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THE POWER OF DIVERSITY: A FARMER'S ROAD TO PROSPERITY

Abhijeet Kuderiya* and Chetna Pathak

PhD Scholar, Jawaharlal Nehru Krishi Vishwavidyalaya, Jabalpur – 482004 - (M.P.), India.

**Corresponding Author Mail ID: kuderiyaabhijeet@gmail.com*

Introduction

Farming everywhere is subjected to various types of risks and uncertainties. This risk may be human induced or may be result of natural calamities. In a country like ours where farming is dominated by the presence of marginal and small farmers, such type of risk threatens the farm sector as well as communities engaged in this noble profession. Calamities like insect-pests and diseases, untimely rainfall, hailstorms, fast blowing winds result in considerable loss of yields ultimately making agriculture a non-remunerative profession. Agriculture is not only confined to crops or livestock. Agriculture encompasses a wide range of enterprises which among others also include goatry, sheep, apiculture, sericulture, piggery, floriculture, horticulture, olericulture etc. Maintaining a single business puts farmers at danger of losing everything they have if a disaster strikes the fields and destroys their crops. We must have strategies that guarantee farmers a steady income even if one crop or business fails. Having multiple businesses or producing multiple products is one way to prevent your income from being only reliant on the production and pricing of a single product.

In order to lower risk and boost financial benefit, farmer enterprise diversification entails expanding the range of crops, livestock, or farm operations. It can also entail making novel use of already-existing resources, such processing raw materials on the farm. The profit from manufacturing other products may keep the overall profit from dropping below acceptable levels if the profit from one product is low.

This is what is called as enterprise diversification. Enterprise diversification is a self-insuring strategy used by farmers to protect against risk (Mishra et al, 2004). Having multiple businesses guarantees that the farmer will be paid by one of them in the event that the others fail. Farmers actually employ enterprise diversification as a self-insuring tactic to guard against a range of hazards. The most effective strategy for enterprise diversification is to promote a farming system approach through Integrated Farming System (IFS) models. According to this paradigm, the output of one business is used as an input by another, which lowers cultivation costs and boosts profits. Furthermore, the farm's resources are used wisely, which promotes the system's sustainability.

Enterprise diversification in farming offers numerous benefits, making it a highly effective strategy for farmers-

1) **Risk management:** By diversifying their businesses, farmers can share the risk of illnesses, pests, market swings, and climate change, resulting in more steady revenue streams.
2) **Increased Income:** Farmers can increase overall profitability by generating numerous revenue streams through a variety of agricultural activities, including crop cultivation, animal raising, and value-added processing.
3) **Resource Optimization:** Diversification makes it possible to use land, labour, and capital more effectively, which boosts farming enterprises' sustainability and efficiency.
4) **Enhancement of Soil Health:** Combining different crops and livestock can improve the fertility and structure of the soil, lessen erosion, and encourage sustainable farming methods.

5) **Market Opportunities:** Diversified farms provide access to a variety of markets, such as specialist and niche markets, which frequently have lower competition and larger profit margins.
6) **Climatic Change Resilience**: Farmers can better adapt to climatic unpredictability and extreme events by diversifying their crops and livestock, which increases their resistance to unfavourable weather conditions.

Success stories of farmer enterprises

i. Mushroom cultivation

Mr. Ghanshyam Prasad was inspired to begin mushroom farming following a number of conversations and technical advice from ATMA and KVK specialists. He began his business endeavors by buying 10 kg of oyster mushroom spawn from BAU Sabour. In November 2012, it was administered in 100 bags that were suspended from a 150-square-foot thatched roof. On his first try, he was able to grow 60 kg of mushrooms, of which 40 kg were sold fresh for Rs. 150/kg. The remaining 20 kg of mushrooms were turned into pickles, which were then sold out.

He gained confidence in production and marketing after realizing a net profit of Rs. 4,500 on his first try. He made a net profit of Rs. 10,000 on his second attempt, producing 150 kg of fresh mushrooms. He made a total of Rs. 30,000 after the third round in 2012–2013. Additionally, he guaranteed the availability of spawn for the local farmers and grew mushrooms all year round. Additionally, he turned buffalo dung, mushroom waste, and other agricultural wastes into vermi-compost, which increased the output of his crop on the five hectares of land. Mr. Ghanshyam's zeal has now made him more than just a role model for the unemployed rural kids in his area.

ii. Prosperous Dairy Farming through Crossbreeds in Karnal

Through Mr. Pramod Khokhar's efforts, the Arvind Dairy Farm in Nalvi Khurd village, Karnal, Haryana, was established as an integrated livestock inside a traditional agricultural farming system. In an effort to diversify farming, Mr. Ravi Khokhar sought to convert the family-based subsistence farming method to raising crossbred dairy cows. Before establishing Arvind Dairy Farm, he received training at the National Dairy Research Institute (NDRI). He has healthy, well-fed crossbred cows, a feeding area, well-maintained cattle shed, and an automated milk collection system. Thirty crossbred cattle are currently owned by Arvind Dairy, and the milk is sold in the surrounding districts.

Additionally, the farm has sold about 50–60 animals, and at the moment, 80 percent of the dairy animals are in the lactating stage. Cattle have a maximum production of 35–53 liters. In addition to some handmade concentrate (maize/wheat/barley + de-oiled cake + neembola) and a mineral mixture (200 gm per day per animal) for good health and high-quality milk, animals are fed a combination of green and dry fodder made up of berseem or oats and wheat straw three times a day. The animals' good health is maintained by timely and appropriate vaccination.

Mr. Ravi complies with NDRI rules, which state that cattle should be separated by 13–14 months before calving. He attributes Arvind Dairy Farm's success to perseverance and hard effort. The farm has grown from 30 to 80 crossbreeds with adequate, contemporary facilities for dairy animals as a result of this commitment.

iii. Vinay Kumar from Bihar

Vinay Kumar used modern methods, organic farming, and creative sugarcane cultivation to turn his 10-acre farm into a very successful business. He makes 20 lakh rupees a year from his varied approach, which includes producing fish, rice, wheat, coarse grains, and fruits.

iv. Nagaraj Nakhat from Bihar

By growing dragon fruit at the age of 76, Nagaraj Nakhat transformed farming in his area. He increased production from 1 to 50 metric tons in six years, starting with just 100 plants and growing them to over 17,000 plants spread across 7 acres. His farm now produces millions of dollars and encourages other farmers to use intelligent agricultural techniques.

v. Shivaji Rajput from Maharashtra

Shivaji made substantial revenues by converting 25 acres into a sustainable bamboo plantation. He began with just 100 bamboo plants and has now grown it into a prosperous farm that helps his family and the community's economy.

Conclusion

The success of farmers who have diversified their businesses shows how important ingenuity and adaptability are in overcoming challenges. By leveraging market trends, incorporating value chains, and fostering strategic partnerships, farmers can raise their standard of life and promote rural development. If resources are available and regulations are supportive, diversification can be a sustainable path to agricultural and economic success.