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Agri-business incubators and Start-up India

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ABSTRACT

ABSTRACT An essential institutional tool for advancing agripreneurship, innovation, and commercialization in the agricultural industry is agribusiness incubation. Agri-Business Incubation Centers (ABICs) are essential in supporting early-stage businesses as agriculture shifts from subsistence farming to a market-oriented and technologically advanced system. With a focus on ICAR-supported incubators, RKVY-RAFTAAR, and university-based incubation centers, this review article summarizes the idea, development, policy framework, institutional frameworks, and impact of agribusiness incubation in India. The advantages, methods of dissemination, success stories, and difficulties encountered by incubatees are also highlighted in the paper. The analysis comes to the conclusion that agribusiness incubation plays a significant role in fostering innovation, creating jobs, and promoting sustainable rural development.

Keywords: Agri-Business Incubation, Agripreneurship, RKVY-RAFTAAR, Start-ups, Agricultural Innovation

Introduction

Agriculture remains the backbone of the Indian economy, providing livelihood to a large proportion of the population. However, a move toward innovation-led agribusiness development is required due to issues like diminishing agricultural profitability, dispersed landholdings, market inefficiencies, and climate variability. Agri-startups all over the nation have benefited greatly from the convergence of Start-up India and Agri-Business Incubators. ABIs lower the chance of business failure and increase the survival rate of start-ups by serving as a link between research institutions, entrepreneurs, investors, and markets (Rathore *et al.*, 2021) [1]. ABIs support inclusive growth, capacity building, innovation dissemination, and the creation of jobs in rural areas through organized incubation programs.

By offering administrative, financial, and technical assistance, Agri-Business Incubation Centers serve as a link between markets, research institutions, and businesses. The agri-startup ecosystem has been greatly bolstered by the Indian government through programs like Startup India, ICAR-NAIF, and RKVY-RAFTAAR. According to ICAR (2019) [2], an agribusiness incubator is a company that helps agribusiness start-ups grow and succeed by offering shared facilities, technical know-how, business mentoring, and access to capital and markets. In order to help commercialize agricultural inventions, the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), State Agricultural Universities (SAUs), and other research and academic organizations in India heavily support ABIs.

An important step in bolstering the country's start-up ecosystem was taken in 2016 when the Indian government launched the Start-up India initiative. By offering a supportive environment for start-ups through financial mechanisms, tax incentives, policy assistance, and incubation facilities, the initiative seeks to stimulate innovation, entrepreneurship, and employment (Government of India, 2016) [3].

In this regard, a thorough analysis of Agri-Business Incubators and their function within the Start-up India framework is necessary to comprehend their performance, contribution, and difficulties. The concept, development, and effects of ABIs in India are examined in this paper's study of the literature, along with their potential to improve the agri-startup ecosystem in the future.

The major objectives of agri-business incubation include:

- Promotion of agripreneurship and self-employment
- Employment generation and income enhancement
- Strengthening research–industry–farmer linkages

Rise of agri-business incubators in India

- As per the data present on Start Up India website, as of Dec 2023, India has over 200+ agri incubators managed by academic institutes, corporates, private players and Government.
- The Incubators are taking Indian agriculture to an advanced level by the virtue of agripreneurship.

Incubation centre under RKVY-RAFTAAR

• RKVY-RAFTAAR Agri Incubation Centres :

- 29 appointed incubation centres. (SKP's +24 R-ABI's)
- **NIAM (CCS):**
- 32 years of expertise in agriculture marketing.
- Assisted 59 RKVY-RAFTAAR incubates in B₂B and B₂C areas.
- Grant recommendations of INR 4.58 crores for 39 start-ups.
- **IARI (Pusa Krishi)**
- Renowned in agriculture research and Agri startups.
- Portfolio: 120+ incubated start-ups, 50+ start-up grants, 60+ grants in Aid.

