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MANAGE Agri Eureka: Igniting Innovation towards Sustainable Agri-Startups

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About the Publication

The Extension NEXT Good Practices Bulletin Series documents and disseminates innovative, evidence-based incubation practices that have demonstrated positive impact in agribusiness incubation. The series aims to facilitate knowledge sharing by highlighting successful, replicable, and scalable initiatives, enabling incubation professionals, researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to learn from proven field experiences and promote their wider adoption.

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Authors' Note



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The MANAGE Agri Eureka initiative was conceived as a National-level Agri Innovation and Business Plan Challenge to identify, recognise and nurture innovative ideas with potential to address challenges across agriculture and allied sectors. The experience of working with aspiring innovators and early-stage entrepreneurs highlighted the importance of creating accessible pathways through which promising ideas could be identified, evaluated and connected with appropriate entrepreneurial support. Agri Eureka was therefore designed not merely as a business plan competition, but as an institutional mechanism for widening the reach of agricultural innovation and entrepreneurship.

This Good Practice Bulletin documents the rationale, evolution, design and implementation of Agri Eureka, along with its experiences, outcomes and key lessons. The experiences gained through successive editions provide valuable insights into engaging diverse groups of aspiring innovators and creating pathways for the progression of promising ideas towards enterprise development.

The Publication is intended to serve as a practical reference for agribusiness incubators, agricultural universities, innovation and entrepreneurship cells, policymakers, researchers, development organisations and other institutions engaged in promoting agricultural innovation and entrepreneurship. The practices and lessons presented may provide useful guidance for designing similar initiatives for identifying and supporting promising innovations in diverse agricultural and regional contexts.



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We express our sincere appreciation to the participants, mentors, experts, evaluators, and the MANAGE-CIA team whose contributions have been instrumental in implementing and strengthening Agri Eureka. We also acknowledge the enthusiasm and commitment of the innovators who have contributed their ideas, experiences and entrepreneurial aspirations to the program. The experiences documented in this Good Practice bulletin are entrusted to encourage wider adoption of systematic innovation scouting and support mechanisms and contribute to strengthening the agricultural innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem in the country.

MANAGE Agri Eureka:
Igniting Innovation towards Sustainable Agri-Startups



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Abstract

The MANAGE Centre for Innovation and Agripreneurship (MANAGE-CIA), a leading agribusiness incubator in India and Knowledge Partner under the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (PM-RKVY), formerly Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana–Remunerative Approaches for Agriculture and Allied Sector Rejuvenation (RKVY-RAFTAAR), has been promoting agripreneurship since 2019–20 by supporting Agri-startups from ideation to commercialization. During the initial cohorts, participation was largely confined to individuals already familiar with the startup ecosystem. To broaden outreach and identify innovative agricultural ideas from diverse sections of society, MANAGE-CIA launched Agri Eureka in 2022, a national-level Agri-innovation and business plan competition designed to identify, mentor, and support promising agripreneurial ventures.

The program follows a structured multi-stage process involving nationwide outreach, application screening, expert evaluation, mentoring, capacity building, final selection, and post-selection incubation support. Across four editions held between 2022 and 2025, Agri Eureka received 1,399 applications from participants representing 29 States and Union Territories, including students, farmers, working professionals, aspiring entrepreneurs, and startup founders. The innovations spanned diverse sectors such as biotechnology, food processing, fisheries, Agri-fintech, artificial intelligence, Internet of Things (IoT), farm mechanization, animal husbandry, organic farming, and waste-to-wealth solutions, covering product, process, and service innovations.

Applications were evaluated based on innovation, uniqueness, scalability, business viability, and potential impact. Following a rigorous screening process, 99 participants (7.07%) were shortlisted for intensive mentoring in business modelling, intellectual property rights, financial management, product development, and investor pitching. Ultimately, 15 national-level winners were recognized for their entrepreneurial potential and innovative solutions. A key strength of the program is its post-competition support, providing mentorship, networking, incubation facilities, and funding opportunities under PM-RKVY. As a result, 26 (76.47%) of the 34 finalists received incubation support, facilitating the transformation of innovative ideas into sustainable agribusiness enterprises. Agri Eureka has emerged as an effective platform for fostering innovation, promoting women and youth entrepreneurship, and strengthening India's Agri-startup ecosystem.

Introduction

The agricultural sector in India faces persistent challenges, including rising costs of cultivation, low productivity, poor price realization, credit and risk vulnerability, post-harvest losses, and climate-induced resource degradation (NITI Aayog, 2025). Addressing these issues necessitates innovative, location-specific, and technology-driven solutions. Agripreneurs play a pivotal role in this transformation by introducing innovative products and services that have the potential to address numerous challenges faced by the sector (Anupam Anand and Saravanan Raj, 2019). However, their success depends on an enabling ecosystem characterized by low entry barriers, particularly for students, and supportive legal and regulatory frameworks that promote entrepreneurship, ensure fair competition, and safeguard property rights (Rathore et al., 2023).

The MANAGE Centre for Innovation and Agripreneurship (MANAGE-CIA), functioning as a Knowledge Partner under the PM-RKVY program formerly RKVY-RAFTAAR, has been supporting agri-startups from ideation to commercialization since 2019–20. During the initial years of implementation, it was observed that participation in incubation programs was largely confined to individuals who were already familiar with startup ecosystems and entrepreneurship support mechanisms. As a result, many innovative ideas from students, farmers, rural youth, professionals, and aspiring entrepreneurs remained unidentified and had limited access to mentoring, funding, and incubation opportunities. To address this gap, MANAGE-CIA introduced Agri Eureka in 2022 as a national-level Agri-innovation and business plan competition. The initiative was designed to broaden outreach, attract a diverse pool of innovators, and create a structured platform for identifying, recognizing, and nurturing promising agripreneurial ideas. Between 2022 and 2025, four editions of the program were conducted, attracting participants from 29 States and Union Territories across India. The competition covered diverse sectors such as farm mechanization, biotechnology, waste-to-wealth, artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), Internet of Things (IoT), fisheries, animal husbandry, food processing, precision farming, supply chain management, organic farming, and Agri-fintech.

Business plan competitions enable participants to refine and defend their ideas before expert panels, thereby enhancing clarity, confidence, and entrepreneurial competence (Schwartz et al., 2013; Watson et al., 2018). It also contributes significantly to human capital development through mentorship, advisory support, and experiential learning opportunities (Russell et al., 2008; Watson and McGowan, 2019). While competitions provide recognition and visibility, the successful transformation of innovative ideas into viable enterprises depends largely on access to critical resources, including physical, human, social, and financial capital (Colombo & Grilli, 2010; Kellermanns et al., 2016; Drover et al., 2017). In this context, a key strength of the Agri-Eureka program lies in its structured post-selection incubation support offered at MANAGE-CIA. This support includes mentorship, networking opportunities, business guidance, and access to funding, thereby enabling participants to progress from ideation to enterprise development. As a result of this comprehensive support system, 26 out of 34 finalists successfully established their own startups and were subsequently recommended for incubation, facilitating the advancement and scaling of promising Agri-startups. The effectiveness of the MANAGE-CIA Agri Eureka competition highlights its role in fostering innovation, entrepreneurial learning, and venture creation within the agricultural sector. This aligns with findings of Passaro et al. (2017): participation in competitions serves as a catalytic platform that encourages awareness of entrepreneurial processes and helps individuals to transition from ideation to formal venture creation, elevating the societal prestige of entrepreneurial careers.

