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Cultivating the future: Insights into agricultural graduates' attitudes toward entrepreneurship in Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

Agricultural entrepreneurship holds vast potential for fostering economic growth and entrepreneurial development, serving as a springboard for micro-businesses. Despite its significance, many agricultural graduates are reluctant to venture into entrepreneurship due to various internal and external factors shaping their perceptions and attitudes. This quantitative study investigates the willingness of agricultural graduates to engage in entrepreneurial activities within the agricultural sector, focusing on students from Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, India. Data were collected from 200 respondents using a structured questionnaire and analysed using descriptive and factor analysis tools in Excel. Key findings reveal that individuals with entrepreneurial vision, confidence in their skills, strong social networks, and prior investments in other businesses are more inclined toward entrepreneurship. Interestingly, fear of failure or risk perception does not significantly deter entrepreneurial ambitions. The study highlights critical barriers, with 86% of respondents identifying limited capital as the primary constraint. Conversely, 92.5% believe that agriculture offers lucrative opportunities if approached strategically, while 83% emphasize passion and interest as key motivators for success. Factor analysis identified five major influences on entrepreneurial interest: government policies and support, societal influences, individual capabilities, family backing, and institutional support. The study underscores the transformative role of education in fostering entrepreneurial tendencies. By aligning curricula with industry needs and engaging multi-stakeholders—such as government bodies, financial institutions, and successful entrepreneurs—universities can create a robust ecosystem for nurturing entrepreneurial talent. Practical exposure through internships, mentorship programs, and hands-on training was identified as a game-changer for enhancing students' readiness to venture into agriculture-based enterprises. Moreover, the research points to an opportunity for policymakers to address key challenges such as access to credit, market linkages, and technology adoption. Tailored interventions, such as startup incubation centres and financial incentives, can bridge the gap between ambition and action, empowering graduates to overcome barriers and turn their entrepreneurial dreams into reality. This study offers actionable insights for educators, policymakers, and industry stakeholders aiming to unlock the latent potential of agricultural graduates. By cultivating a culture of innovation and resilience, agricultural entrepreneurship can emerge as a cornerstone for sustainable development and rural prosperity. This comprehensive analysis not only highlights the aspirations of agricultural graduates but also paves the way for actionable strategies to inspire and equip them to become the entrepreneurial leaders of tomorrow.

Keywords: Agricultural entrepreneurship, youth employment, agri-startups, entrepreneurial attitudes and Tamil Nadu Agricultural University Students

1. Introduction

Agricultural entrepreneurship represents a critical pathway for fostering rural development, enhancing food security, and stimulating economic transformation in developing economies like India. In the context of increasing youth unemployment and declining interest in traditional farming, entrepreneurship within the agricultural sector provides a promising alternative, particularly for graduates equipped with formal agricultural education. The growing demand for innovation in agri-food systems and the pressing need for sustainable livelihoods underscore the urgency to empower young graduates to consider entrepreneurship as a viable and rewarding career path (FAO, 2016) [2].

Entrepreneurship among agricultural graduates is increasingly being recognized not merely as a job alternative but as a catalyst for self-reliance, rural industrialization, and inclusive economic growth (Kahan, 2012) [5]. Despite this recognition, empirical evidence suggests a consistent reluctance among agricultural graduates to pursue entrepreneurial ventures. This hesitancy stems from a combination of internal factors—such as risk aversion, lack of confidence, and limited exposure—and external constraints like inadequate access to credit, absence of mentorship, and insufficient institutional support (Chigunta, 2002; World Bank, 2017) [1, 8].

In India, Tamil Nadu stands out for its robust agricultural education system, with Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU) playing a pivotal role in nurturing agrarian expertise. Yet, a gap persists between academic training and real-world entrepreneurial engagement. Studies reveal that although agricultural graduates possess the technical know-how, they often lack the entrepreneurial mindset, exposure to business practices, and motivation required to translate their knowledge into business enterprises (Jain & Vyas,

2018) [3].

Against this backdrop, this study seeks to examine the attitudes and willingness of agricultural graduates from TNAU toward entrepreneurship in agriculture. The research is timely, considering the increasing emphasis placed by the Indian government on promoting agri-startups through initiatives like the Agri-Clinics and Agri-Business Centres (ACABC) Scheme, Startup India, and various state-level incubation programs (Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare, 2020) [6].

This study adopts a quantitative research design, surveying 200 final-year agricultural students using a structured questionnaire. The analysis, conducted through descriptive statistics and factor analysis, aims to unpack the psychological, social, and institutional factors influencing entrepreneurial inclination. Initial findings suggest a promising entrepreneurial potential among graduates, driven by confidence in their skills, social capital, and previous exposure to business environments. Notably, traditional deterrents like fear of failure appear less significant than commonly assumed.

