

The Economic Impact of Farm Tourism on Local Communities in North Malabar, India

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1. Abstract - Farm tourism, or agritourism, has emerged as a cornerstone strategy for rural economic diversification, particularly in agrarian-heavy regions where traditional farming faces increasing market volatility. This study examines the economic impact of farm tourism on local communities in the North Malabar region of Kerala, India, focusing specifically on income diversification and employment generation. Drawing upon a quantitative survey of 107 farm tourism operators, the research explores the nexus between enterprise profitability and community-level economic benefits. While the literature establishes farm tourism as a global phenomenon for sustainable development, this paper provides granular evidence of its localized role in transforming farmers from commodity producers into service entrepreneurs. The findings underscore the importance of integrating farm tourism into mainstream agricultural policy to foster household resilience and mitigate rural-urban migration. The paper concludes with policy recommendations for bridging the infrastructure and implementation gaps currently hindering the sector's full potential in South Asia.

Keywords: Farm Tourism, Agritourism, Rural Development, North Malabar, Income Diversification, Employment Generation, Kerala.

2. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary global economy, rural regions across both developed and developing nations are increasingly embracing multifunctional agriculture as a strategic response to the declining profitability of traditional commodity farming. This shift reflects a broader structural transformation in rural economies, driven by mounting pressures such as climate variability, land fragmentation, rising input costs, and volatile global market prices for primary agricultural products (Sharanya Yadav, 2023). As farming alone becomes insufficient to sustain rural livelihoods, diversification into allied activities has emerged as a crucial pathway for enhancing economic resilience and long-term sustainability.

Within this evolving framework, farm tourism—the integration of agricultural production with tourism and hospitality services—has gained prominence as a viable rural development strategy. Originally emerging as a niche initiative in parts of Europe, farm tourism has expanded into a dynamic, multi-billion-dollar global industry. By offering experiential services such as farm stays, agro-education, cultural immersion, and nature-based recreation, this sector enables farmers to generate supplementary income while preserving agricultural landscapes and rural heritage. The global farm tourism market is projected to reach USD 62.98 billion by 2027, underscoring its growing economic relevance and potential as a sustainable development model (RSI International, 2024). Importantly, farm tourism leverages existing natural, cultural, and human resources, thereby minimizing capital intensity while maximizing local value addition.

In the Indian context, farm tourism aligns closely with national objectives of rural development, employment generation, and inclusive growth. Agriculture continues to support a significant proportion of India's population; however, declining farm incomes and agrarian distress have necessitated innovative livelihood alternatives. Among Indian states, Kerala—internationally recognized through its “God's Own Country” tourism brand—offers a particularly fertile setting for examining the synergies between agriculture and tourism. Historically, Kerala's agrarian economy has been dominated by high-value cash crops such as coconut, arecanut, spices, and rubber. Yet escalating production costs, labour shortages, and heightened exposure to global competition have compelled farmers to explore alternative and supplementary revenue streams (Kumar, 2020).

Within Kerala, the North Malabar region—comprising districts such as Kasaragod, Kannur, and parts of Kozhikode—presents a distinctive socio-economic and ecological landscape. The region is characterized by rich biodiversity, traditional farming systems, unique cultural practices, and relatively untapped tourism potential. Recent years have witnessed growing interest in farm-based tourism initiatives in this region,

positioning it at the threshold of a localized tourism-driven transformation (Jincy & Reshmi, 2022). Farm tourism in North Malabar not only offers economic opportunities for individual farmers but also holds promise for revitalizing rural communities through employment creation, skill development, and the strengthening of local supply chains.

Despite this evident potential, the transition from agricultural production to service-oriented entrepreneurship poses significant microeconomic challenges. Farmers must adapt to new skill requirements, investment risks, market uncertainties, and regulatory frameworks. While the macroeconomic contributions of tourism to Kerala's economy—such as foreign exchange earnings and state-level employment—are well documented, there remains a notable gap in understanding the localized economic impacts of farm tourism at the community level (Drishti IAS, 2025). In particular, limited empirical attention has been given to how the financial performance of individual farm tourism enterprises translates into tangible benefits for surrounding households and village economies.

Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to bridge this research gap by examining the economic impact of farm tourism on local communities in North Malabar, India. The paper focuses specifically on the mechanisms through which farm tourism enhances income stability, absorbs local labour, and stimulates ancillary economic activities within rural settings. By emphasizing micro-level outcomes, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of farm tourism as a tool for inclusive rural development and community-based economic sustainability (Sharanya Yadav, 2023).