Genesis of the MANAGE Agri Eureka



The MANAGE Centre for Innovation and Agripreneurship (MANAGE-CIA) undertook outreach initiatives to identify and nurture innovative agricultural ideas among students, farmers, rural youth, professionals and aspiring entrepreneurs who had limited access to entrepreneurship opportunities, incubation support, mentoring and funding. As part of these outreach efforts, the Krishi Vikas: Searching Agri Innovations and aid young businesses program was conducted between April and October 2018 with the objective of identifying promising agricultural innovations and entrepreneurial ideas and bringing potential entrepreneurs into the agricultural entrepreneurship ecosystem. The program was implemented in collaboration with agricultural universities and other institutional partners through scouting programs organised across eight states, namely Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Assam. Across these programs, a cumulative 341 entrepreneurial ideas were pitched, of which 223 entrepreneurs were shortlisted for further support. The shortlisted entrepreneurs were provided opportunities for expert guidance, training, mentoring, exposure, awareness about available financial assistance, and networking, enabling them to further develop and refine their business ideas. The program demonstrated the potential of systematic institutional outreach in identifying promising innovations and connecting aspiring entrepreneurs with the support required to pursue agricultural entrepreneurship

Profile of the Participants



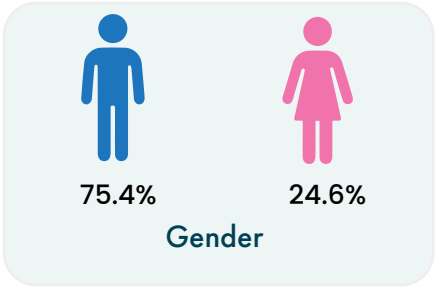
The Agri Eureka programme demonstrated significant diversity in innovation, highlighting its broad and inclusive approach to identifying and nurturing agricultural innovations.

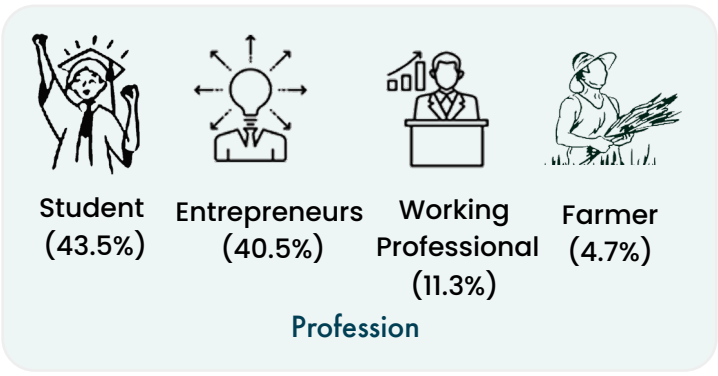
3.1 National Reach and Inclusive Participation: Between 2022 and 2025, Agri Eureka attracted 1,399 applications from 29 States and Union Territories, demonstrating its broad national reach, with male and female applicants accounting for 75.4 per cent and 24.6 per cent, respectively.

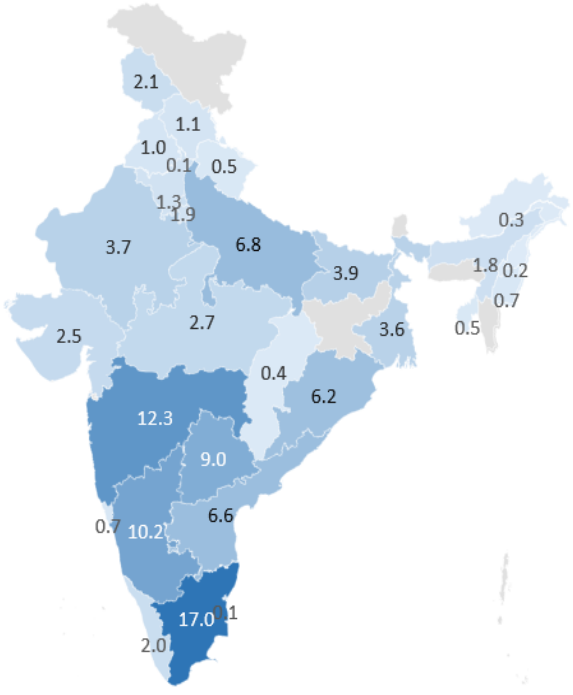
3.2 Diversity of Applicant Profiles: The programme successfully engaged multiple stakeholder groups, including students (43.5%), aspiring entrepreneurs (40.5%), working professionals (11.3%), and farmers (4.7%), indicating its effectiveness in reaching both conventional and non-traditional innovation communities.

3.3 Representation Across Startup Stages: The applicant pool represented innovations at various stages of maturity, ranging from ideation (50.8%) and prototype development (23.7%) to Minimum Viable Products (MVPs) (12.2%) and scaling ventures (13.2%). This diversity enabled the programme to identify and support innovations across the entrepreneurial pathway rather than focusing solely on advanced startups.

