National workshop on

Reimagining India's Agri-Incubation Ecosystem: Innovations, Good Practices and Future Pathways

02-03 March 2026

MANAGE-Centre for Innovation and Agripreneurship (MANAGE-CIA)

National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE)

Rajendranagar, Hyderabad - 500 030, India

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About the Publication

This publication is a compilation of deliberations and insights from the two-day **National Workshop on Reimagining India's Agri-Incubation Ecosystem: Innovations, Good Practices and Future Pathways,** held on March 02–03, 2026, at MANAGE, Hyderabad.

The publication presents the key insights and reflections of representatives from leading incubation centres and ecosystem enablers on successful incubation models and strategies for developing demand-driven, financially viable, and impact-oriented Agri-incubation programs, while highlighting challenges within the incubation ecosystem and promoting collaboration to strengthen agripreneurship.

Disclaimer

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Preface

The National Workshop on Reimagining India's Agri-Incubation Ecosystem: Innovations, Good Practices and Future Pathways, organized by the National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management, Hyderabad, represents a timely and significant effort to critically reflect upon and strengthen India's rapidly evolving Agri-startup and incubation landscape. Over the past decade, India's agripreneurship ecosystem has expanded considerably, supported by the emergence of agribusiness incubators across the country. While this expansion has created new opportunities for innovation and enterprise development, it has also introduced complex challenges related to ecosystem coordination, startup scouting, market readiness, financial sustainability, and the need for more integrated and impact-oriented incubation models.

In this context, the workshop brought together representatives from leading incubation centres and ecosystem enablers from across the country, to share experiences, highlight successful models, and deliberate on emerging challenges and future pathways. The deliberations underscored critical themes such as strengthening stakeholder connectivity, bridging the "problem discovery gap," adopting inclusive models like the hub-and-spoke approach, improving startup selection and evaluation mechanisms, and addressing the "Valley of Death" between research and commercialization.

The discussions also highlighted the importance of capacity building, particularly in developing skilled human resources for incubation management, integrating academic programmes with entrepreneurial training, and fostering women and youth-led enterprises through targeted initiatives. Furthermore, the workshop emphasized the need for financial sustainability of incubators through diversified revenue models, robust infrastructure, effective branding, and enhanced access to investment and global markets. The insights presented in this proceedings report reflect not only the collective wisdom of experts but also a shared commitment to transforming India's agri-incubation ecosystem into a more coordinated, inclusive, and impact-driven system. It is hoped that this compilation will serve as a valuable resource for researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and stakeholders engaged in advancing agripreneurship, and will contribute meaningfully to shaping future strategies for agricultural innovation, rural development, and economic growth in India.

Saravanan Raj

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MANAGE

The National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE), Hyderabad, was established in 1987 by the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare as an autonomous institute. It was initially set up as the National Centre for **Man**agement of **Ag**ricultural **E**xtension, from which its acronym 'MANAGE' is derived. In recognition of its importance and expansion of activities across the country, its status was elevated to that of a National Institute in 1992, and it was rechristened as the National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE). The institute was created to strengthen and modernize the agricultural extension system in response to globalization, liberalization, and advancements in Agri-technologies. It provides professional guidance, training, and capacity building to strengthen extension organisations through management training, consultancy, agribusiness management education, research, and information services, along with mentoring Agri-startups and agripreneurs, monitoring and evaluation, knowledge management, and internship support to effectively serve India's diverse and evolving agricultural sector.

MANAGE- Centre for Innovation and Agripreneurship (MANAGE-CIA)

MANAGE–Centre for Innovation and Agripreneurship (CIA), hosted at the National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE), a Centre of Excellence in Agribusiness Incubation. As one of India's leading agribusiness incubators, it has incubated 630 agri-startups and mentored 1,164 agripreneurs across 26 states and Union Territories, spanning diverse domains within agriculture and allied sectors. As a Knowledge Partner under the PM-RKVY (formerly known as RKVY-RAFTAAR) programme, MANAGE CIA plays a strategic role in strengthening partner Agribusiness Incubators and supporting the growth trajectory of Agri-startups nationwide.