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The definition of farm tourism has evolved from simple “farm stays” to a complex hybrid of education, recreation, and direct sales on working farms (Phillip, Hunter, & Blackstock, 2010). Early definitions focused on the provision of temporary accommodation, but contemporary scholars emphasize the “working farm” element, where tourism remains supplementary to primary agricultural functions. This distinction is vital: unlike mass tourism, farm tourism preserves the agrarian identity of the landscape while adding a service layer that buffers against crop failure and market fluctuations (Nickerson, Black, & McCool, 2001). According to a comprehensive review, agritourism activities are increasingly understood as multifaceted, incorporating direct-to-consumer farm experiences, educational tours, and diversified recreational options that extend beyond mere accommodation into sustained economic engagement with rural locales (Chase et al., 2018). Recent conceptual work illustrates how farm tourism now encompasses digital and experiential marketing strategies that enhance tourist engagement and extend agrarian value chains, particularly through online bookings and curated rural experiences (Singh & Sharma, 2023). Furthermore, scholarly research suggests that the concept of farm tourism is progressively aligned with experiential tourism frameworks, where authenticity, interaction, and learning serve as core dimensions shaping visitor experiences and economic benefits (K Martinus et al, 2024).

The economic contributions of agritourism are globally heterogeneous but consistently positive (OECD, 2018). In Poland, agritourism has been found to account for nearly one-third of total household income for participating farmers (Roman & Prus, 2017). Similarly, in Brazil and Italy, the sector is a major national employer, providing hundreds of thousands of jobs (Barbieri, 2013). European studies further confirm that agritourism enhances farm income stability by reducing dependence on volatile agricultural markets, particularly in regions vulnerable to climate and price risks (Flanigan, Blackstock, & Hunter, 2014). In India, states like Maharashtra and Karnataka have led the way in formalizing agritourism models (Ministry of Tourism, 2021). Maharashtra, in particular, has demonstrated that “enterprising farmers” can fundamentally change the economic face of traditional agriculture by creating a “win-win” situation for both the urban consumer and the rural producer (Kumbhar, 2010). More recent empirical evidence from different parts of India suggests that agritourism participation contributes not only to income diversification but also to enhanced household resilience, improved consumption patterns, and greater financial security among rural producers (Priyadarshan et al., 2025). These findings reinforce the role of farm tourism as a viable strategy for strengthening rural livelihoods in agrarian economies.

The literature identifies a “multiplier effect” where tourist expenditure on farms circulates through the local economy via wages and the procurement of local goods (Haggblade, Hazell, & Reardon, 2010). Farm tourism is notably labor-intensive (Phillip et al., 2010). Beyond direct guide and hospitality roles, it stimulates indirect employment in handicrafts, transport, and local retail (Hastuti, E et al, 2015). For developing regions, this serves as a critical tool for counter-urbanization, providing youth and women with viable local livelihoods and reducing rural-urban migration (Rout, H.B Et al 2017). Contemporary Indian studies further suggest that where community participation and institutional support are strong, agritourism facilitates the formalization of

rural micro-enterprises and expands women's engagement in income-generating activities, enhancing social inclusion alongside economic gains (Dsouza, Shetty, & Pillai, 2024).

Despite Kerala's dominance in the eco-tourism sector, the specific problems and prospects of farm tourism in the North Malabar tract remain a lean area of scientific inquiry (Kumar, 2020). While studies have addressed visitor satisfaction in Kerala and general perceptions of tourism-led development, there is a lack of rigorous analytical work connecting farm-level income to community-wide employment dynamics (Deepthi & Davy, 2017). Empirical evidence linking the financial performance of farm tourism operators to local labour market outcomes in North Malabar is virtually non-existent (Jincy & Reshmi, 2025). Recent empirical work from agritourism destinations in Kerala such as Wayanad and other districts shows the importance of service quality and visitor satisfaction for economic success. These studies indicate that high perceived quality of experience correlates with greater visitor spending, repeat tourism, and enhanced local economic activity—factors critical to the long-term sustainability of agritourism enterprises (Maria Poulouse & Ushadevi, 2024). Recent pilot studies from rural tourism destinations in Kerala, including Wayanad, indicate that agritourism operators who collaborate with local artisans and community institutions generate stronger economic spillover effects for rural households, suggesting a replicable model for regions such as North Malabar (Thomas & George, 2023).