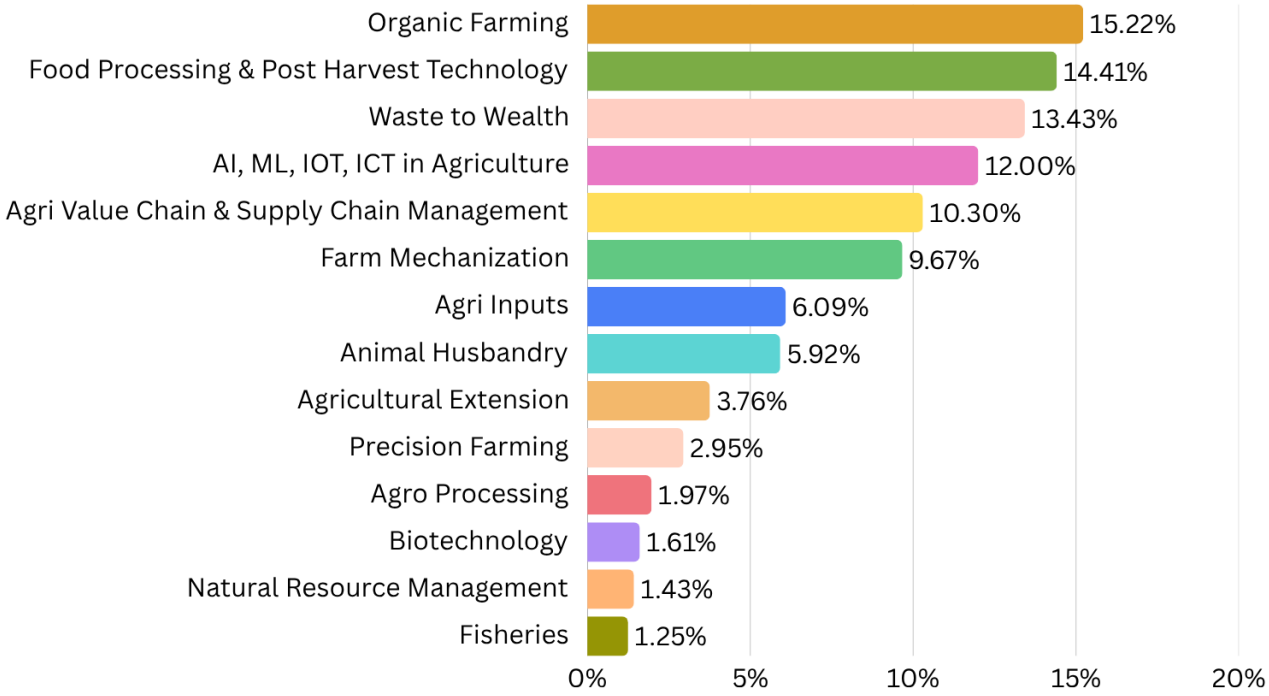
3.4 Sectoral and Innovation Diversity: Applications were received from a broad spectrum of sectors, including organic farming (15.2%), food processing (14.4%), waste-to-wealth (13.4%), AI, ML, IOT, & ICT (12.0%), agri-value & supply chain (10.3%), farm mechanization (9.7%), agri-inputs (6.0%), animal husbandry (5.9%), agricultural extension (3.7%), precision farming (2.9%), agro-processing (1.9%), biotechnology (1.6%), natural resource management (1.4%), and fisheries (1.2%). The innovations comprised product (30.5%), process (18.2%), service (10.1%), and integrated innovation models (41.2%), reflecting the programme's success in fostering multidisciplinary and problem-oriented solutions for agriculture.



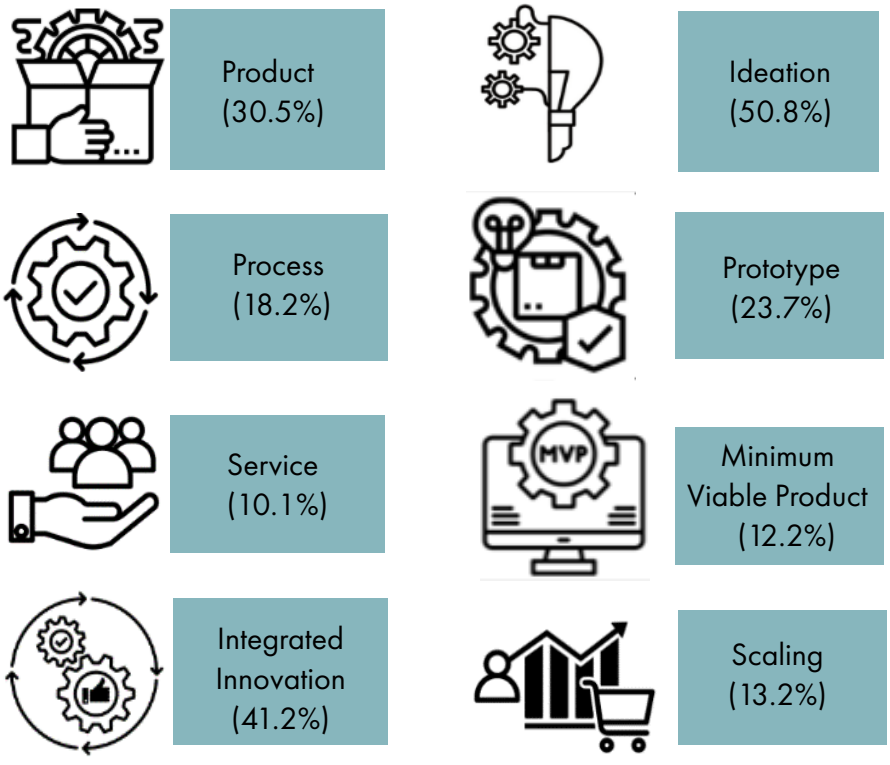




Geographical Representation (%)



Focus Area and Innovation Diversity (%)