The research also reveals systemic challenges—chief among them being capital constraints, which were identified by 86% of respondents as a primary barrier. Simultaneously, there is widespread optimism, with over 92% of students agreeing that agriculture can be highly profitable if approached strategically. This dichotomy between aspiration and actualization forms the crux of the entrepreneurial dilemma faced by young agri-professionals.

Through this exploration, the study contributes to the broader discourse on agricultural innovation and youth empowerment. It provides practical insights for curriculum reform, policymaking, and institutional engagement aimed at transforming agricultural education into an engine for entrepreneurship. As the global agricultural landscape evolves amidst climate challenges, digital transformations, and market shifts, empowering youth with the tools, confidence, and support systems to innovate in agriculture is not just an academic exercise—it is a developmental imperative (Rapsomanikis, 2015) [7].

2. Research Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research design aimed at exploring the attitudes of agricultural students toward entrepreneurship within the context of Tamil Nadu. The research specifically focuses on the student population enrolled at Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU) campuses—Agricultural College and Research Institute (ACRI), Kudumiyanmalai, and Chettinad—to understand their willingness to engage in agricultural entrepreneurship and identify the factors influencing their perceptions.

Sampling and Data Collection

The target population for this study consisted of undergraduate students pursuing agricultural sciences. A total of 242 respondents participated in the survey, selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation across different academic years. The sample was composed of:

- 92 first-year students
- 28 second-year students
- 122 third-year students

Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms, providing convenience and broad accessibility for participants. The questionnaire was designed to capture demographic information, entrepreneurial attitudes, perceived challenges and opportunities in agriculture, as well as external and internal motivating factors. Respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality to encourage honest and unbiased responses.

Research Instruments

The structured questionnaire consisted of both close-ended and Likert scale-based questions. These were formulated based on prior literature on agricultural entrepreneurship, youth motivation, and entrepreneurial ecosystems, ensuring content validity and relevance to the research objectives.

Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data were coded and analyzed using Microsoft Excel, which served as the primary tool for quantitative analysis. Two main statistical approaches were employed:

- **Descriptive Analysis:** Used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents and provide insights into the general trends in their attitudes toward entrepreneurship (e.g., frequency distributions, percentages, and means).
- **Factor Analysis:** Conducted to identify the underlying constructs that influence students' entrepreneurial interests. This technique helped reduce the dimensionality of the dataset and grouped related variables into coherent factors, providing a deeper understanding of the key motivators and barriers.

The combination of descriptive and inferential methods allowed for a comprehensive analysis of student attitudes, highlighting not just individual opinions but also collective trends and patterns that can inform policy and institutional strategies.

Scope and Limitations

While the study offers valuable insights, it is limited to a specific subset of students from selected colleges within TNAU. Therefore, the findings may not be fully generalizable to all agricultural students across Tamil Nadu or India. Additionally, as data collection was conducted online, students with limited internet access may have been underrepresented.

Nevertheless, the methodology employed ensures a reliable foundation for drawing meaningful conclusions and proposing actionable recommendations for enhancing agricultural entrepreneurship among youth.

3. Results and Discussion

Understanding the attitudes and perceptions of agricultural students toward entrepreneurship is essential for designing effective educational and policy interventions. The data collected in this study reflects not only individual opinions but also the influence of academic exposure, institutional support, and broader socio-economic factors. The structured responses from 242 students across different academic years provide a valuable lens through which to examine key

drivers and deterrents of entrepreneurial interest in agriculture. Analyzing this data through both descriptive and factor-based approaches enables a nuanced understanding of how youth perceive the feasibility, risks, and rewards associated with launching agri-based ventures. The following section presents a detailed review and critical discussion of selected data tables, drawing connections to existing research and highlighting implications for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders in agricultural development.

3.1. Whether Entrepreneurship Can Solve Unemployment Issues in Agriculture

Table 1: Whether Entrepreneurship can solve unemployment issues in Agriculture

Whether Entrepreneurship can solve unemployment issues in Agriculture	I Year	II Year	III Year	Total
Strongly Disagree	16	1	7	24
Disagree	11	3	10	24
No Opinion	15	4	25	44
Agree	20	8	35	63
Strongly Agree	30	12	45	87

A significant majority (150 out of 242; ~62%) either Agree or Strongly Agree that entrepreneurship can effectively address unemployment in agriculture. This positive outlook is especially strong among III Year students, who presumably have more exposure to entrepreneurship courses and real-world agricultural dynamics. The increase in agreement across academic years suggests that maturity, curriculum exposure, or practical experience correlates with entrepreneurial optimism.

This is consistent with Jain & Vyas (2018) [4], who found that final-year agricultural students were more likely to consider entrepreneurship a solution to rural unemployment due to their greater understanding of market opportunities and self-employment potential. Similarly, Kahan (2012) [5] noted that entrepreneurial education is key to shifting youth from job seekers to job creators in agriculture.