The preceding review highlights a significant geographic and thematic gap: while agritourism is theoretically championed as a tool for rural resilience, empirical evidence connecting the financial performance of operators to local labour market outcomes in North Malabar is virtually non-existent. Most studies remain descriptive rather than analytical. This study aims to:

- Evaluate the extent to which farm tourism contributes to the diversification of household income in North Malabar.
- Analyze the relationship between the financial success (income levels) of farm tourism operators and their capacity for local employment generation.
- Identify the institutional and infrastructural barriers that limit the scaling of these economic benefits.

4. Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research design to examine the economic impacts of farm tourism. Data was collected from a sample of 107 farm tourism operators across North Malabar through a structured survey instrument. The region was selected due to its high density of small-scale traditional farms and emerging tourism potential. The primary independent variable is the Annual Family Income of the farm operator, and the dependent variable is the Number of Local Employees hired. To test the hypothesis that higher-income enterprises contribute more significantly to local employment, a Chi-square analysis was conducted. This non-parametric test was chosen to determine the association between the categorical income brackets and the scale of hiring. Limitations regarding expected cell counts were noted and addressed through careful interpretation of the trend data.

5. Analysis and Results

First objective

To examine the economic benefits of farm tourism on local communities in North Malabar, including changes in income levels and employment opportunities.

Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant association between income and hiring employment level in North Malabar

Case Processing Summary

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Family_income * Hiring_employees	107	100.0%	0	0.0%	107	100.0%

Family_income * Hiring_employees Crosstabulation

	Hiring_employees				Total
	1-3	4-6	> 7	None	
Family less than Count	2	1	0	4	7

_income	10000	Expected Count	3.3	1.4	.6	1.7	7.0
		% within Family_income	28.6%	14.3%	0.0%	57.1%	100.0%
	10000-30000	Count	19	2	0	9	30
		Expected Count	14.3	5.9	2.5	7.3	30.0
		% within Family_income	63.3%	6.7%	0.0%	30.0%	100.0%
	30001-50000	Count	15	8	1	4	28
		Expected Count	13.3	5.5	2.4	6.8	28.0
		% within Family_income	53.6%	28.6%	3.6%	14.3%	100.0%
	50001-75000	Count	13	6	4	5	28
		Expected Count	13.3	5.5	2.4	6.8	28.0
		% within Family_income	46.4%	21.4%	14.3%	17.9%	100.0%
	more than 75000	Count	2	4	4	4	14
		Expected Count	6.7	2.7	1.2	3.4	14.0
		% within Family_income	14.3%	28.6%	28.6%	28.6%	100.0%
Total		Count	51	21	9	26	107
		Expected Count	51.0	21.0	9.0	26.0	107.0
		% within Family_income	47.7%	19.6%	8.4%	24.3%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	27.048 ^a	12	.008
Likelihood Ratio	28.778	12	.004
Linear-by-Linear Association	.364	1	.546
N of Valid Cases	107		

a. 10 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .59.

The cross tabulation between family income and hiring employees shows a clear pattern: lower-income households (below ₹ 10,000) are more likely not to hire any employees (57%), while middle-income groups (₹ 10,000-50,000) predominantly hire 1–3 employees. Higher-income categories, especially those earning above ₹ 50,000, show greater diversity in employment, with a noticeable proportion hiring 4–6 or more than 7 employees. This suggests that as family income increases, there is a greater likelihood of hiring more workers. The Chi-square test supports this observation, indicating a statistically significant association between income and employment levels, $\chi^2(12, N = 107) = 27.05$, $p = 0.008$. However, the test has limitations since 50% of cells had expected counts less than 5, which weakens the reliability of the result. Despite this, the findings imply a moderate association, where higher family income tends to facilitate greater employee hiring. Overall, the analysis highlights a significant but complex relationship between income levels and employment generation, with higher-income households showing greater capacity to engage larger workforces.

