tourism sectors, providing economic, social, and educational benefits. For visitors, it offers hands-on learning experiences, cultural exchange, and an

understanding of food production, while for farmers and rural communities, it provides a vital opportunity to diversify income and maximize the value of their products and services. Agritourism is deeply tied to the principles of sustainability, aligning the economic, social, and environmental components of a community's well-being. As a multifaceted concept, it encompasses a variety of activities, including farm stays, fruit picking, plantation tours, organic food tasting, and cultural demonstrations.



In a country like India, where agriculture is the backbone of the economy, and with a young, educated population seeking diverse employment, agritourism offers a powerful model for rural revitalization. However, in many regions, the younger generation is increasingly abandoning agriculture due to perceived low income and a lack of social prestige. Agritourism presents a viable solution by rebranding farming as a dynamic, entrepreneurial, and rewarding venture. The active participation of youth is crucial for the sector's long-term sustainability and innovation. Young people bring fresh perspectives, technological literacy, and the entrepreneurial energy needed to transform traditional farming into vibrant, tourism-friendly experiences through ventures like farm stays, guided tours, and digital marketing.

Despite the favourable conditions and growing potential, youth participation in agritourism remains notably low in many parts of India, particularly in semi-rural and rural areas. The state of Kerala, celebrated for its scenic landscapes, rich biodiversity, and cultural heritage, holds immense promise for agritourism. The Kollam district, with its fertile agricultural zones and proximity to key tourist circuits, provides an ideal environment for this sector to flourish. However, there is a clear and concerning disconnect between the region's potential and the actual ground-level engagement by its youth. Many of Kollam's educated young people are underemployed or unemployed, representing a valuable demographic capable of driving innovation and entrepreneurship. This study seeks to bridge this identified gap by investigating the factors that deter youth engagement in agritourism and what measures can be taken to encourage more active and meaningful participation in this sector.

This research is guided by two **primary objectives**: (1) to identify the key opportunities available for youth in agritourism, including government schemes and entrepreneurial avenues, and (2) to explore the major challenges and barriers they face, such as financial constraints, inadequate training, and social stigma.

Literature Review

The academic discourse on agritourism has evolved, reflecting its increasing importance as a strategy for rural economic development and cultural preservation. Early studies often defined agritourism and its various forms, highlighting its dual role in providing farmers with an alternative income stream and offering tourists an authentic experience of rural life. Researchers like S.K. Dixit (2017) and H. Philip & T. Shyju (2014) emphasized how agritourism can make farmers more financially resilient to unpredictable market fluctuations and stimulate local economies by creating direct and indirect employment opportunities. This early literature consistently positioned agritourism as a tool for sustainable rural development that also preserves local traditions and indigenous knowledge systems.

More recent literature has begun to focus on the critical role of youth in this sector. R.B. Singh (2018) highlighted the alarming trend of younger generations abandoning agriculture due to its low profitability and lack of prestige, positioning agritourism as a potential solution to rebrand the sector. Research by S. Kapoor (2020) and N. Nair & A. Thomas (2016) explored the role of agritourism in rural empowerment, with an increasing recognition of the need to involve young people. These studies point to several key reasons for youth involvement, including their comfort with technology, which can enhance marketing and efficiency, their entrepreneurial spirit, and their potential to prevent rural-to-urban migration. The literature also acknowledges that youth can act as "ambassadors" of local culture, heritage, and ecological knowledge, ensuring its preservation.

While existing research establishes the theoretical importance of agritourism and the potential role of youth, there is a distinct gap in the literature concerning the ground-level realities, particularly in specific geographical contexts. The provided source explicitly identifies this research problem: "despite favourable conditions, youth participation in agritourism remains notably low, especially in semi-rural and rural areas of Kollam district". This study directly addresses this gap by



providing empirical data from a specific region, moving beyond theoretical discussions to investigate the practical barriers that hinder youth engagement. By exploring issues like financial constraints, lack of training, and the pervasive social stigma associated with agricultural work, this research provides a nuanced understanding of the on-the-ground challenges that previous, broader studies may not have captured. This human-centric approach is crucial for providing actionable insights to policymakers and organizations working on rural development and youth employment initiatives.

