

**ICAR Winter School
Contemporary Agri-preneurship Venture for Empowerment of
Rural Youth of the North East Hill Region,
ICAR Research Complex for NEH Region, Umiam, Meghalaya,
18th February – 10th March, 2025**



In this meeting note, Swapna Rani and Prashant Kalal share insights from their participation in the ICAR-sponsored 21-day winter school on “Contemporary Agripreneurship Venture for Empowerment of Rural Youth of the North East Hill Region.” held from 18 February to 10 March 2025.

CONTEXT

This intensive winter school program aimed to equip agricultural professionals with the knowledge and skills necessary to develop and promote agri-preneurship activities among rural youth in the Northeast Hill (NEH) region. The program was attended by 22 participants from 10 states.

The NEH region has great potential to evolve into an agri-startup hub due to its diversified agro-climatic conditions, favourable for cultivating high-value crops such as king chilli, large cardamom, black



pepper, turmeric, ginger, and pineapples. Sharing international borders with five countries and blessed with scenic natural beauty, the region is also suited for agritourism ventures.

Despite its potential, the region remains economically underdeveloped, primarily due to infrastructure challenges. Agripreneurship can play a crucial role in empowering farming communities by engaging

them in value-added activities such as processing, packaging, and marketing, which can lead to increased income. Encouraging rural youth to pursue agripreneurial activities is essential for building a more equitable and sustainable society.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

This 21-day winter school was meticulously planned by Course Director Dr. B.P. Singh, and Course Coordinators Dr. S. B. Singh, Dr. Uttam Singh, Dr. Anjoo Yumnam, and Dr. Pampi Paul from ICAR RC NEHR, Umiam. The program featured lectures, interactive sessions, and exposure visits, which offered participants valuable insights into potential areas, technologies, skills, and government schemes relevant to agripreneurship.

TRAINING HIGHLIGHTS

Entrepreneurial Opportunities in Agri and Allied Sectors

We gained awareness of emerging agri-business avenues viable in the NEH region, such as the cultivation and processing of underutilized indigenous fruits like Sohiong (*Prunus nepalensis*, known as Meghalaya blackberry), crab apples (*Malus sylvestris*), passion fruit, and plums into value-added products like jams, squashes, and wines.

Dr. B.K. Sohliya, Executive Adviser of the Meghalaya Farmers Empowerment Commission (MFEC), highlighted the commercial potential of uniquely flavored unifloral honeys such as jamun, litchi, and tulsi honey. Dr. Talang, Scientist at ICAR RC NEHR, demonstrated profitable hydroponic cultivation of lettuce and broccoli.



Visit to hydroponics unit at ICAR RC NEHR, Umiam

We explored organic agripreneurship, including the production of:

- **Manures:** Vermicompost, green manure seed production (sunhemp & dhaincha)
- **Biofertilizers:** Azolla, *Azotobacter*, *Rhizobium*, *Pseudomonas*
- **Biopesticides:** Neem oil, *Beauveria*, *Metarhizium*

Dr. D. Thakuria, Dean, CAU-CPGS, emphasized the increasing market demand for these inputs. He noted that dried cow dung cakes are being sold online at Rs. 10 per piece. Dr. Balusamy from ICAR RC NEHR introduced us to service-based opportunities in soil health management, including soil reclamation, testing services, and agri-clinics.

Dr. Lakshmikant Nayak from ICAR-NINFET, Kolkata, presented entrepreneurial options in fiber extraction from pineapple leaves and banana pseudostems, which are abundant in the region.

Mushroom and Beekeeping Ventures

Dr. Tasvina Borah and Dr. S. Patra enlightened us on the value-added potential of mushrooms (pickles, powder, noodles, cookies, dried forms) and beekeeping. A mushroom spawn production unit can generate an income of approximately Rs. 2 lakhs per year. Besides honey (Rs. 1000/kg), other valuable hive products include:

- Royal Jelly: Rs. 4000/kg
- Pollen: Rs. 1500/kg
- Propolis: Rs. 2600/kg
- Bee Venom: Rs. 5000/gram

Livestock and Integrated Farming

We learned about lucrative ventures in piggery, fish farming, bull rearing, and poultry through success stories shared by Dr. S.K. Das and Dr. S. Deori. Contract farming with buy-back agreements is common in poultry and fisheries, providing assured markets and inputs.