Frequency and percentage table

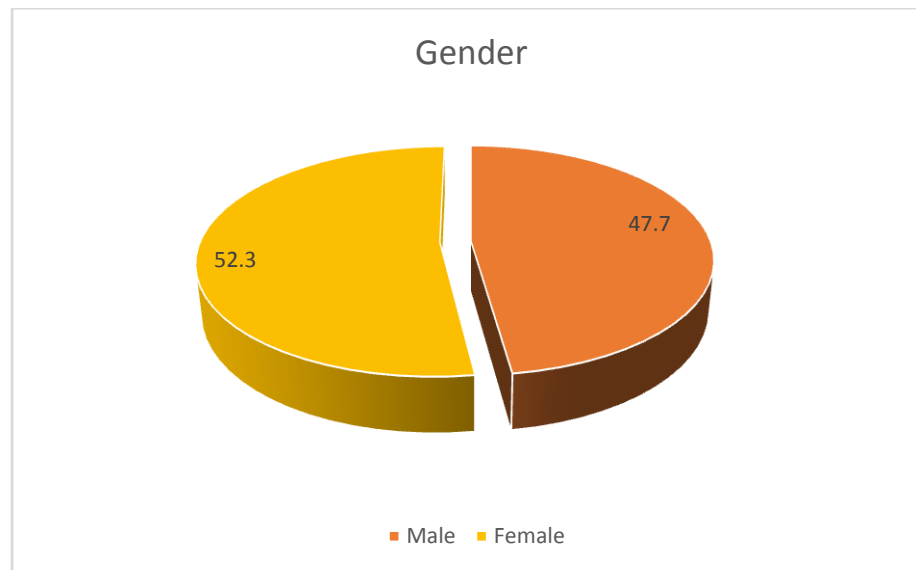
Variables		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	51	47.7
	Female	56	52.3
	Total	107	100.0
Age	Under 18	5	4.7
	18-24	35	32.7
	25-34	24	22.4

	35-44	21	19.6
	45-54	12	11.2
	55 above	10	9.3
	Total	107	100.0
Education	Primary Education	3	2.8
	Secondary Education	27	25.2
	Bacholars Education	50	46.7
	Master Education	26	24.3
	No formal education	1	.9
	Total	107	100.0
Occupation	Farmer	25	23.4
	Tourism operator	11	10.3
	Small business owner	19	17.8
	other	51	47.7
	Government employee	1	.9
	Total	107	100.0
Type of tourism activities	Farm tours	16	15.0
	others	18	16.8
	Educational Programs	21	19.6
	CE	3	2.8
	Agri stays	7	6.5
	Sales of local products	7	6.5
	FC	1	.9
	FCE	1	.9
	AC	1	.9
	FES	2	1.9
	FS	6	5.6
	Cultural experiences	10	9.3
	Agri stys and educational programmes	1	.9
	FCS	2	1.9
	FA	6	5.6
	FAC	1	.9
	FAS	1	.9
	AS	1	.9
	ACE	1	.9
	FE	1	.9
	Total	107	100.0

Gender

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Male	51	47.7	47.7	47.7
Female	56	52.3	52.3	100.0
Total	107	100.0	100.0	

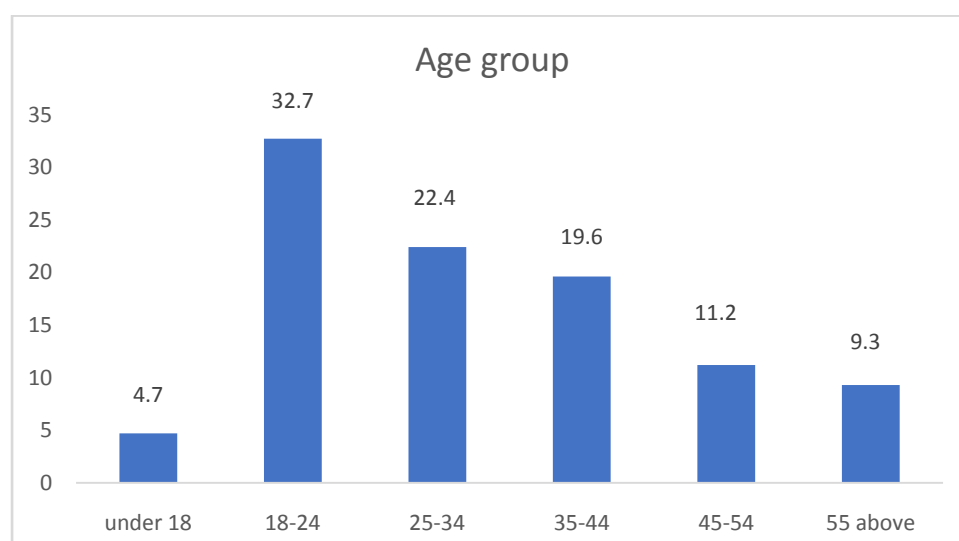
The table presents the gender distribution of the sample consisting of 107 respondents. Out of the total, 51 individuals are male, representing 47.7% of the sample, while 56 are female, accounting for 52.3%. This indicates a slightly higher proportion of female respondents compared to male respondents. The cumulative percentage shows that males constitute nearly half of the sample, and when females are included, they complete the total sample of 100%. Overall, the gender composition is fairly balanced, with a marginal predominance of females in the surveyed population.