Methodology

Study Area and Context

This study was conducted in the Kollam district of Kerala; a region selected for its unique potential for agritourism. Kollam is one of Kerala's agriculturally active districts, with a diverse mix of coastal, midland, and highland areas that support a wide range of crops. Its proximity to significant tourist destinations such as Ashtamudi Lake and Thenmala Eco-tourism further enhances its suitability for the development of agritourism ventures. This specific context makes Kollam an ideal case study for investigating the gap between policy potential and ground realities.

Research Design

A mixed-methods research approach was employed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the opportunities and challenges of youth engagement in agritourism. This design integrates quantitative data gathered from structured questionnaires with qualitative insights to explore the multifaceted issues under investigation. Secondary data was also sourced from government reports and academic literature to provide a broader contextual understanding of the agritourism sector and rural entrepreneurship in India. This triangulation of data sources enhances the robustness and validity of the study's findings.

Sampling Strategy

The target population for this study consisted of local youth aged 18–30 in Kollam district. A sample of 50

individuals was selected for primary data collection. The study's focus on this age demographic is intentional, as it represents the group crucial for innovation and the long-term sustainability of the agritourism sector. The equal gender distribution of the sample (50% male, 50% female) ensures that the findings reflect a balanced perspective of both genders' experiences.

Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

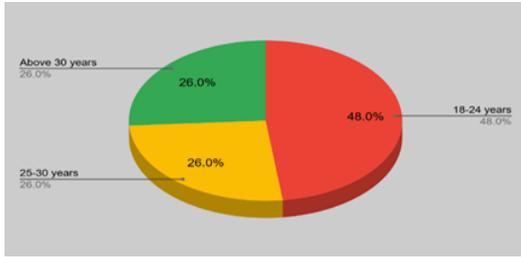
Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire administered to the sampled youth. The questionnaire was designed to gather both quantitative and qualitative information on key areas, including demographic characteristics, awareness of agritourism, participation levels, entrepreneurial interest, and the perceived challenges. The secondary data was collected from a variety of existing sources, including reports from the Kerala Tourism Statistics, Kerala Economic Review, and the Department of Agriculture, as well as relevant academic literature.

Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data was analysed using a combination of descriptive statistical methods for the quantitative data and thematic analysis for the qualitative responses. Simple statistical methods were used to identify key patterns and trends in the survey data, such as frequencies and percentages. For qualitative data, thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes and narratives, providing a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural perceptions and experiences of the youth. This combined approach allows the study to present a holistic and nuanced understanding of the research problem.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the empirical findings from the survey of 50 youth in Kollam district and discusses their implications in the context of agritourism's potential for rural revitalization. The data is presented using a combination of tables and figures to provide a comprehensive understanding of youth engagement with and perceptions of agritourism.



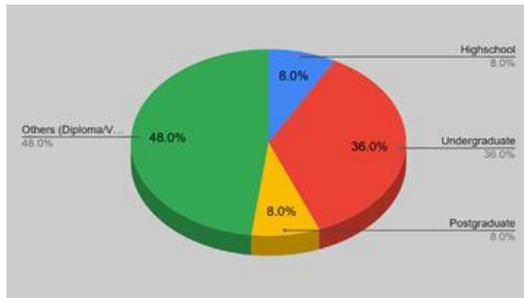
Source: survey data

Figure 1 Respondents according to their Age

Table 1 Respondents according to their Gender

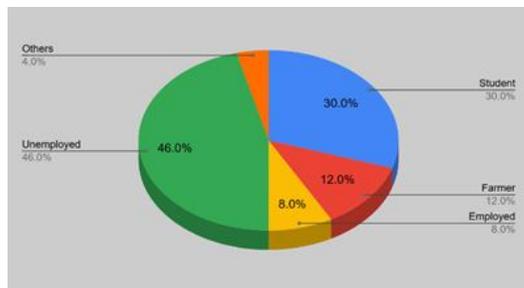
Gender	Number of respondents	Percent
Male	25	50%
Female	25	50%