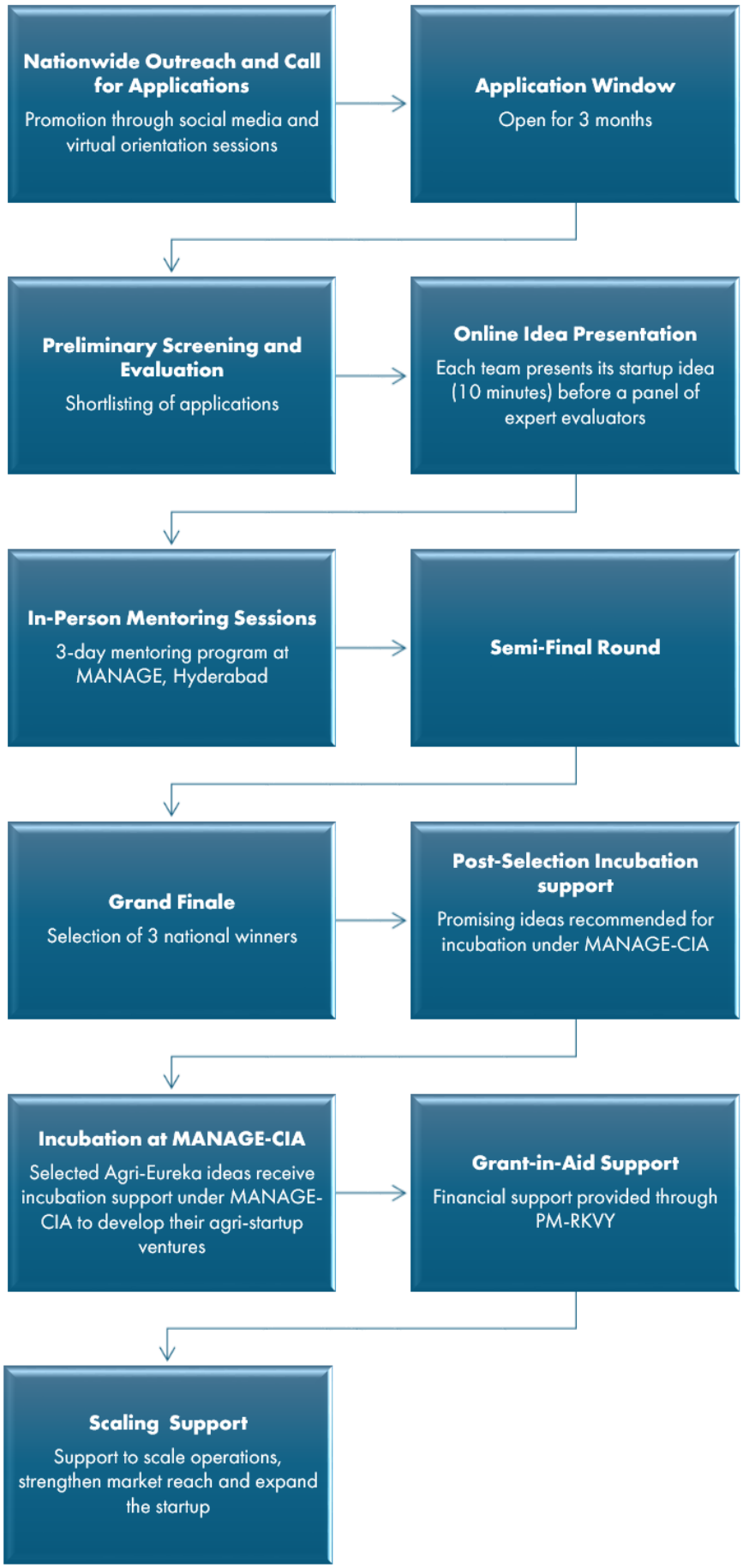
Type of Innovation

Stage of Development

Implementation Process



Agri Eureka Program Stages



4.1 Strategic Outreach and Application Mobilization

Agri Eureka employs a multi-channel outreach strategy designed to reach aspiring agripreneurs with diverse backgrounds, levels of experience, and geographical locations. Rather than relying on a single publicity mechanism, the programme combines broad-based awareness generation with targeted institutional engagement to maximize participation and inclusivity.

- Multi-Channel Awareness and Promotion: At the national level, awareness is created through a mix of traditional and digital communication channels, including newspapers, agricultural publications, social media campaigns, and participant testimonials. This approach ensures visibility among a wide audience while using participant testimonials to build credibility and encourage participation from first-time innovators.
- Leveraging Institutional Networks for Wider Reach: To reach potential entrepreneurs, MANAGE-CIA leverages its extensive institutional network. Outreach with agricultural universities, engineering and management institutions, startup incubators, innovation councils, and entrepreneurship cells helps to directly engage students, researchers, innovators, and early-stage entrepreneurs who may otherwise remain untapped.
- Continuous Engagement and Entrepreneurial Orientation: The outreach process is further reinforced through continuous engagement activities during Saturday webinar series, orientation programmes, stakeholder meetings, student visits to MANAGE under All India Tour programmes, and various MANAGE training and capacity-building initiatives. These platforms not only disseminate information about the programme but also familiarize potential applicants with entrepreneurship opportunities, application requirements, and the support available through the Agri-startup ecosystem.
- Reducing Entry Barriers and Enhancing Accessibility: To reduce entry barriers and encourage broader participation, the programme follows an applicant-friendly design. A three-month application window provides adequate time for idea development and proposal preparation, while a standardized presentation template helps ensure uniformity in submissions. Free participation and the flexibility to apply either individually or as a team further enhance accessibility, enabling innovators from varied socio-economic and institutional backgrounds to compete on an equal platform.

4.2 Merit-Based Screening and Evaluation Process

Agri Eureka follows a structured multi-stage evaluation process designed to identify innovations with strong potential for impact, scalability, and commercialization. The screening methodology emphasizes both innovation quality and entrepreneurial viability, ensuring that resources and support are directed towards ideas with the highest likelihood of success.

- Preliminary Screening and Shortlisting: The process begins with a detailed review of all submitted applications against predefined eligibility and quality criteria. To maintain the programme's focus on nurturing emerging innovations, ideas that lack novelty, have readily available market alternatives, or have already received substantial funding support are screened out at an early stage. This initial filtering mechanism enables evaluators to concentrate on genuinely innovative solutions that require institutional support for further development.
- Standardized Online Pitching Process: Shortlisted applicants are invited to participate in an online pitching round, where each team delivers a standardized 10-minute presentation. The use of a common presentation format ensures consistency across submissions and allows evaluators to compare ideas on a uniform basis. Conducting the presentations online broadens participation by

enabling innovators from different regions of the country to engage in the process without incurring travel costs.

- Multidomain Expert Evaluation: A multidomain panel comprising experts from academia, industry, entrepreneurship, and the startup ecosystem evaluate each proposal using a comprehensive assessment framework. Rather than focusing solely on technological novelty, the evaluation considers multiple dimensions, including the significance of the problem addressed, innovativeness of the solution, market readiness and acceptability, business model robustness, competitive advantage, financial feasibility, revenue-generation potential, team capability, and expected societal benefits. This holistic assessment approach helps identify innovations that are not only technically sound but also commercially viable and socially relevant.



Evaluation Criteria

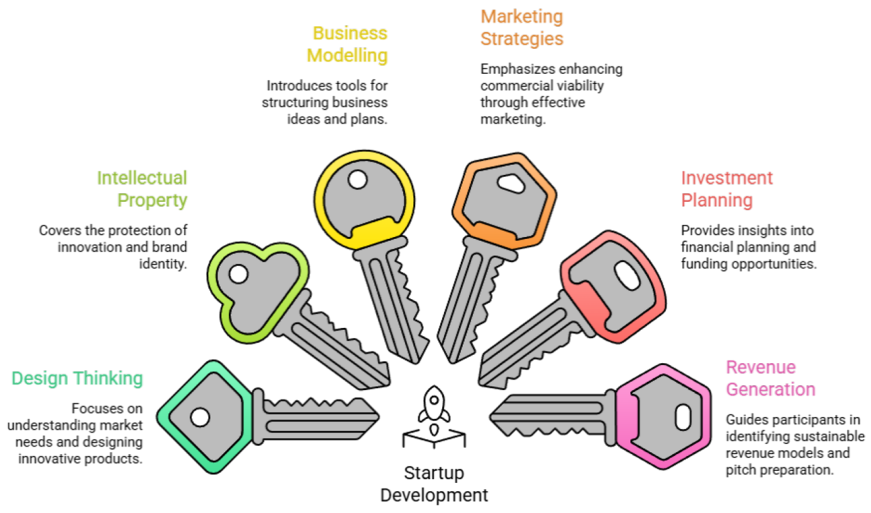
Identification and Advancement of High-Potential Agri-Entrepreneurial Ideas: From a total of 1,399 applications received between 2022 and 2025, 250 innovations were shortlisted for the preliminary pitching round through a rigorous screening process, and subsequently 99 participants were selected for intensive mentoring support. This structured, merit-based evaluation framework enabled the identification of high-potential innovations with strong technical, commercial, and societal relevance, ensuring that mentoring and incubation resources were strategically directed towards the most promising agripreneurial ventures.

4.3 Intensive Mentoring and Capacity-Building Programme

Agri Eureka adopts an immersive, mentor-driven capacity-building approach to bridge the gap between innovative ideas and entrepreneurial readiness. Following the preliminary screening stage, shortlisted participants attend a two-day residential programme at MANAGE, where learning is combined with continuous expert interaction, practical exercises, and iterative refinement of business ideas.