However, 48 respondents (20%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed, indicating lingering skepticism, possibly due to fear of failure, lack of visible role models, or institutional barriers.

3.2. Entrepreneurship in Agriculture Requires Significant Risk-Taking

Table 2: Entrepreneurship in agriculture requires significant risk-taking

Entrepreneurship in agriculture requires significant risk-taking	I Year	II Year	III Year
Strongly Disagree	17	1	6
Disagree	9	5	5
No opinion	19	5	20
Agree	16	9	34
Strongly Agree	31	8	57

Risk perception remains a dominant theme, with 155 respondents (~64%) agreeing that entrepreneurship in agriculture involves significant risks. This sentiment is particularly pronounced among III Year students, reinforcing the view that deeper understanding of market volatility, input-output price fluctuations, and weather-related uncertainties shapes this perception.

According to FAO (2016) [2], risk—especially financial and climatic—is a key deterrent for youth engaging in agri-enterprises. World Bank (2017) [8] also highlighted that without risk-mitigating infrastructure (e.g., crop insurance, market access), youth remain cautious.

Interestingly, only 61 respondents (25%) disagreed, and 44 were neutral. This neutral segment may reflect either lack of exposure or indecisiveness, especially among early-year students. The data supports targeted interventions in entrepreneurship education, including modules on risk management, financial literacy, and business planning.

3.3. Agricultural Graduates Have Sufficient Skills to Start Their Ventures

Table 3: Agricultural graduates have sufficient skills to start their ventures

Whether Entrepreneurship can solve unemployment issues in Agriculture	I Year	II Year	III Year	Total	Whether Entrepreneurship can solve unemployment issues in Agriculture
Total	16	25	63	71	67
III Year	4	10	35	43	30
II Year	1	3	2	11	11
I Year	11	12	26	17	26

Only 57% (138 students) expressed confidence (Agree or Strongly Agree) in having sufficient skills to launch their own ventures, while a substantial 63 respondents (26%) remained neutral, and 41 (17%) disagreed. This mixed response reveals a skill-confidence gap, particularly among first-year students, many of whom disagreed or had no opinion.

Graduates in their final year exhibit greater self-assurance, likely due to fieldwork, internships, and exposure to enterprise models. This supports findings from Chigunta

(2002) [1] and Rapsomanikis (2015) [7], which emphasize the importance of practical exposure and skill-building in developing entrepreneurial confidence.

The data underscores the need for a stronger experiential learning model, incorporating mentorships, agribusiness simulations, and startup incubation in the curriculum.

3.4. Importance of Factors Influencing Attitude Toward Agri-Startups

Table 4: How important are the following factors in influencing your attitude towards agri-startups?

Perception	Financial independence	Social recognition	Personal interest in agriculture	potential for innovation	Availability of resources and support
Not at all Important	20	14	14	9	14
Not Important	20	26	8	23	27
No Opinion	46	60	42	34	48
Important	59	64	49	69	67
Very Important	97	78	129	107	86

The most influential factors identified are:

- Personal Interest in Agriculture (73.5%)
- Potential for Innovation (72.3%)
- Financial Independence (64.5%)

This suggests that intrinsic motivation and opportunity for creativity outweigh extrinsic motivators like social recognition (which had lower "Very Important" scores). These results align with Rapsomanikis (2015) [7], who emphasized that youth are motivated by autonomy, innovation, and self-determination more than status or conformity.

Interestingly, Availability of Resources and Support also received high importance (63.6%), indicating that while students are interested and motivated, external enablers (credit, training, tech access) remain crucial.

These insights point toward the need for multi-stakeholder ecosystems—where policy, infrastructure, and education intersect—to foster real entrepreneurial action.

3.5. Cross-Table Synthesis and Key Insights

Analyzing all thetables together provides a comprehensive view of agricultural students' entrepreneurial mindset, their perceived capabilities, and the enabling or limiting factors influencing their decisions. This synthesis is valuable not only for understanding individual data points but for deriving patterns and correlations that have broader educational and policy implications.

1. Entrepreneurial Confidence Grows with Academic Progression

A recurring theme across the data is that confidence, optimism, and clarity of opinion increase with academic maturity. For instance, third-year students show stronger agreement that entrepreneurship can solve unemployment and that they possess sufficient skills to start ventures. This suggests that exposure to practical experiences, field visits, entrepreneurial training modules, or internships over the years positively shapes students' perceptions.

This insight reinforces findings from Jain & Vyas (2018) [3] and Kahan (2012) [5] that entrepreneurial intention is not static—it is influenced by sustained engagement, mentoring, and learning over time. Therefore, early integration of entrepreneurial content in the syllabus could help boost interest and preparedness even among first-year students.