Source: survey data



Source: Survey Data

Figure 2 Respondents according to the Educational Qualification



Source: Survey data

Figure 3 Response according to Occupation

Table 2 Awareness of the youth in Agritourism activities

Response	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	42	84
No	8	16

Source: Survey data

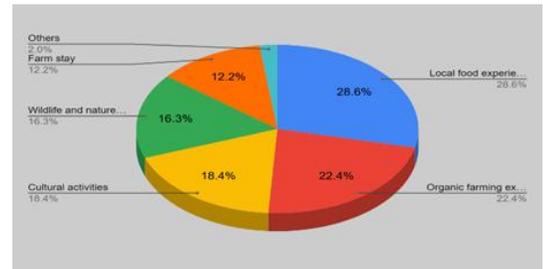
Table 3 Response regarding the participation in Agritourism

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	23	44.9
No	27	55.1

Source: Survey data

Table 4 Response based on interest in Agritourism activities

Response	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	27	54
Maybe	19	19
No	4	4



Source: Survey data

Figure 4 Agritourism Interest Aspects Response

Table: 5 Interest in Using Natural Resources for Agritourism Ventures

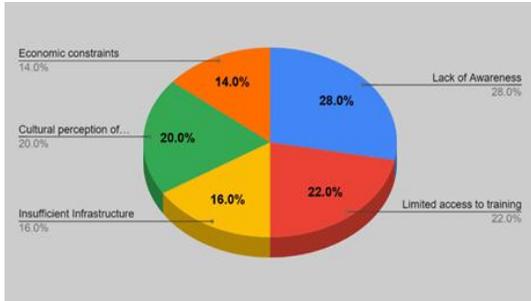
Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	15	30
No	10	20
Maybe	25	50

Source: Survey data

Table 6 Response regarding entrepreneurial opportunities in agritourism

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	29	58
No	3	6
Maybe	18	36

Source: Survey data



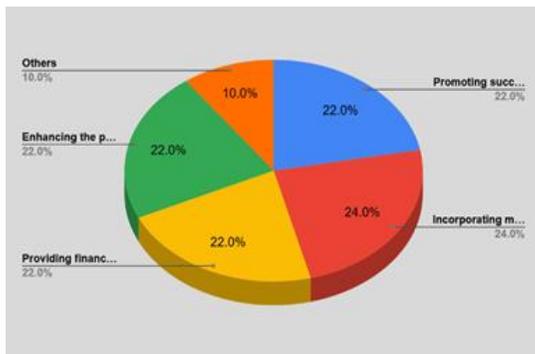
Source: Survey data

Figure 5 Response based on Challenges in engaging Youth in Agritourism

Table: 7 Addressing Stigma in Agricultural Work

Response	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	20	40
No	5	10
Not sure	25	50

Source: Survey data



Source: Survey data

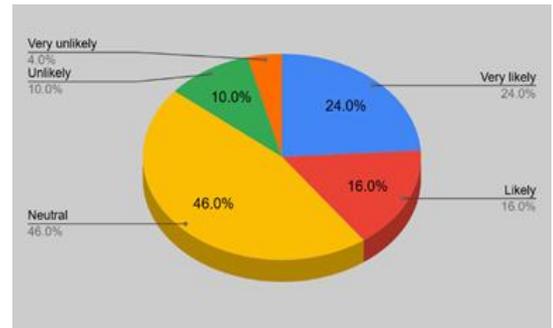
Figure 6 Response based on measures to reduce stigma associated with Agriculture

Table: 8 Agritourism's Role in Economic Development

Response	Number of respondents	percentage
Yes	29	58
No	9	18
Maybe	12	24

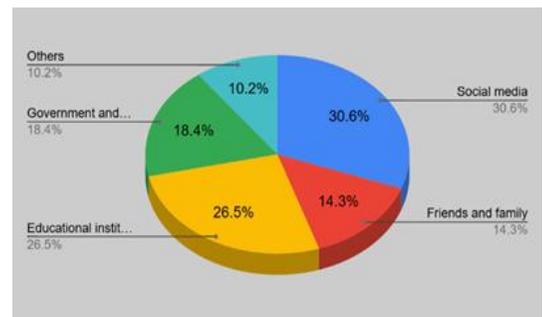
Table 9 Engaging in Agritourism as a Full-Time Career Option