Background

Agricultural transformation lies at the heart of India's vision to emerge as a developed nation by 2047. Recognising agriculture's central role in economic resilience, rural prosperity, and food security, alongside the transformative potential of Agri-startup innovations to address challenges across the agricultural value chain, the Government of India launched the Innovation and Agri-Entrepreneurship Development Programme under RKVY-RAFTAAR in 2018-19. This initiative has catalysed the creation of a nationwide Agri-incubation ecosystem supported by Knowledge Partners and Agribusiness Incubators. The programme offers structured incubation, mentorship, and grant-in-aid support for student ideas, idea-stage startups, and seed-stage startups, thereby strengthening the foundation for innovation-led agricultural growth.

Over the past decade, the Agri-startup ecosystem has expanded through the expansion of Agribusiness Incubators across universities and ICAR institutions, increasing academia–industry–startup collaboration, growing participation of youth, Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs), and rural entrepreneurs, and the emergence of sector-specific incubation models in Livestock, Fisheries, Food-tech, Agri-biotech, Supply chain, and Climate-smart agriculture. Despite increasing Agri-startup innovations, scaling remains uneven due to policy fragmentation, limited coordination among ecosystem stakeholders, weak investor linkages, industry collaborations, and fragmented incubation capacities across regions, as well as talent gaps affecting startup mentoring. As the sector is becoming increasingly knowledge and technology-intensive, thereby demanding more coordinated, cross-disciplinary, data-driven, and capital-intensive incubation systems.

The National Workshop on Reimagining India's Agri-Incubation Ecosystem: Innovations, Good Practices and Future Pathways, held on 02–03 March 2026 at the National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE), Hyderabad, brought together representatives from leading incubation centres and Agri-Startup ecosystem enablers. The workshop focused on sharing successful incubation models and identifying strategies to develop demand-driven, financially viable, and impact-oriented Agri-incubation programs, while strengthening collaboration, startup support systems, industry linkages, and policy frameworks for the future of Agri-incubation in India.

Objectives:

- Share good practices from successful incubation models, design demand-driven, financially viable and sustainable impact-driven incubation programs.
- Strengthen startup selection, mentoring, and monitoring systems by identifying sectoral gaps, underperforming domains, and priority intervention areas within the Agri-incubation ecosystem.
- Discuss the outcome-oriented performance assessment framework to measure innovation impact, capital efficiency, scalability, and socio-economic contribution
- Establish collaborative networks among incubators to promote cross-disciplinary knowledge exchange and address emerging technological and managerial skill gaps
- Enhance the institutional and financial capacity of Agri-incubators by facilitating structured industry partnerships, market linkages, and investor engagement.
- Co-create a roadmap outlining policy reforms and operational strategies to strengthen the future trajectory of Agri-incubation in India

Synergising Incubation Ecosystems: Strengthening Agri-Incubation through Shared Learning and Good Practices

Welcome Address

Ms. V. Usha Sree
Manager, MANAGE-CIA

She warmly welcomed the distinguished speakers, experts, and participants from various incubators. She encouraged participants to actively engage in the sessions and discussions to gain meaningful insights and share their experiences related to the Agri-startup ecosystem.

Setting the Context

Dr. Saravanan Raj
Director (Agricultural Extension), MANAGE &
CEO, MANAGE-CIA

Dr. Saravanan Raj, outlined the purpose and objectives of the programme. In his address, he highlighted that although the Agri-startup ecosystem in India has expanded significantly in recent years, it is currently facing criticism due to a few instances of startup failures. He emphasised that the absence of well-documented success stories and impact assessments often leads to a limited understanding of the contributions made by Agri-startups. He also pointed out a declining trend in the number of applications received by incubators and support programmes, indicating the need to expand outreach efforts. In this regard, he underscored the importance of reaching new stakeholders and regions where the agri-startup ecosystem remains less developed.