Age

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 18-24	35	32.7	32.7	32.7
25-34	24	22.4	22.4	55.1
35-44	21	19.6	19.6	74.8
45-54	12	11.2	11.2	86.0
55 above	10	9.3	9.3	95.3
under 18	5	4.7	4.7	100.0
Total	107	100.0	100.0	

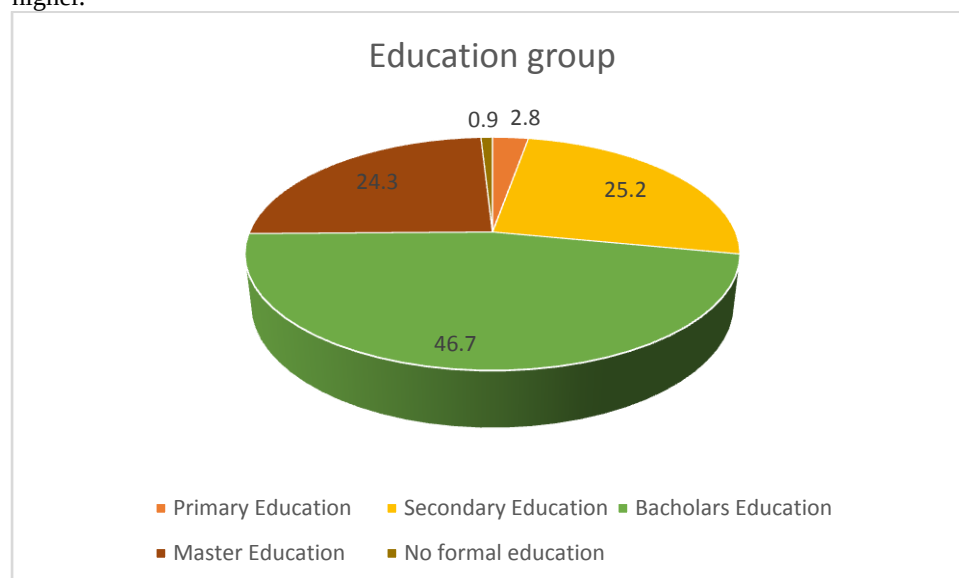
The age distribution of the 107 respondents shows that the largest group is 18–24 years, with 35 individuals, accounting for 32.7% of the sample. The 25–34 age group follows with 24 respondents (22.4%), and the 35–44 group has 21 respondents (19.6%). Respondents aged 45–54 number 12, representing 11.2%, while those 55 and above are 10 individuals (9.3%). The smallest group is under 18, with 5 respondents (4.7%). Overall, the sample is dominated by younger adults, particularly those under 35 years of age.



Education

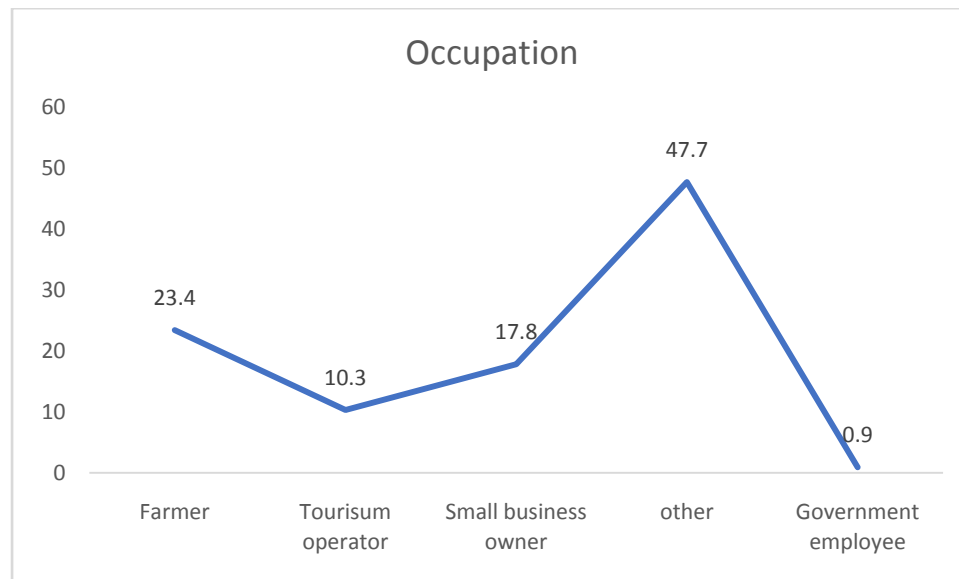
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Primary Education	3	2.8	2.8	2.8
	Secondary Education	27	25.2	25.2	28.0
	Bacholars Education	50	46.7	46.7	74.8
	Master Education	26	24.3	24.3	99.1
	No formal education	1	.9	.9	100.0
	Total	107	100.0	100.0	