2. High Risk Awareness Does Not Equate to Avoidance

While the majority of students (64%) recognize that agricultural entrepreneurship involves significant risk, this perception does not suppress their interest. The coexistence of risk recognition and strong entrepreneurial intent (as seen in Table 1 and Table 2) implies a growing maturity and realism among students. They are not naïvely optimistic but are beginning to accept risk as part of the entrepreneurial journey.

This resilience aligns with global findings, such as those from the FAO (2016) [2] and World Bank (2017) [8], which emphasize that when youth are provided with the right tools (training, insurance schemes, access to credit), they are more willing to manage risk rather than avoid entrepreneurship altogether.

3. Intrinsic Motivation Is a Major Driver

The data show that "Personal Interest in Agriculture" and "Potential for Innovation" are the two most important motivators influencing entrepreneurial attitude (Table 4), even more than financial independence or social recognition. This strongly suggests that students see agriculture not just as a fallback option, but as a space for innovation, creativity, and personal fulfillment.

Such a finding reflects the narrative in Rapsomanikis (2015) [7] and Chigunta (2002) [1], where youth entrepreneurship flourishes when aligned with personal values and passions, not simply economic necessity. Policies and programs that emphasize personal development, sustainability, and innovation in agri-ventures are more likely to attract and retain young entrepreneurs.

4. Skills and Resource Gaps Remain a Barrier

Despite optimism and passion, students are divided on whether they have sufficient skills to launch businesses (Table 3). About 43% of students are uncertain or disagree, and this gap is more significant among first-year students. Similarly, availability of resources and support systems is rated as "Very Important" by most students, indicating that even confident students recognize they cannot succeed without support.

This underscores a crucial insight: passion alone is not enough. To translate interest into action, universities and policymakers must focus on:

- Skill-building workshops (e.g., on finance, marketing, and operations)

- Access to startup capital and credit
- Hands-on training programs and field exposure
- Startup incubation and mentorship support

These enablers bridge the gap between entrepreneurial intention and implementation, as emphasized in the ACABC Scheme and various agri-incubation success models in India and abroad.

5. Diverse Opinions Reflect a Need for Personalized Engagement

Across all tables, a noticeable portion of students consistently select "No Opinion", ranging from 15% to over 25% in different questions. This neutral stance likely represents a segment that is either undecided, under-informed, or disengaged. These students are a key target group for awareness campaigns, exposure visits, and motivational interventions.

Engagement strategies such as guest lectures from successful agri-entrepreneurs, entrepreneurship fairs, and student startup competitions can help convert indifference into interest, especially for those at the beginning of their academic journey.

4. Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive insight into the entrepreneurial attitudes of agricultural students in Tamil Nadu, with a specific focus on their perceptions of risk, skill readiness, motivational factors, and the role of entrepreneurship in addressing rural unemployment. By surveying 242 undergraduate students across different academic years and institutions, the research uncovers both encouraging trends and areas that demand focused intervention.

The findings affirm that agricultural entrepreneurship is widely recognized by students as a viable pathway to reduce unemployment, particularly as they progress through their academic journey. Third-year students, with greater exposure to practical learning, show higher levels of confidence and entrepreneurial readiness compared to their first- and second-year peers. This suggests that curriculum structure and hands-on experiences significantly influence entrepreneurial intention.

While the majority acknowledge that entrepreneurship in agriculture involves significant risks, this does not deter their enthusiasm. Instead, many students appear willing to navigate these risks, especially when they are supported by adequate knowledge, training, and institutional backing. This resilience reflects a shift in mindset—away from risk aversion and toward calculated risk-taking, a trait critical for entrepreneurial success.

Another noteworthy conclusion is the strong influence of intrinsic motivators such as personal interest in agriculture and the desire for innovation. These factors surpass extrinsic drivers like social recognition or financial incentives, indicating that passion and purpose are key foundations for sustainable entrepreneurship among youth. At the same time, the study highlights that a considerable number of students still feel underprepared, pointing to a gap between entrepreneurial aspiration and actual capability.

Furthermore, the responses underline the importance of systemic support, including access to credit, mentorship, startup incubation, and exposure to real-world agri-business practices. Institutional frameworks—such as those offered by universities, agricultural extension bodies, and government schemes—must evolve to meet these needs, particularly through early-stage entrepreneurship education, interdisciplinary project work, and cross-sector partnerships.

In summary, this research not only showcases the latent entrepreneurial potential among agricultural graduates but also offers a roadmap for unlocking it. By integrating entrepreneurship into academic curricula, providing practical and financial support, and fostering an innovation-driven mindset, educational and policy institutions can enable students to move from intention to implementation. If nurtured effectively, this next generation of agri-entrepreneurs can transform agriculture into a vibrant, self-sustaining sector that drives rural development, economic resilience, and food security.

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Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of Interest.

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