ABI – ICRISAT

- The International Crop Research Institute for Semi Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) established an Agribusiness Incubator in Hyderabad in 2003. This has fostered 16 Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) across Tamil Nadu, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh with the help of NABARD. Currently, ABI-ICRISAT is supporting 14 startups in the agribusiness sector.
- The incubates of ABI-ICRISAT have raised approximately \$57.00 million in awards. Over 3,200 direct jobs were created by the incubator, and ten agri-technologies created by ICRISAT and its partners were commercialized. During its 2018–19 fiscal year, it brought more than 90 agri-products created by the incubates to market, and more than 3 million farmers utilized their products.

Agri Business Incubation Centre (ABIC)

- CCS Haryana Agricultural University, Haryana, India has successfully launched its one of a kind, one-stop incubation centre for agri-startups named as “Agri Business Incubation Centre (ABIC)” for supporting startups in Agri and Allied Sectors, supported by National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) and Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY, MoA&FW).

Agri business incubation centre - milestones

- The draft of the Memorandum of Association along with rules and regulations of ABIC as a society was prepared and finalized. The Agri-Business Incubation Centre (ABIC) supported by NABARD, has been registered under the Haryana the Registration & Regulation Societies Act 2012 on 11 January 2019 and was inaugurated on 25 May 2019 and the ABIC team joined in June 2019 and thus ABIC incubates are being inducted & incubated through the ABIC team.
- ABIC has received a grant through RKVY-Raafar scheme, Government of India, MoA&FW to strengthen Infrastructure of ABIC and promote agripreneurship.
- An Expression of Interest (EOI) was floated online by ABIC. A lot of applications have been received from PAN India including Hyderabad, Delhi, Mumbai, Punjab, etc out of which around the best technical & business mentors have been selected on ABIC's Mentors Panel.
- The two-day event “National Incubator Colloquium 2020” was conducted in January 2020 to bring closer industry associations, Corporate, Business Incubator Centres, other Academic Institutions, society, & the most important stakeholders that are the start-ups and potential entrepreneurs.
- NABARD supported ABIC Bakery & Confectionary Unit was established in February 2021.

Overview of the process

1. Check eligibility: Ensure your innovative idea is in the agriculture and allied sectors. You will likely need to be an entrepreneur, startup, student, or farmer.
2. Download the application form: Find and download the application form from the ABIC website.
3. Submit the application: Fill out the form and submit it along with the application fee of Rs. 500/-. The fee can be paid via a Demand Draft in favour of ABIC, CCSHAU, Hisar payable at Hisar, or online by contacting the ABIC office.
4. Await selection: After submission, your application will be evaluated. If selected by the PMRC (Project Management and Review Committee), you will be notified.
5. Complete registration: Once selected, pay the registration fee for your category to become an incubate.

Agri varsity's incubation centre to give wings to 66 start up projects

The Agri Business Incubation Centre (ABIC) of Chaudhary Charan Singh Haryana Agricultural University (HAU) here has received 217 startup applications, out of which 66 young agri-entrepreneurs have been selected for projects in food processing, value addition, waste-to-wealth, precision farming, organic farming, agri-machinery manufacturing, input innovation, among others.

How ABIC is beneficial for students

1. Financial Support for Startups Students can receive grant-in-aid of ₹5 – ₹25 lakhs (depending on the ABIC program). Funding supports product development, prototype building, trials, and marketing. **2. Training & Mentorship** Professionals in marketing and finance, agricultural scientists, successful entrepreneurs, and industry experts provide students with practical mentoring. **3. Labs and Facilities Access** gives the host institution or university access to labs, testing facilities, equipment, incubation space, and technical assistance. **4. Possibilities for Internships** Students can learn business planning, market analysis, innovation, and startup management through paid internships under RKVY-RAFTAAR and MANAGE. **5. Exposure & Networking** Students can receive visibility for growing their ideas by taking part in national conferences, exhibitions, and startup summits. **6. Self-employment & Placement**

Review

Akcomak (2009) [4] conclude that incubators in developing nations have a number of flaws, such as a preference for tangible services over intangible ones, a reliance on the government, a lack of management and qualified personnel, a lack of planning, and a lack of creativity in problem-solving. It was also mentioned that effective incubators handle tenant companies' difficulties in a unique and inventive manner. As a result, policies pertaining to incubators should be carefully crafted in conjunction with those pertaining to economic development and the promotion of entrepreneurship.