The education distribution of the 107 respondents shows that the largest group has a bachelor's education, with 50 individuals, representing 46.7% of the sample. Those with a master's education account for 26 respondents (24.3%), followed by secondary education with 27 respondents (25.2%). Only 3 respondents (2.8%) have primary education, and a very small number, just 1 individual (0.9%), has no formal education. Overall, the majority of the sample is well-educated, with most respondents having at least a secondary level of education or higher.

**Occupation**

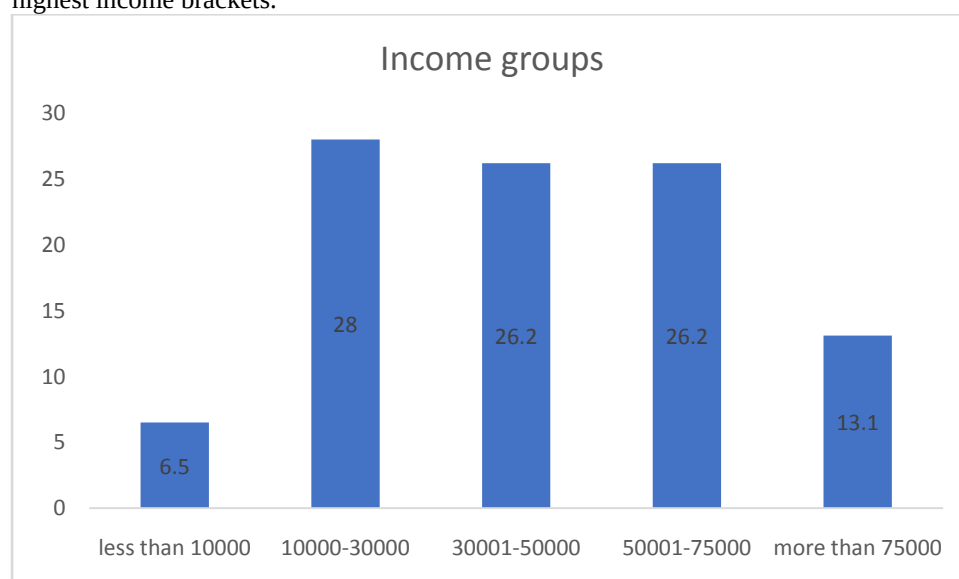
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Farmer	25	23.4	23.4	23.4
	Tourisum operator	11	10.3	10.3	33.6
	Small business owner	19	17.8	17.8	51.4
	other	51	47.7	47.7	99.1
	Government employee	1	.9	.9	100.0
	Total	107	100.0	100.0	

The occupation distribution of the 107 respondents indicates that the largest group falls under “other” occupations, with 51 individuals, representing 47.7% of the sample. Farmers constitute 25 respondents (23.4%), while small business owners account for 19 respondents (17.8%). Tourism operators make up 11 respondents (10.3%), and government employees are the smallest group with only 1 respondent (0.9%). Overall, the sample shows a diverse range of occupations, with nearly half engaged in occupations outside the main listed categories.