- Guiding the Entrepreneurial Journey: The programme is designed around the principle of transforming innovators into entrepreneurs. Rather than delivering standalone lectures, sessions are sequenced to guide participants through the entrepreneurial journey from problem identification and solution development to business planning, market validation, and investor engagement. Throughout the programme, participants interact directly with domain experts, startup mentors, industry practitioners, and successful entrepreneurs, enabling them to receive real-time feedback on their ideas and business strategies.
- Experiential Learning Through Design Thinking and Business Modelling: A distinctive feature of the programme is its emphasis on experiential learning. Design thinking and product development sessions encourage participants to critically examine the problems they seek to address, understand customer needs, refine value propositions, and align innovations with market demand. Similarly, business modelling exercises use the Business Model Canvas as a practical tool to help participants systematically map key resources, activities, partnerships, customer segments, channels, cost structures, and revenue streams. This structured approach enables innovators to move beyond technical solutions and develop commercially viable enterprises.
- Building Investment and Enterprise Readiness: The programme further strengthens entrepreneurial preparedness through specialized sessions on intellectual property management, legal compliance, financial planning, and investment readiness. Participants are guided on protecting their innovations, evaluating funding requirements, understanding financial metrics, and exploring appropriate financing options. Dedicated mentoring on revenue generation and pitch preparation helps participants convert technical concepts into compelling business propositions and investor-ready presentations.
- Exposure Visits to Innovation and Incubation Ecosystems: As part of the capacity-building process, participants are taken for exposure visits to leading innovation and incubation platforms such as ICAR IIMR Nutrihub and T-Hub. These visits provide participants with first-hand exposure to how startup ecosystems function, how innovations are supported, and how ideas are transformed into market-ready enterprises.

By integrating expert mentoring, practical tools, peer learning, exposure visits, and continuous feedback within a concentrated learning environment, the programme enables participants to refine their innovations, strengthen business acumen, and improve their readiness for incubation, investment, and market entry. This holistic and hands-on methodology has proven effective in enhancing both the quality of startup ideas and the entrepreneurial capabilities of participants.



4.4 Progressive Validation through Multi-Stage Pitch Evaluation

- Progressive Refinement Through Multi-Stage Evaluation: Agri Eureka employs a staged evaluation process that progressively refines and validates startup ideas before selecting winners. Following the intensive mentoring and capacity-building programme, participants enter a semi-final round where they apply the knowledge, feedback, and business insights gained during the training. This intermediate stage serves as a quality enhancement mechanism, allowing participants to strengthen their value propositions, address identified gaps, and improve the commercial viability of their innovations before the final assessment.
- Real-World Pitching and Expert Assessment: The final evaluation is designed to simulate real-world entrepreneurial pitching environments. Finalist teams present their refined startup concepts before an expert jury comprising industry professionals and PM-RKVY-associated experts from the Agri-startup ecosystem. The format combines a structured presentation with an interactive question-and-answer session, enabling evaluators to assess not only the innovation itself but also the entrepreneur's understanding of the market, business model, scalability, and implementation strategy. This dual assessment approach provides deeper insights than conventional proposal-based evaluations.
- Ensuring Inclusivity and Equal Opportunity: A distinctive feature of the process is its emphasis on inclusivity and equal opportunity. Participants are permitted to present in English, Hindi, or any other Indian language, ensuring that language proficiency does not become a barrier to innovation recognition. This approach enables talented innovators from diverse educational, social, and regional backgrounds to effectively communicate their ideas and compete on the strength of their innovations rather than their communication language.
- Balancing Innovation, Viability, and Market Readiness: The evaluation framework adopts a balanced assessment methodology that considers technological feasibility, market potential, uniqueness of the innovation, business viability, and overall presentation effectiveness. By integrating technical, commercial, and entrepreneurial dimensions into a single assessment process, the programme identifies startups that demonstrate both innovation excellence and commercialization potential. The multi-stage progression from application screening to mentoring, semi-final evaluation, and final pitching ensures that selected winners are not only innovative but also better prepared for incubation, investment, and market entry.



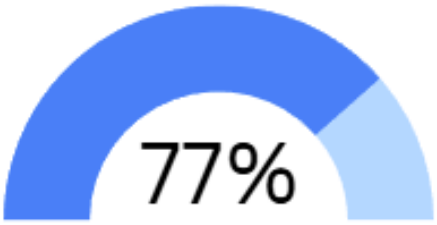
4.5 Post-Competition Incubation, Funding, and Enterprise Growth Support

The Agri Eureka Programme extends its support beyond the competition stage by providing promising innovators with opportunities to strengthen and scale their entrepreneurial ventures. Through MANAGE-CIA, promising participants gain access to incubation facilities, enabling them to refine their innovations and develop sustainable business models in a structured entrepreneurial environment.

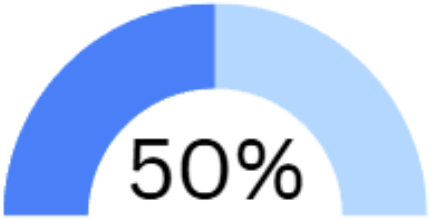
4.5.1 Mentorship, Networking, and Incubation Support

The two-month programme offers mentorship and networking opportunities through interactions with domain experts, industry professionals, investors, and successful entrepreneurs. This support helps participants enhance their business planning, strategic decision-making, and enterprise management capabilities while expanding valuable professional networks.

During 2022–2025, 26 out of 34 finalists, accounting for 76.47 per cent, were supported through incubation at MANAGE-CIA.



26 out of 34 finalists were supported through incubation at MANAGE-CIA



17 out of 34 finalists were selected for funding support under PM-RKVY at MANAGE-CIA



Total sanctioned grant-in-aid: ₹110 lakh

4.5.2 Funding Support and Resource Mobilization

- In addition, outstanding Agri-startups are considered for financial support under PM-RKVY programmes, including the Startup Agri-business Incubation Programme (SAIP) with grant-in-aid support of up to ₹25 lakh, the Agripreneurship Orientation Programme (AOP) with support of up to ₹5 lakh, and the Student Orientation Programme (SOP) with support of up to ₹4 lakh. These linkages provide opportunities for grant support, incubation assistance, and other resources that facilitate the growth and commercialization of innovative agri-enterprises.
- During 2022–2025, 17 startups, representing 50.00 per cent of the finalists, were selected for funding support under PM-RKVY at MANAGE-CIA, with a total sanctioned grant of ₹110 lakh. Among these, 14 startups were supported under the Agripreneurship Orientation Program (AOP), two under the Startup Agri-business Incubation Program (SAIP), and one under the Student Orientation Program (SOP).

4.5.3 Enhancing Investment and Funding Readiness

In addition, five startups received funding support from other incubators, further demonstrating the programme's role in improving the visibility, credibility, and funding readiness of participating startups.