Incubation centers are crucial to the development of start-ups and young entrepreneurs, according to Srinivas et al. (2019) [5] in their bulletin on "Fostering entrepreneurship through Incubation centers in NARES." A well-designed incubation program supports a startup from the concept development phase to business setup and, most importantly, funding. Finding quality start-ups that address market or value chain issues is a challenge for Indian incubators. Ashwini (2019) [6] These cooperative initiatives highlight the growing understanding of incubation as an essential instrument for promoting equitable, sustainable, and innovation-driven economic growth.

Ohlan, Raj (2020) [7] carried out a primary data-based study in the state of Maharashtra and discovered that agricultural startups were creating jobs and resolving problems in the agriculture industry. Surliya, Beniwa, and Maan (2021) investigated the problems and difficulties encountered by Indian agricultural startups. According to the study, the businesses' primary issues were a lack of funding, a short

age of subject matter experts, and a lack of technological expertise among Indian farmers.

According to [Preethika et al. \(2020\) \[8\]](#), the majority of incubatees neglect to pay the incubators' fees or shares because they may fail in their early stages or because start-ups lack the funds to do so. Incubation centers are heavily burdened by these kinds of receivables. According to [Wadwa \(2022\) \[9\]](#), agri-startups are greatly enhancing their farming practices with cutting-edge technology like artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), and data analytics. The majority of research on agricultural startups are based on secondary data sources, and there isn't a thorough primary data-based study that examines the various facets of agricultural startups in Haryana, according to a review of the literature. Thus, the current study primarily focuses on several elements of the operations of agricultural startups in Haryana in order to close the research gap.

[Kumar and associates, 2022 \[10\]](#) the importance of ABIs in corporate development, technology transfer, and job creation has been the subject of an increasing amount of research. Review-based data, however, highlights issues with unequal regional distribution of incubators, low private sector involvement, financial limitations, and startups' post-incubation sustainability.

In their analysis of the state of agribusiness incubation in India, [Kadirvel et al. \(2025\) \[11\]](#) focused on the role that incubation plays as a catalyst for the rise of rural income, entrepreneurial development, and alignment with national agricultural goals.

[Surliya et al. \(2021\)](#) found that poor technology knowledge among farmers, a lack of capital, and limited access to subject-matter specialists were the main obstacles.

Case Study

1. Dr. Deepika Ahlawat- A 28-year-old associated with the Sports Authority of India, has prepared indigenous nutritious food for athletes from rural areas. She has patented her product and, with the support of ABIC (Agri-Business Incubation Centre), started her own startup. Who converted her **home on Camry Road into a laboratory**, also received significant help from ABIC for her startup. Her project is fully implemented, it will provide direct benefits to about 50 employees and 850 farmers. She received information from SAI (Sports Authority of India) about the nutritional needs of athletes. When she studied nutrition, she realized that athletes need proper food even before playing. Based on research, she then developed a complete nutritious diet.

Case Study

2. Ankit Ahlawat – HerbChick Bars Wanting to work in the field of food processing, Ankit Ahlawat had a raw prototype of an edible bar based on chicken processing and wanted to make it a shelf-based product, ready to eat. With ABIC supporting his research and development efforts, ABIC's incubate, Ankit developed the world's first non-refrigeration required, ready to eat chicken bar. He has now also introduced vegan bars. ABIC's support: Business Entity registration; Scientific & Technical Support; Packaging R&D; Funding Support; Licensing and validation: FSSAI & HACCP and IP Facilitation.

- World's First Vegan Protein & Chicken Protein Bars
- No added preservatives
- Six months shelf-life at room temperature
- 20gm Protein Keto-Friendly sugar-free healthy bars.

