

Regional Workshop on
Motivating and Attracting Youth in Agriculture in North India
Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana
(28 – 29 February, 2020)

Reviving agriculture sector is currently an important policy matter before the country. In this context, youth (men and women) could play an important role. Fortunately, there is a favourable demographic dividend in view of a large population of 356 million youth in India representing 10-24 years of age group (UN Report 2014). Of this, almost 200 million young people live in rural India. Though this projects a bright future, yet relatively few young people (around 5%) prefer to remain in agriculture. Major reasons for this are: decreasing income, greater risk due to adverse climatic factors, poor rural infrastructure and lack of enabling policy environment. Obviously, therefore, youth do not find agriculture a creative, profitable and respectable profession, besides relatively poor living conditions. At the same time, agriculture presently is faced with numerous challenges such as: over-exploitation of natural resources (land, water and agrobiodiversity), a continued decline in factor productivity, inputs becoming costly, low returns and production uncertainties due to adverse effects of climate change. Therefore, ageing agriculture coupled with waning interest of youth and multi-facet agricultural challenges are posing serious threats for our agricultural sustainability.

It is also a fact that majority of young people coming from villages lack skills and knowledge. Agriculture being a major occupation in rural areas and considering the fact that there is increasing unemployment, ageing farming population, besides emerging options for secondary and specialty agriculture, youth have an opportunity to be successful farmers/entrepreneurs to take agriculture as a profession provided they get an opportunity to develop their right skills to make a difference. Further, it needs to be recognized that youth is unlikely to be a homogenous group and different young men and women do have different aspirations, which need to be appropriately addressed. Also, it would be necessary to bring in some positive change in their mind-set and build required confidence through capacity development and required technical as well as funding support.

Farming must become resilient, diversified, economically rewarding and intellectually satisfying. Future strategies for agricultural transformation must, therefore, be around rewarding jobs/entrepreneurship in agro-based value chain activities, better social amenities in rural areas, increased public and private sector investments in agriculture and rural infrastructure, establishment of small agri-firms, better linkage mechanisms with markets, etc. Also, there is need to raise minimum educational and training standards, reorienting agricultural education towards agri-food and value chain systems, inculcating efficiency in financial, social and environmental terms, reorienting social security programs with increased labour market flexibility and making income distribution more equitable.

To empower and motivate rural youth, there is also an urgent need to transform the agricultural extension system into an innovative platform that delivers technology based demand driven knowledge and services. This obviously poses a new institutional challenge for pluralistic agricultural extension i.e. a mix of public-private sector involving participation of youth in particular. Empowering youth through vocational training and building a cadre of "Technology Agents" to provide technical backstopping as well as custom hire services to the smallholder farmers would go a long way in linking research with extension and thereby

accelerating agricultural growth. Moreover, it is necessary now that Agricultural Technology Agents become “job creators” and not “job seekers”, while providing the best technologies as well as quality inputs at farmer’s doorsteps. The concept of Agri-Clinics as a single window system has to be encouraged so that technology agents are able to join hands to serve better the farming communities. Emergence of private sector institutions to provide agro-advisory services to farmers is a positive development and would need enabling policy support.

Agriculture in the northern states demands a paradigm shift in the mind-set, shifting from agriculture as means of livelihood to a business oriented profession, and accordingly revitalizing the young workforce in agriculture. It is well recognized that motivating and empowering youth in agriculture is the vehicle for change and hence urgent steps are needed for greater involvement of young professionals in agriculture at the local, state, regional and national level for enhancing productivity, profitability and sustainability of agriculture to feed the billions. This can be achieved only when required knowledge and education, technical skills, sustained encouragement and the enabling environment are provided. In addition, the required policies, incentives and rewards needs to be put in place to attract young talents to undertake innovative ways of farming that are not only profitable and sustainable but also respectable. Thus, transformative and translational changes would be required for developing strategies that can reorient the present-day agriculture to be more relevant, efficient, demand-driven, productive, competitive and profitable, while ensuring food, nutrition and environmental security for all. Hence, there is need to revamp agricultural education sector and agri-skill development programs, while devising the suitable agri-business mechanisms or agri-preneurship to make best use of available human resource considering that: “youth needs agriculture as much as agriculture needs youth”.

Agriculture is now changing fast from a production for quantity to meeting the market oriented designer food requirements of the populace. While taking into consideration the changing resource availability, life style changes based consumer needs, health consciousness and nutritional dietary preferences, there is a disconnect between the producer, processor and the consumer, resulting in poor price realization for the farmer, lost opportunities for processors and higher price of food products for consumers. As mentioned earlier, urban development is pulling away youth from rural areas leaving farming to older generation and women who are disadvantaged by skewed land ownership policies and connected subsidies, banking and finance opportunities. With this backdrop, it is the ideal time to relook at the way agriculture is promoted at all levels to make it appealing to the youth of today – rural or urban – who are a powerhouse of creativity, vibrant energy, innovation and focused motivation.

Therefore, to meet the twin challenges of sustainable agriculture development and to motivate and attract youth in agriculture, a “Regional Workshop on Motivating and Attracting Youth in Agriculture in North India” was organized by Punjab Agricultural University (PAU) Ludhiana and the Trust for Advancement of Agricultural Sciences (TAAS), New Delhi, India at PAU, Ludhiana, Punjab, India on 28-29 February, 2020. The Workshop provided an opportunity to all stakeholders to interact and discuss various options and avenues for not only attracting youth in agriculture but even motivating them towards entrepreneurship options in agriculture and allied sectors. The senior research, development and policy related officials/managers from national organizations, state agricultural universities (SAUs) education and training institutions, civil society organizations (CSOs) including non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and farmers organizations (FOs) and the private sector were invited to discuss various ways to motivate and attract youth in agriculture (MAYA).

Objectives

- To review and identify skill development gaps and opportunities for youth in agriculture and allied sector
- To share knowledge and experiences concerning innovations, success stories on agri-entrepreneurship and opportunities for specialty/ modern farming systems
- To assess and define the role of key public and private sector institutions for extending technical and financial support to mainstream youth in agriculture
- To build a neutral platform for collaboration and partnerships among stakeholders in North India.
- To develop a Road Map for motivating and attracting youth in agripreneurship

Participants

Around 200 participants from North Indian States like Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir attended the workshop including researchers, policy makers, students, agri-entrepreneurs, farmers, civil society organizations (NGOs, FPOs), private sector organizations (IFFCO, KRIBHCO), Banks (NABARD), Farmers' Commission etc.

Outcomes

- Skill development gaps and opportunities identified and measures for socioeconomic integration and empowerment of youth suggested.
 - Knowledge and experiences concerning agricultural innovations, entrepreneurship and opportunities for specialty agriculture shared among the stakeholders.
 - Role of key institutions understood and needed mechanisms, including enabling policies to mainstream youth in agriculture formulated.
 - A neutral platform for collaboration and partnerships among stakeholders in North India established.
 - A Road Map outlining action points and policy reforms to motivate and attract youth in agriculture developed.
-

Glimpses