Incubator on Spotlight

An engaging activity titled "Incubator on Spotlight" was conducted to facilitate participant introductions while providing an opportunity for participants to showcase the unique initiatives and best practices implemented by their respective incubation centres. During this session, each participant briefly presented their incubator's distinctive approaches, successful initiatives, or innovative practices within a three-minute time frame.

The MANAGE CIA Way:
Lessons from Good Practices of MANAGE-CIA

Dr. Saravanan Raj
Director (Agricultural Extension), MANAGE and CEO,
MANAGE-CIA

A well-connected and continuously engaged incubation system plays a crucial role in strengthening agripreneurship in India, with its effectiveness largely driven by strong stakeholder connectivity. Platforms such as the Agri-Startup Stakeholders Connect Programme create opportunities for startups to interact with diverse stakeholders, enabling them to showcase ideas, receive feedback, and build meaningful networks, thereby enhancing participation and outreach. Although currently implemented at the state level, such an approach holds significant potential for expansion to the district level to further promote grassroots entrepreneurship.

The process of nurturing innovation and building entrepreneurial capacity is supported through initiatives like the Agri-Eureka and Aqua-Eureka Innovation Platforms, which identify promising ideas, while the Pre-Incubation Programme helps early-stage innovators refine their concepts and develop minimum viable products. Alongside this, skill development is emphasized through Digital Marketing Programmes for Agri-Startups, enabling entrepreneurs to position their products effectively in competitive markets. Efforts to strengthen the ecosystem are further reflected in the MANAGE Internship Programme, which addresses skilled manpower needs by training and placing students in incubation centres, and in Entrepreneurship Development Programmes that promote entrepreneurial thinking among students and innovators. These are complemented by National Faculty Development Programmes that enhance the capacity of mentors and faculty supporting the ecosystem.

Continuous knowledge exchange is facilitated through the Saturday Webinar Series, which has evolved into a

major knowledge-sharing platform engaging over 60,000 participants globally. The significantly higher number of registrations compared to actual participation reflects the growing interest in agripreneurship and innovation. Overall, this integrated and continuously engaged approach demonstrates how a well-structured incubation ecosystem can effectively nurture agripreneurs, strengthen innovation networks, and contribute to the growth of India's Agri-startup ecosystem.

Key Insights

- ◇ Strong ecosystem connectivity significantly enhances innovation, visibility, and opportunities.
- ◇ From idea generation to pre-incubation and digital skill development, continuous support is essential for startup success.
- ◇ The Saturday Webinar Series demonstrates how continuous engagement can build awareness, connect stakeholders, and sustain interest in agripreneurship.

Innovate, Incubate, Accelerate: Lessons from KAU's Agribusiness Incubation Ecosystem

Dr. KP Sudheer
Head RABI, KAU, Thrissur

The session delivered by Dr. K. P. Sudheer provided comprehensive insights into the development, functioning, and impact of the agribusiness incubation ecosystem established at the RAFTAAR Agri Business Incubator (RABI) of Kerala Agricultural University (KAU). During the session, the speaker emphasized that the effectiveness of an incubator largely depends on the quality of startups it attracts. In this context, the transparent and merit-based startup selection process followed at the KAU Agribusiness Incubator was explained. The speaker highlighted that extensive outreach, strong branding, and multi-channel publicity are essential for attracting high-potential entrepreneurial ideas. Such strategies help improve the quality of the startup pipeline, enhance national visibility, and ensure efficient utilization of incubation resources and funding support.