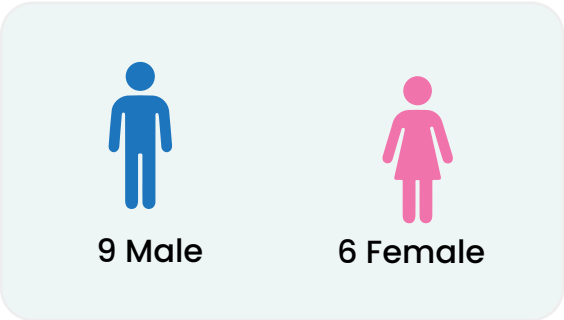
Outcomes and Impact



5.1 Outcomes

The effectiveness of Agri Eureka is reflected in its ability to identify and recognize high-potential innovators from diverse educational, professional, and geographical backgrounds. Between 2022 and 2025, the programme honoured 15 national-level winners from a highly competitive applicant pool, reinforcing its role as a national platform for promoting innovation, nurturing entrepreneurial talent, and strengthening the pipeline of future Agri-startups.

- **Encouraging Gender-Inclusive Agripreneurship:** The winners comprised nine male and six female innovators, reflecting a relatively balanced representation of entrepreneurial talent. This distribution highlights the programme's ability to recognize promising innovators across genders while encouraging participation of women in agripreneurship and contributing to a more inclusive agricultural innovation ecosystem.

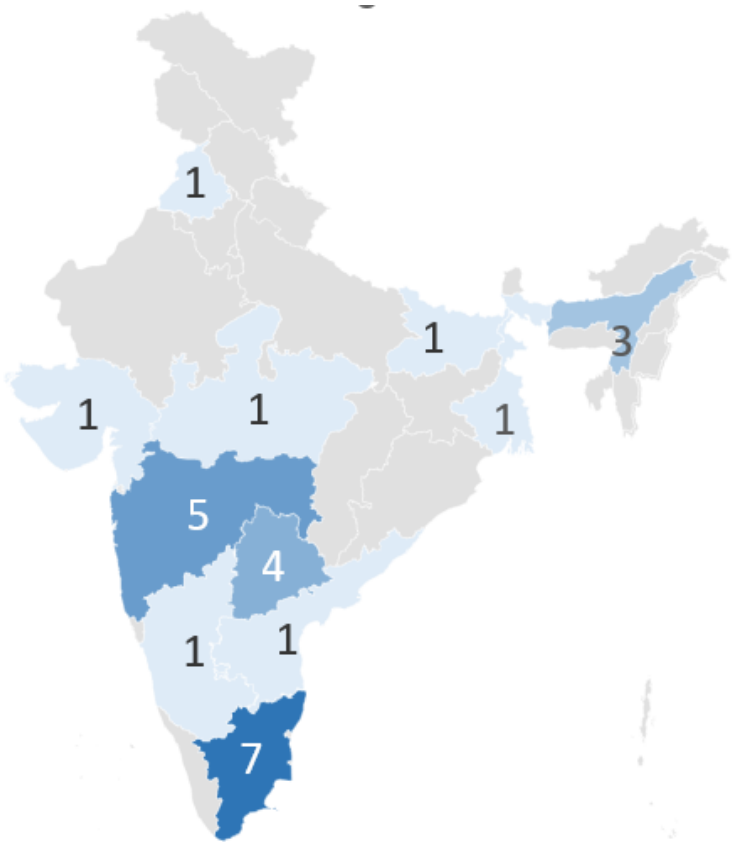


Gender

Nurturing Young Innovators: A notable outcome of the programme has been its success in attracting young innovators and first-generation entrepreneurs. Nearly half of the winners were students and early-career researchers, including undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral students from disciplines such as agriculture, agricultural sciences, food science, engineering, and management. This highlights the programme's effectiveness in identifying entrepreneurial potential at an early stage and creating pathways for young innovators to transform ideas into viable enterprises. The remaining winners represented a diverse pool of entrepreneurs and professionals, including farmers-turned-entrepreneurs, business consultants, agribusiness professionals, finance experts, technology specialists, and experienced industry practitioners, bringing together complementary expertise from agriculture, business, finance, and technology.

Broad Geographical Representation: The programme also achieved broad geographical representation, with winners emerging from eight states across different regions of India. Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, and Telangana each contributed three winners, followed by Madhya Pradesh with two winners, while Gujarat, West Bengal, Mizoram, and Punjab each produced one winner. This widespread participation demonstrates the programme's ability to identify innovative solutions beyond traditional startup hubs and promote entrepreneurship across diverse agro-ecological and socio-economic contexts.

Diversity of Winning Innovations: The selected innovations addressed a wide range of challenges across the agricultural value chain, reflecting the multidisciplinary nature of contemporary agripreneurship. Biotechnology and fisheries accounted for three winning innovations each, followed by food processing and post-harvest technology with two innovations. Additional innovations emerged in artificial intelligence, machine learning, Internet of Things (IoT), information and communication technologies in agriculture, Agri-fintech, farm mechanization, animal husbandry, and agro-processing. This diversity indicates the programme's success in fostering solutions that combine scientific innovation, digital technologies, value addition, financial inclusion, and sustainable agricultural development.



Incubation and Funding Support: The programme provides promising innovators with opportunities for incubation and financial support to facilitate the transition of innovative ideas into viable agri-enterprises. During 2022–2025, 26 of 34 finalists (76.47 per cent) received incubation support through MANAGE-CIA, while 17 finalists (50.00 per cent) were selected for PM-RKVY-linked funding support, with a total sanctioned grant of ₹110 lakh. .

5.2 Impact

₹12.64 crore Collective Annual Turnover	57,328 Farmers Benefitted	452 Employment Generated

- **Enterprise Growth and Revenue Generation**

Agri Eureka has supported promising innovations in progressing towards enterprise development and market participation. Of the 34 finalists supported over four years, 15 startups (44.12%) began generating revenue. Among them, three reported annual revenue above ₹150 lakh, two earned between ₹30 lakh and ₹150 lakh, five earned between ₹10 lakh and ₹30 lakh, and five earned between ₹1 lakh and ₹10 lakh. Collectively, the participant startups reported an annual turnover of ₹1,264.41 lakh (₹12.64 crore) as of August 2026.

- **Farmer and Value-Chain Impact**

Innovations supported through Agri Eureka have reached 57,328 farmers as of August 2026 by addressing their needs through diverse technological, financial, market, advisory, and livelihood pathways.

» Access to finance and information: digital lending, farm bookkeeping, market and weather information, agronomic advisory, insurance, and credit linkages.

» Farm mechanization and cost reduction: harvesting, drip and mulch laying, turmeric processing, and other labour-saving technologies that reduce drudgery, time, and production costs.

» Access to finance and information: digital lending, farm bookkeeping, market and weather information, agronomic advisory, insurance, and credit linkages.

» Farm mechanization and cost reduction: harvesting, drip and mulch laying, turmeric processing, and other labour-saving technologies that reduce drudgery, time, and production costs.

» Climate resilience and sustainable production: solutions for saline soils, heat stress, organic input assessment, eco-friendly weed control, biodegradable farm products, and sustainable aquaculture.

» Diagnostics and risk management: affordable tools for detecting plant diseases, pesticide residues, water-quality problems, and ineffective bio-inputs.