At ICAR-NRC Pig, Guwahati, we observed facilities for stunning, dehairing, smoking, and processing pork into value-added products such as sausages, helping boost revenue.



Slaughter unit at ICAR-NRC Pig

Agritourism and Adventure Tourism

Dr. Deewan, Director (I/c), IIE, Guwahati, shared a successful adventure tourism model in Menchuka, Arunachal Pradesh, involving trekking, biking, paragliding, and kayaking. Mr. Robert, a progressive farmer in Riatbasaw village, practices an Integrated Farming System, combining fishery, poultry,

piggery, and diverse crop cultivation. He has transformed his farm into an agro-tourism model, offering visitors traditional village experiences and local Khasi cuisines.



Mr. Robert shared his vision to develop his farm into an agro-tourism model

Government Policies to Encourage Agripreneurship

Dr. A.K. Mohanthy, Director of ICAR ATARI Zone VII, highlighted that India ranks ninth globally in terms of the number of agri-tech startups, with over 2,800 recognized under the 'Startup India' initiative. During the session, participants were introduced to several government schemes that support and nurture agri-startups by offering technical and financial assistance. These included RKVY-RAFTAAR, the Agripreneurship Orientation Program (AOP), the Startup Agri Incubation Program (SAIP), the ASPIRE scheme, MSME initiatives, and the Udyam portal for online enterprise registration.

Dr. Senthil Vinayagam from ICAR-NAARM elaborated on the contributions of the National Agricultural Research and Education System (NARES) and AgriInnovate India Ltd. in technology commercialization and agribusiness incubation. He also discussed support mechanisms such as the Agri Udaan scheme, Startup India Seed Fund, and the Agricultural Infrastructure Fund. Additionally, he emphasized the benefits of linking Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) with agri-startups to enhance market access, improve technology adoption, and increase efficiency for both farmers and startups.

Dr. Mahesh Chander from ICAR-IVRI updated us on the Agri-Clinics and Agri-Business Centres (AC&ABC) Scheme and introduced innovative agri-tech startups like Krimanshi and Wastelink. These startups focus on producing low-cost livestock feed from fruit and vegetable waste, addressing feed shortages and reducing food waste while promoting a circular economy.



An interactive lecture, involving various tasks

Lastly, Dr. T.B. Marak from the Agri Business Incubation (ABI) Centre at ICAR RC NEHR, Umiam, provided insights into the ABI's activities in promoting agripreneurship in the NEH region. She described the Centre's role in offering technical expertise, mentorship, and incubation support, as well as in connecting budding entrepreneurs with potential funding agencies.

Essential Qualities of a Successful Agripreneur

Through lectures by Dr. B.P. Singh and Dr. Lakhan Singh, we learned that entrepreneurs are made, not born. Key traits include:

- Passion
- Effective communication
- Joyful mindset
- Risk-taking and problem-solving abilities

Mr. Joydeep Sharma, founder of NEloc2glo, and Ms. Sainorita, a successful packaging innovator, shared real-life experiences in creating unique agri-products and building brand value through creative marketing.

OUR IMPRESSIONS

- Lectures were informative, interactive, and up-to-date.
- Exposure visits were well-coordinated and supported by technical staff.
- Accommodation was comfortable, with reliable Wi-Fi and amenities.
- Communication via WhatsApp was timely and helpful.
- The opportunity to explore local food and tourist sites was much appreciated.

Through our respective KVKs, we conduct entrepreneurship development programs, sharing technologies and skills with enthusiastic rural youth to guide them on their agripreneurial journeys.

CONCLUSION

India holds immense potential in agripreneurship, yet the journey toward creating 'unicorn' agri-startups is still ongoing. With the world's largest youth population, India must foster a generation of job creators, not job seekers.

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