Case Study

3. Plutus Plus Handmade Skincare by Mridulla Bhardwaj visited ABIC with the intention of bringing reasonably priced handmade skin care to the market. She was captivated by the Incubator's service pool. With ABIC's business development assistance, she created a range of products based on goat milk and essential oils. These days, Mridulla's "Plutus Plus" brand is well-known on Flipkart and Amazon. She has not only demonstrated that women can do great things when they set

their minds to it, but she has also improved the lives of several women from Self-Help Groups by giving them work opportunities and raising their standard of living. Business entity registration, website and digital platform development, Incubatee Network facilitation, studio establishment, IP facilitation, and funding help are among the services provided by ABIC.

Case Study

4. At the start of 2019, **Nivedi's** agribusiness incubation center, ICAR-NIVEDI's NaaViC Agribusiness Incubation Center (NaaViC), with a focus on Animal Science and Veterinary Services, was established at ICAR-National Institute of Veterinary Epidemiology and Disease Informatics, Bengaluru. It is one of the top incubators for the veterinary and animal husbandry industries in South India, and it operates on a bigger scale. DST-TEDP, ICAR-NAIF, and RKVY-RAFTAAR are currently supporting it. The ICAR-NIVEDI facility offers an expansive 5000 square feet for incubation activities.

ABIC bakery of CCSHAU

The **Agri Business Incubation Centre (ABIC)** at **CCS Haryana Agricultural University (CCSHAU)**, Hisar runs a **Bakery and Confectionery Unit** which is available on **rental/usage basis** to: Students, Farmers, Women entrepreneurs, Self-help groups etc.

The goal is to help people start a **bakery business at low cost**, without needing to buy expensive equipment.

Purpose of ABIC bakery

- ✓ To support new entrepreneurs in bakery production
- ✓ To provide ready-to-use equipment
- ✓ To reduce startup cost
- ✓ To encourage food processing businesses
- ✓ To promote skill development and income generation

Challenges in Agri-Business Incubation: Based on reviewed studies, the major challenges include: The success and sustainability of agribusiness incubation are impacted by a number of interrelated issues, according to reviewed studies. Due to their lengthy gestation periods and reliance on weather, agribusiness businesses are sometimes viewed as high risk, which is a significant barrier to funding. Despite possessing excellent technical knowledge, many incubatees lack managerial, marketing, and entrepreneurial skills, which restricts the expansion and scalability of their businesses. Opportunities for value chain integration and market access are diminished by weak connections between farmers, markets, financial institutions, and private sector participants. Furthermore, a major obstacle to demand generation is farmers' low adoption of technology, which is caused by low awareness, risk aversion, and inadequate digital literacy. Innovation and inclusive involvement in agribusiness incubation are further hampered by sociocultural hurdles, such as gender inequality and outdated views

Conclusion

By encouraging innovation, entrepreneurship, and the commercialization of agricultural innovations, agribusiness incubation has become an essential institutional tool for bolstering India's agri-startup ecosystem. Through funding, mentorship, infrastructure support, and market connections, programs like Start-up India, ICAR-supported incubators, NABARD, and RKVY-RAFTAAR have significantly contributed to the creation of an enabling environment for agripreneurs, according to the report. Successful incubation models, such as university-based ABICs and national-level incubators like ICRISAT and ICAR-NIVEDI, provide evidence of their contribution to technology

transfer, employment creation, income enhancement, and sustainable rural development. The long-term viability and scalability of agri-startups are nevertheless hampered by enduring issues such as restricted access to funding, skill gaps among incubatees, poor value chain integration, low farmer adoption of technology, and sociocultural hurdles. To maximize the impact of agri-business incubation, it will be essential to address these issues through increased private sector participation, stronger governmental support, capacity training, and strong post-incubation support networks. All things considered, agribusiness incubation has enormous potential to change Indian agriculture into a robust, innovative, and market-oriented industry that significantly advances inclusive growth and national development objectives.

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