» Market access and value addition: buy-back arrangements, traceability, direct sourcing, processing, and value-added products based on brinjal, rice, hibiscus, banana, maize, areca, medicinal plants, and other farm produce.

» Livelihood diversification: custom hiring, village-level processing, seaweed cultivation, waste-to-value enterprises, and participation of women, FPOs, SHGs, fisherfolk, and rural youth.

- **Employment and Livelihood Creation**

The supported startups generated 452 employment opportunities as of August 2026, comprising 169 direct and 283 indirect jobs. These opportunities emerged through manufacturing, processing, distribution, custom hiring services, farmer advisory, input supply, enterprise operations, and other local value-chain activities.

Key Success Factors



The success of the MANAGE-CIA Agri Eureka initiative can be attributed to a combination of strategic outreach, inclusive participation mechanisms, systematic screening, structured mentoring and post-selection support. The major success factors include:

- Multi-channel outreach and institutional partnerships: The use of newspapers, social media, agricultural publications, webinars, orientation programmes and participant testimonials helped generate wider awareness about the initiative. Partnerships with agricultural universities, incubators, innovation councils, entrepreneurship cells and professional networks further strengthened outreach and facilitated the identification of promising innovators from diverse regions and backgrounds.
- Reduced entry barriers for early-stage innovators: Free participation, a three-month application window, standardised presentation formats and the provision of individual or team participation created an accessible entry mechanism. These features encouraged students, farmers, rural innovators and first-time entrepreneurs to participate without significant financial or procedural barriers.
- Rigorous and merit-based screening: A structured screening process focusing on novelty, problem relevance, feasibility, market potential and business viability enabled the identification of promising Agri-startup ideas from a large pool of applications. Systematic evaluation helped maintain the quality and originality of the ideas considered for further support.
- Structured mentoring and capacity building: The two-day mentoring and capacity-building programme provided participants with targeted support to refine their ideas, strengthen value propositions, develop business models, understand market and financial considerations, address intellectual property aspects and improve their pitching skills. This structured preparation enhanced the quality of ideas presented during the final evaluation.
- Inclusive and flexible pitching mechanisms: Allowing participants to present their ideas in English, Hindi or other Indian languages reduced language-related barriers and enabled innovators from diverse educational, social and regional backgrounds to communicate their ideas more effectively. This contributed to a more inclusive and equitable innovation recognition process.
- Strong post-selection support and linkages: The provision of incubation, mentoring, networking and funding linkages under PM-RKVY programmes extended support beyond the competition stage. These linkages helped finalists progress from idea recognition towards enterprise development, commercialisation and scaling, thereby strengthening the longer-term impact of the initiative.
- Clearly defined team roles and coordinated implementation: Effective implementation was supported by a coordinated team structure with clearly defined responsibilities covering strategic leadership, programme coordination, outreach, mentoring facilitation, data management, documentation and expert evaluation. Such role clarity facilitated smooth programme implementation and contributed to the overall quality and effectiveness of the initiative.

Challenges


National Young
Professionals
Development Program on
New Competencies, Career
Opportunities and Research
Priorities in Agricultural Extension
MANAGE, Hyderabad

Like many national-level innovation programmes, Agri Eureka encountered several implementation challenges. In response, it adopted a range of innovative and context-specific strategies that enhanced its ability to identify and nurture high-potential agripreneurs across the country.

Challenges Faced	Strategies Adopted
Reaching Untapped Innovators One of the primary challenges was reaching aspiring innovators located in remote regions and those with limited exposure to the startup ecosystem. Many potential applicants, particularly students, farmers, and rural innovators, were unaware of available entrepreneurial opportunities and support mechanisms.	**Multi-Channel Outreach and Partnerships** To address this, MANAGE-CIA adopted a multi-channel outreach strategy involving social media campaigns, digital marketing, institutional partnerships, webinars, orientation programmes, and stakeholder networks. Leveraging collaborations with agricultural universities, incubators, innovation councils, and entrepreneurship cells significantly improved the programme's visibility and reach.
Innovation Quality and Originality Another challenge related to the quality and originality of submitted ideas. While the programme attracted a large number of applications, several proposals were found to be incremental improvements or replications of existing solutions rather than genuinely innovative concepts.	**Rigorous Screening and Expert Evaluation** To overcome this, a rigorous screening and evaluation framework was established, focusing on novelty, problem relevance, market potential, and business viability. Expert-led assessments, coupled with mentoring interventions, helped participants refine ideas, strengthen value propositions, and better articulate the uniqueness of their innovations.
Managing Resource Constraints Managing the programme within existing institutional capacities also posed challenges. The coordination of outreach activities, application screening, mentoring sessions, expert evaluations, and event logistics required considerable time and human resources, particularly while simultaneously implementing multiple programmes and activities under MANAGE-CIA.	**Structured Team** This challenge was addressed through a clearly defined team structure with assigned responsibilities for leadership, programme coordination, outreach, mentoring, communication, documentation, and evaluation. The coordinated efforts of MANAGE-CIA staff and expert jury members ensured efficient workflow management, strengthened coordination, and enabled the smooth implementation of the programme despite growing participation.

Lessons Learned



The implementation of MANAGE-CIA Agri Eureka generated several insights that are relevant for strengthening future innovation and entrepreneurship programmes. The major lessons learned include:

- Outreach should be viewed as a continuous engagement process: One-time publicity may create awareness, but sustained engagement with educational institutions, innovation networks and grassroots stakeholders is important for continuously identifying potential innovators who remain outside conventional entrepreneurship ecosystems.
- Identification and development of innovators need to be treated as interconnected processes: The experience showed that promising ideas may not initially be presented in a fully developed business form. Providing opportunities for refinement and guidance during the programme can help distinguish potential innovations from ideas that require further development.
- Competition-based recognition is more effective when linked to a longer support pathway: The experience indicated that identifying and recognising promising innovators represents only one stage of the entrepreneurial journey. Greater value can be created when competition outcomes are connected with subsequent incubation, mentoring, networking, funding and market-oriented support.
- Programme design needs to balance scale with quality: Expanding participation increases the possibility of discovering promising innovations, but it also increases the effort required for screening, mentoring and evaluation. Future programmes therefore need mechanisms that can manage growing participation without compromising the depth and quality of assessment.
- Institutional partnerships extend the effectiveness of centralised programmes: A national-level programme can achieve wider and more meaningful reach when partner institutions contribute local knowledge, networks and access to potential innovators. Such partnerships can help bridge the gap between a central programme and geographically dispersed innovation communities.
- Implementation experience should inform continuous programme refinement: The challenges encountered in outreach, screening, coordination and participant development provide useful evidence for improving subsequent editions. Periodic review of participation patterns, evaluation outcomes and support requirements can help make future innovation programmes more responsive and effective.

Sustainability



Agri Eureka demonstrates strong potential for institutional sustainability through an integrated programme model that combines innovation outreach, systematic screening, structured mentoring, expert evaluation, and linkages with incubation and funding support. Agri Eureka makes use of MANAGE-CIA's existing incubation facilities, mentor network, programme-management capacity, digital platforms, and institutional partnerships. This resource-sharing approach minimizes additional infrastructure needs and enables the programme to be replicated in subsequent cycles at a modest operational cost.