Family income					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	less than 10000	7	6.5	6.5	6.5
	10000-30000	30	28.0	28.0	34.6
	30001-50000	28	26.2	26.2	60.7
	50001-75000	28	26.2	26.2	86.9
	more than 75000	14	13.1	13.1	100.0
	Total	107	100.0	100.0	

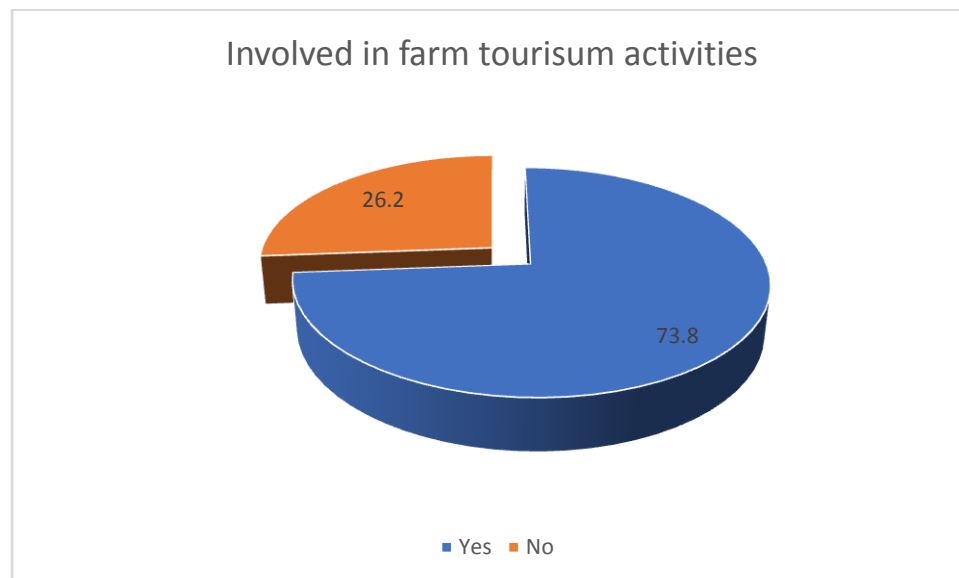
The family income distribution of the 107 respondents shows that the largest groups are those earning between □ 10,000-30,000 and □ 30,001-50,000, with 30 respondents (28.0%) and 28 respondents (26.2%) respectively. Another 28 respondents (26.2%) fall in the □ 50,001-75,000 income range. Families earning less than □ 10,000 comprise 7 respondents (6.5%), while those earning more than □ 75,000 include 14 respondents (13.1%). Overall, the majority of respondents belong to middle-income families, with relatively fewer in the lowest and highest income brackets.



Involved_in_farm_torism

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	79	73.8	73.8	73.8
No	28	26.2	26.2	100.0
Total	107	100.0	100.0	

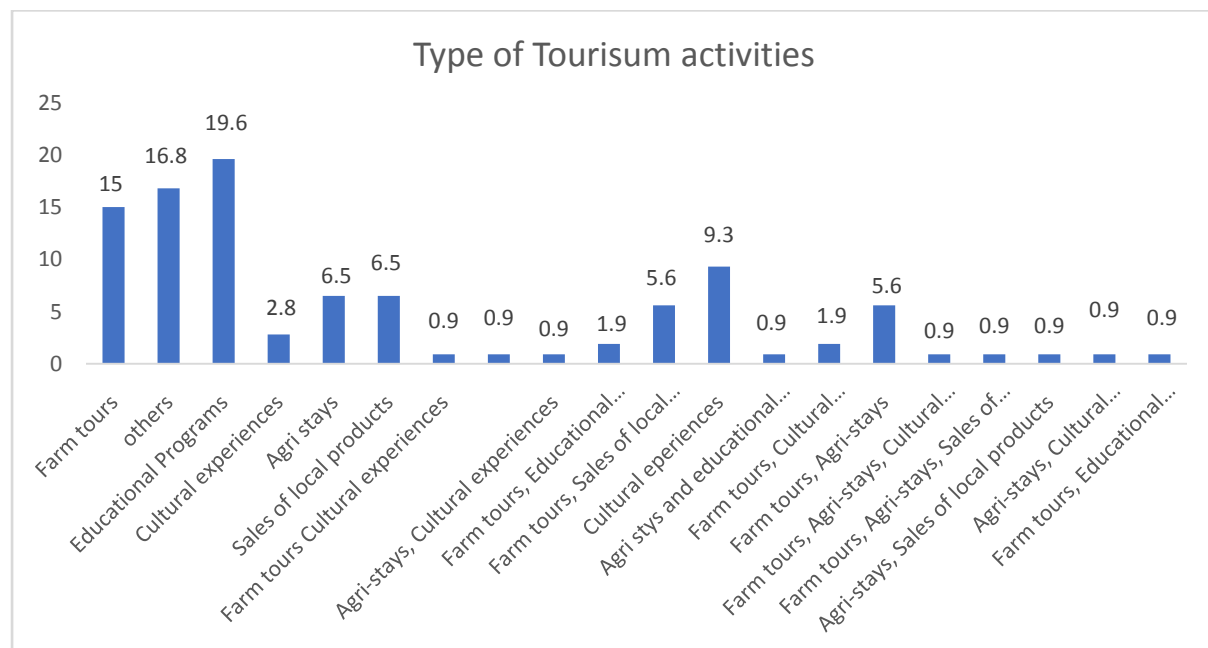
The table shows that out of 107 respondents, 79 individuals (73.8%) are involved in farm tourism activities, while 28 respondents (26.2%) are not. This indicates that a significant majority of the respondents participate in farm tourism, suggesting it is a prominent activity among the surveyed population.



