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Entrepreneurship and marketing skill development through distance learning programmes

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Abstract

The Indian agriculture need entrepreneurship for agricultural development and it is the path breaking need for sustainable development of the sector. In this context an attempt was made to study the entrepreneurship development and the enterprise that are to be taken up as business ventures and to assess the level of capital investment that is going to be invested in the business among the students of third year Bachelor of Farm Technology degree programme. It was found that most of the respondents would like to improve the level of existing business or to initiate new business based on the experience gained through the degree programme. Further the students need more skill oriented programmes relating to specific technologies like high tech crop production, marketing such as sales promotion, acquisition and use of market information and export of agricultural commodities along with financial services.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Finance, Marketing, Skill Development, Technologies

Introduction

Rural population in India constitutes 65 per cent of the total population and therefore, exploring the potential of the human resource particularly in the rural areas is an essential criterion for faster sustainable and overall economic development. In the present scenario of Indian agriculture, entrepreneurship in agricultural development is the path breaking need for sustainable development of the agricultural sector. In the agriculture sector, lot of investment is made for harnessing the existing potential of agricultural sector and to explore the untapped potential areas. Indian farmers are traditionally bound to crop production and related activities. But the recent socio economic changes have pushed the farmers to move from subsistence agriculture to market based agriculture to meet out their growing demands. How the farmers adopt to new situation is an important aspect, where the Governments focus the inclusive development. Entrepreneurship has long been recognized as a leading driver of development in local, regional and national economies (Schumpeter, 1934) ^[1]. The farmers are trying to become entrepreneurs and they are striving for the profit maximization. But the constraint is that, the entrepreneurship is not compatible with the traditional agricultural views. The definition for entrepreneurship adopted in this article is the simple one: the creation of new businesses that prosper and create jobs (Kirchhoff, 1994) ^[2]. In India, the time required to start a business, on an averages, is 88 days but the world average is fifty-four days, this is 60 per cent higher than world average and over 1,500 per cent higher than the US average of five days (World Development Indicators, 2006) ^[4]. The entrepreneurship level in India is 17.9 per cent and it has also been found that younger people are more likely to be engaged in entrepreneurial activity (Manimala *et al.*, 2002) ^[3]. The overall objectives of the study are to assess the technologies learnt, that are useful for implementation; to assess the entrepreneurship development and the enterprise that are to be taken up as business ventures; and to assess the level of capital investment that is going to be invested in the business.

Materials and Methods

Bachelor of Farm Technology (B.F.Tech.) programme is offered by the TNAU, Coimbatore, through Open and Distance Learning (ODL) mode. Therefore the students of third year Bachelor of Farm Technology (B.F.Tech.) degree programme were selected for the study. The degree covers a course on the marketing of agricultural commodities which aims at educating

and motivating the students in the area of marketing and business development in the agricultural sector. The course covers various aspects of agricultural business such as processing, value addition, business development, marketing institutions, marketing, marketing acts and rules, export etc. After the completion of the course, 43 students who had undergone the course were interviewed to assess their entrepreneurial and marketing skill development. The data was collected from the respondents using semi structured questionnaire.

Results and Discussion

The results of the study on the entrepreneurship and marketing skill development through Open and Distance Learning (ODL) programme reveals that all the sample students have under taken the B.F.(Tech) programme with overall objective of gaining economic benefit through proper education on agriculture and related activities. During the assessment it was observed that some of them wanted to improve their existing business and some of them expressed that they want to initiate some new business based on the expertise gained by them through the degree programme.

As the age is one of the important criteria in learning and execution of business activities, the age of the respondents is presented in the Table.1. The table reveals that around 40 per cent of the respondents were under the age of less than 40 years as this is opt age for developing the business. Since at

the age of 40 years, experience will be more as well as acquiring other resources will be easy.

Table 1: The age of the respondents

S.No	Age (in years)	Nos	Per cent
1	<40	17	39.53
2	41-50	12	27.91
3	51-60	10	23.26
4	>60	4	9.30
	Total	43	100.00

Technologies learnt that are useful for implementation / taking up as a business

Many technologies relevant to the agriculture and allied activities have been thought in the degree programme. Of the technologies learnt, the respondents were asked to reveal the technologies learnt that are useful for implementation / taking up a business. The results on technologies learnt were presented in the Table 2. It was found that the majority of respondents (22.54 %) revealed that crop production technologies were highly useful for helping their business. Many respondents were interested in organic farming as this technology can enhance their income, 19.72 per cent of them expressed this technology as useful. Similarly, the pest management, trading, high tech farming etc., were found to be highly useful technologies in taking up as a business.