US$0.39 **per application** Outreach	**US$4.85** **per startup** Preliminary evaluation	**US$6.13** **per startup** Mentoring

Impact per ₹1,000 of Programme Expenditure	
Grant mobilized	₹29,000 per ₹1,000 invested
Collective annual turnover	₹33,351 per ₹1,000 invested
Farmers reached	151 farmers per ₹1,000 invested
Employment generated	1.19 jobs per ₹1,000 invested

- Cost-efficient Implementation: The programme utilizes MANAGE-CIA's strong social-media presence, institutional partnerships, professional networks, and testimonials from previous participants to reach aspiring innovators across different states and regions. During 2022–2025, an outreach expenditure of ₹52,205 generated 1,399 applications from 29 States and Union Territories, resulting in an outreach cost of approximately ₹37.32 per application.

  The preliminary evaluation was conducted online, reducing the travel, venue, and logistical expenditure associated with physical screening. An expenditure of ₹1,15,729 was incurred to evaluate 250 shortlisted applicants, equivalent to ₹462.92 per screened participant. The online process also enabled experts to assess applications systematically and concentrate subsequent mentoring and incubation resources on relatively promising innovations.

  The programme adopted a resource-efficient mentoring model by guiding 99 teams at a total expenditure of ₹57,915, corresponding to approximately ₹585 per team. The relatively low per-team cost demonstrates the feasibility of delivering structured expert mentoring at scale while making efficient use of available institutional and expert resources. This cost-effective approach strengthens the potential for sustaining and replicating the mentoring component across subsequent programme cycles.

- Integration with PM-RKVY Financial Support: Agri Eureka integrates its innovation challenge with the PM-RKVY incubation and funding framework to support promising innovations. Through this linkage, a total grant-in-aid of ₹110 lakh was sanctioned. By utilizing an existing government mechanism, the programme creates a direct pathway from mentoring to incubation and financial support without requiring a separate funding arrangement. With a total programme expenditure of ₹3.79 lakh, Agri Eureka facilitated ₹110 lakh in sanctioned grant-in-aid, representing a programme expenditure-to-grant leverage ratio of approximately 1:29.

Scaling Up Potential



The scaling potential of Agri Eureka is reflected in its adaptation into MANAGE-Fisheries Innovation and Startup Hub (MANAGE-FISHub) Aqua Eureka 2025, launched on August 15, 2025, as a national-level Aqua Innovation Challenge for the fisheries and aquaculture sector. This sector-specific replication shows that the Agri Eureka model can be customized to promote innovation and entrepreneurship in allied agricultural sectors.

The model has good scaling potential, as it can be replicated by other agribusiness incubators, agricultural universities, and innovation cells. Successful replication would require trained mentors, clear selection criteria, domain experts, funding linkages, and post-programme handholding. Agri Eureka can be expanded to more states and regions and can also be institutionalized within incubation and entrepreneurship promotion schemes. Supportive policies, partnerships with incubators, universities, investors, and government agencies can further strengthen its scaling up.

Conclusion

Nurturing a vibrant Agri-startup ecosystem is essential for transforming innovative ideas into viable enterprises capable of addressing challenges related to agricultural productivity, value addition, sustainability and rural livelihoods. The MANAGE Agri Eureka programme has emerged as an effective platform for discovering promising agripreneurial ideas and providing innovators with opportunities for recognition, mentoring, incubation, networking and funding support.

The experience of Agri Eureka highlights the importance of strengthening innovation discovery mechanisms that can reach students, farmers, rural youth, women, professionals and first-generation entrepreneurs, particularly those located outside established startup ecosystems. Continued collaboration with State Agricultural Universities, KVKs, incubators, FPOs, entrepreneurship cells and grassroots institutions can further expand the reach of such programmes and facilitate the identification of locally relevant innovations. At the same time, sustained handholding beyond the competition stage through networking and access to early-stage finance will be important for converting promising ideas into viable and scalable ventures.

MANAGE Agri Eureka provides a practical and replicable model for combining innovation discovery with entrepreneurship development in agriculture and allied sectors. Strengthening and scaling such platforms can contribute to a more inclusive, resilient and innovation-driven Agri-startup ecosystem by creating pathways for diverse innovators to move from ideas to enterprises and, ultimately, to solutions with wider economic and social impact.

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MANAGE Centre for Innovation and Agripreneurship (MANAGE-CIA)

MANAGE Centre for Innovation and Agripreneurship (MANAGE-CIA), hosted at the National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management, is a recognized Centre of Excellence in Agribusiness Incubation that provides a comprehensive platform for nurturing agri-startups from ideation to commercialization. It offers a robust ecosystem that supports innovation, incubation, mentorship, and capacity building, enabling entrepreneurs to develop sustainable and scalable ventures in agriculture and allied sectors. As a Knowledge Partner under the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana program (PM-RKVY), formerly RKVY-RAFTAAR, MANAGE-CIA plays a strategic role in strengthening agribusiness incubators across the country by sharing best practices, providing handholding support, and fostering ecosystem development. The centre focuses on promoting innovative solutions to critical challenges in agriculture, thereby generating employment opportunities, enhancing rural livelihoods, and contributing to inclusive economic growth. With a strong national presence, MANAGE-CIA has incubated over 734 agri-startups and mentored more than 1,293 agripreneurs across 26 states and Union Territories, reflecting its significant contribution to advancing India's agri-startup ecosystem.

Website: https://www.manage.gov.in/managecia

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About the issue

Agricultural innovation has the potential to address persistent challenges across farming, allied sectors and agri-business, yet many promising ideas remain at the ideation stage without adequate opportunities for recognition, validation and further development. Students, farmers, rural youth, professionals and aspiring entrepreneurs may possess innovative solutions but often have limited access to entrepreneurial networks, expert guidance, business development knowledge and incubation pathways. This creates a gap between the generation of an innovative idea and its progression towards a viable and scalable enterprise.

The experience of MANAGE-CIA highlighted the need for a broader and more inclusive mechanism to scout agricultural innovations and connect promising innovators with the entrepreneurship ecosystem. In response, AgriEureka was introduced as a national-level Agri-innovation and business plan competition to identify, recognise and encourage innovative ideas addressing diverse agricultural and allied-sector challenges.

The programme provides an organised platform through which participants can present and refine their ideas, receive expert feedback, strengthen their business propositions and explore opportunities for further support. Its national outreach has enabled participation from diverse regions and innovation domains, while its linkages with mentoring, incubation and other entrepreneurial support mechanisms create pathways beyond the competition itself.

This Good Practice Bulletin documents the approach, implementation experience, outcomes and key lessons of AgriEureka, with the objective of sharing an institutional model for systematic innovation scouting and nurturing. The experience offers useful insights for organisations seeking to strengthen agricultural innovation and entrepreneurship through inclusive outreach, structured evaluation and ecosystem-based support.