Type_of_tourism_activity					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Farm tours	16	15.0	15.0	15.0
	others	18	16.8	16.8	31.8
	Educational Programs	21	19.6	19.6	51.4
	Cultural experiences	3	2.8	2.8	54.2
	Agri stays	7	6.5	6.5	60.7
	Sales of local products	7	6.5	6.5	67.3
	Farm tours Cultural experiences	1	.9	.9	68.2
	Farm tours, Cultural experiences, and Educational programs	1	.9	.9	69.2
	Agri-stays, Cultural experiences	1	.9	.9	70.1
	Farm tours, Educational programs, Sales of local products	2	1.9	1.9	72.0
	Farm tours, Sales of local products	6	5.6	5.6	77.6
	Cultural experiences	10	9.3	9.3	86.9
	Agri stays and educational programmes	1	.9	.9	87.9
	Farm tours, Cultural experiences, Sales of local products	2	1.9	1.9	89.7
	Farm tours, Agri-stays	6	5.6	5.6	95.3
	Farm tours, Agri-stays, Cultural experiences, Educational programs	1	.9	.9	96.3
	Farm tours, Agri-stays, Sales of local products	1	.9	.9	97.2
	Agri-stays, Sales of local products	1	.9	.9	98.1

Agri-stays, Cultural experiences, Educational programs, Sales of local products	1	.9	.9	99.1
Farm tours, Educational programs	1	.9	.9	100.0
Total	107	100.0	100.0	

The table shows the distribution of respondents by the type of tourism activities they are involved in. Among 107 respondents, the most common activities are **educational programs** (21 respondents, 19.6%), followed by **others** (18 respondents, 16.8%) and **farm tours** (16 respondents, 15.0%). Activities such as **cultural experiences** (10 respondents, 9.3%), **agri-stays** (7 respondents, 6.5%), and **sales of local products** (7 respondents, 6.5%) are also practiced by several respondents. A smaller number of respondents (less than 2% each) are engaged in combinations of multiple activities, such as farm tours with cultural experiences, agri-stays, or educational programs. Overall, the data indicate that educational programs, other tourism-related activities, and farm tours are the most preferred types of farm tourism activities among the respondents.



6. Discussion

The statistical results indicate a clear positive correlation between the financial success of farm tourism enterprises and their capacity for local job creation in North Malabar. As operators move into higher income brackets, particularly above ₹ 50,000, there is a marked transition from selfemployment to becoming a local employer, often supporting more than 4-7 workers. This data validates the "multiplier effect" theory within the specific context of Kerala's rural economy. Furthermore, the demographic profile reveals that the sector is significantly engaging younger individuals (aged 18-34) and those with higher education, suggesting that farm tourism is successfully rebranding agriculture as a modern, professionalized service sector.

7. Conclusion and Policy Implications

Farm tourism in North Malabar is a viable engine for rural resilience. To maximize this potential, agricultural policy must shift from a focus solely on yield to a focus on "experience-based value." Streamlining licensing and improving rural road connectivity are essential steps for scaling these benefits.

8. Limitations and Future Research Directions

The study's primary limitation lies in its cross-sectional nature, providing a snapshot of the current economic state. Furthermore, while the Chi-square results are significant, a larger sample size would allow for more sophisticated regression modeling to control for variables such as farm size or education levels. Future research should focus on a qualitative assessment of employment quality, investigating whether the jobs created offer fair wages and long-term security. Additionally, a longitudinal study tracking the resilience of these farms through environmental shocks (e.g., floods or droughts) would provide deeper insights into the sector's role as a climate-resilience strategy.

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