Table 2: Technologies learnt that are useful for implementation / taking up as a business

S. No	Technologies Learnt	No's	Per cent
1	Crop Production Technologies	16	22.54
2	Organic Farming	14	19.72
3	Pest Management	8	11.27
4	Trading	8	11.27
5	High Tech Farming (Green House and Precision Farming)	8	11.27
6	Vermi Compost	5	7.04
7	Fertilizer Management	3	4.23
8	Start New Business	2	2.82
9	Seed Production	2	2.82
10	Others (Processing and Value addition, Mushroom Production, Export procedures and Dairy)	5	7.04
	Total	71	100.00

Effect of the ODL course on the Business Activity

The changes in the business activity such as development of existing business and starting new business after undergoing the degree programme were assessed and the results are presented in Table 3. The results reveal that 37.74 per cent of respondents had agriculture as the main business and after the completion of the course, they have an idea of transforming it

to high tech agriculture such as green house cultivation, precision farming and so on. Further all the respondents expressed that they would continue the existing business with the adoption of new technologies in order to get additional benefit. Table 3., would reveal that none of the degree holders remain unemployed after undergoing the B.F.Tech. degree programme.

Table 3: Changes in the business activity before and after perusing the course

S.No	Enterprise	Before	%	After	%
1	Un employed	3	5.66	0	0.00
2	Agriculture	20	37.74	9	15.00
3	High Tech Agriculture (Green house, Precision Farming, Nursery, Goat farming)	1	1.89	8	13.33
4	Retailing (Agri clinic, Selling organic sugars, Soil testing laboratory, Farm Machineries etc.)	9	16.98	7	11.67
5	Trading	2	3.77	6	10.00
6	Processing and Value addition	4	7.55	5	8.33
7	Employee	8	15.09	5	8.33
8	Terrace Garden	2	3.77	4	6.67
9	Vermicompost			4	6.67
10	Others (Dairy Unit, Organic Farming, Integrated Farming System, Organic Input Production, Cold Storage, Export and Poultry)	4	7.55	12	20.00
	Grand Total	53	100.00	60	100.00

The Capital Investment Plan for Investing in the Existing and New Business

The capital investment is one of the most important factors that decide the scale of business. The respondents plan for making investment in the existing and new business was assessed and the results are presented in Table 4. The results reveal that 41.86 per cent of the respondents were willing to invest less than rupees five lakhs. This reveals that most of them are willing to invest less and hence the business will be of small scale nature.

Table 4: The capital investment plan for investing in the existing and new business

S. No	Investment (in Rs.)	No's	Per cent
1	< 5 Lakh	18	41.86
2	6-10 Lakh	6	13.95
3	11-20Lakh	7	16.28
4	21-30 Lakh	4	9.30
5	> 31 Lakh	2	4.65
6	Based on requirement	4	9.30
7	Not Need additional investment	2	4.65
	Total	43	100.00

The Assistance required for under taking the Business.

Some of the respondents have initiated the up grading existing business and some are yet to start the business. After the completion of the degree programme, the business activity will be taken up in the full time mode. The assistance required while under taking the business is an important factor that will give the additional support to success of the business. The respondents were asked regarding the form of assistance from TNAU for initiating and running the business successfully and the results are presented in Table 5. More than fifty per cent of the respondents indicated that they needed technical assistance for their business from TNAU, followed by provision of marketing guidance by 24 per cent of the respondents, six per cent required financial assistance such as access to the bank loan and Government assistance in the form of subsidies, etc.

Table 5: The Assistance Required while Under Taking the Business.

S. No	Required Guidance	Nos	Percent
1	Technical guidance	26	52.00
2	Marketing (Sales promotion, Market information, Price Data, Export potential)	12	24.00
3	Finance	6	12.00
4	Trainings (Production and Value addition)	6	12.00
	Grand Total	50	100.00

Conclusion and Policy Implication

The study reveals that most of the respondents would like to improve the level of existing business or to initiate new business based on the experience gained through the degree programme. Hence, the students need more skill oriented programmes relating to specific technologies like high tech crop production, marketing such as sales promotion, acquisition and use of market information and export of agricultural commodities. The students are in need of more information on financial services through institutional finance and subsidy support from Government in order to strengthen their business.

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