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	22	44
No	28	56



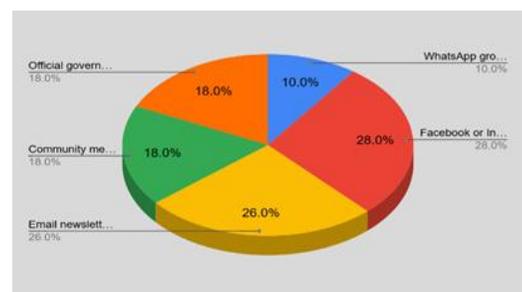
Source: Survey data

Figure 7 Recommending Agritourism as a Career Option to a Peer



Source: Survey data

Figure 8 Typically, learn about opportunities in agriculture or tourism



Source: Survey data

Figure 9 Preferred Platforms for Agritourism Information and Updates



Table 10 Belief that agritourism can generate jobs

Response	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	22	45.8
No	3	2.1
Maybe	25	52.1

The study shed light on how youth prefer to learn about agritourism. As seen in the figure on preferred platforms, social media (30.6%) and educational institutions (26.5%) were identified as the top two sources for information and updates, highlighting the importance of leveraging digital platforms like Facebook and Instagram to reach the target demographic.

The findings reveal a crucial paradox at the heart of youth engagement in agritourism in Kollam district: a significant level of awareness and interest coexists with a low rate of active participation. This disconnect suggests that while the concept of agritourism has successfully permeated the consciousness of the local youth, a number of systemic and socio-cultural barriers prevent them from translating their interest into tangible action. The high unemployment rate among the surveyed youth (46%) underscores the urgent need for alternative livelihood opportunities. Agritourism, with its strong potential for entrepreneurship, is a clear answer to this challenge. However, the prevalence of social stigma associated with agricultural work represents a deeply ingrained cultural barrier. The perception of farming as a low-prestige profession is a major deterrent for educated youth. This stigma is not merely an attitude but a significant psychological barrier that undermines the dignity of agricultural labor and dissuades young people from a career that is both essential and potentially rewarding. The suggestion from the youth themselves to modernize agriculture and promote success stories offers a clear path forward: rebranding the sector by integrating technology and showcasing successful role models who have found prosperity and social recognition in agritourism. In essence, the success of youth engagement in agritourism in Kollam hinges on a holistic strategy that not only provides financial and technical support

but also actively works to elevate the social status of agricultural entrepreneurship.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that agritourism presents a significant and viable livelihood option for the youth of Kollam district, with a high level of awareness and interest among the local population. Despite this potential, a considerable gap exists between awareness and actual participation, pointing to a number of structural and socio-cultural challenges. The key barriers identified include a lack of specialized training, financial constraints, and a persistent social stigma against agricultural work. To effectively harness the potential of agritourism for rural development, it is crucial to implement targeted interventions that address these barriers directly.

Based on these findings, the following actionable policy and institutional recommendations are proposed:

Strengthening Training and Capacity Building

- **Launch specialized training programs:** Implement structured courses in areas such as hospitality, digital marketing, and sustainable farming, specifically tailored for agritourism.
- **Improve access to government initiatives:** Actively connect youth to existing skill development programs from organizations like the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and the Kerala Responsible Tourism Mission.

Enhancing Awareness and Financial Support

- **Enhance awareness campaigns:** Utilize social media, educational institutions, and community outreach programs to inform youth about the diverse career opportunities and entrepreneurial avenues in agritourism.
- **Promote successful local ventures:** Showcase success stories of young agritourism entrepreneurs to serve as motivational models and demonstrate the sector's viability.
- **Provide accessible financial support:** Offer easy access to loans, subsidies, and start-up assistance specifically designed for youth-led



agritourism ventures through partnerships with banks and cooperative societies.

Improving Infrastructure and Addressing Social Stigma

- **Develop rural infrastructure:** Invest in improving road connectivity, public transport, and digital infrastructure in potential agritourism destinations to make them more accessible for both tourists and entrepreneurs.
- **Modernize agricultural work:** Integrate technology and innovation into farming to make it more appealing and efficient for the younger generation.
- **Shift social perceptions:** Conduct community outreach and educational campaigns to challenge the social stigma associated with agriculture and highlight its dignity and value.

By focusing on these areas, government bodies, educational institutions, and local organizations can work together to create an enabling environment where agritourism can become a successful and sustainable model for youth employment and rural development in Kollam district and beyond.

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