The Business Model Canvas framework was presented as an important tool that enables startups to systematically define their value propositions, key partners, customer segments, revenue streams, and cost structures, thereby facilitating the transformation of innovative ideas into sustainable business models. The speaker also discussed how the incubator strategically aligns its innovation efforts with emerging food trends and evolving consumer preferences. The session

highlighted the role of the incubator in integrating traditional knowledge systems with modern food science, enabling the standardization, safety enhancement, and improved marketability of traditional food products while preserving their cultural authenticity. Dr. Sudheer further emphasized the importance of maintaining adequate infrastructure under the direct control of the incubator. Access to common processing facilities, laboratories, and pilot-scale production units allows startups to test, refine, and validate their products efficiently, reducing entry barriers and accelerating commercialization. The incubator's diversified revenue model was also highlighted, including consultancy services, technology transfer, training programmes, facility usage charges, and incubation services. This multi-stream revenue approach contributes to financial sustainability while reducing dependence on external grants. Another distinctive feature discussed was the integration of academic programmes with incubation activities. Kerala Agricultural University offers a Postgraduate Diploma in Food Industry Management and Quality Control, which contributes to developing industry-ready human resources while strengthening the incubation ecosystem and promoting translational research. The session concluded with reflections on the future of India's agri and food startup ecosystem, emphasizing the need to strengthen visibility, diversify revenue streams, enhance infrastructure, promote sustainability-oriented innovations, improve technology transfer, and build strong national networks among PM-RKVY (formerly known as RKVY-RAFTAAR) Agribusiness Incubators.

Key Insights

- Quality-driven startup selection is critical – Transparent, merit-based selection combined with strong outreach and branding ensures a high-potential startup pipeline and effective use of incubation resources.
- Structured tools and infrastructure enable success – Use of the Business Model Canvas along with access to shared facilities (labs, processing units) helps startups refine ideas and accelerate commercialization.
- Sustainability and integration strengthen the ecosystem – Diversified revenue models and integration with academic programmes enhance financial sustainability, innovation capacity, and long-term impact of the incubator.

Catalysing Entrepreneurship: The Incubation Model of ABIS-TBI, TNAU

Mr. A.V. Gnanasambandam
Managing Director & CEO ABIS-TBI, TNAU,
Coimbatore

Mr. A. V. Gnanasambandam delivered an insightful presentation on the development of a structured and dynamic Agri-incubation ecosystem at Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU). The session highlighted how the university has been actively transforming agricultural research and innovation into viable agribusiness enterprises through a comprehensive incubation framework. The speaker explained that the Agri Business Incubation Society at TNAU provides end-to-end support to innovators and Agri-startups, beginning from idea development and extending up to commercialization. One of the key facilities offered to startups is a 33 per cent concession for testing products in NABL-accredited laboratories, which significantly reduces the financial burden on early-stage entrepreneurs. In addition, the incubation centre focuses on licensing technologies developed by TNAU, enabling the commercialization of university-generated innovations.

To further strengthen the incubation support system, the incubator assists entrepreneurs in patent filing, intellectual property rights management, trademark registration, and copyright protection. A notable initiative highlighted during the session was the Product Promotional Centre, which functions as a one-point sales outlet for startup products. This facility is accessible to students, faculty members, and farmers, thereby enhancing product visibility, market exposure, and direct customer access for incubated startups. Mr. Gnanasambandam also emphasized that TNAU is hosting the NIDHI PRAYAS Programme, which supports early-stage innovators through a prototype development laboratory. This facility enables innovators to transform conceptual ideas into functional prototypes before entering the commercialization stage. The incubation ecosystem at TNAU is further strengthened through robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that ensure accountability, regular progress tracking, and efficient utilization of resources by incubated startups.

Another significant aspect discussed was the integration of the incubation ecosystem with the Agricultural Technology Management Agency programme, which has facilitated grassroots-level impact by extending entrepreneurial opportunities and technological innovations to rural communities. The presentation also highlighted successful startups incubated at TNAU, including enterprises in mushroom production, IoT-based agricultural solutions, and value-added products such as dehydrated coconut chips and spice-based innovations. Overall, the presentation reflected TNAU's commitment to fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and technology commercialization,

demonstrating how a well-structured incubation ecosystem can convert research outputs into sustainable and impactful agribusiness ventures.

Key Insights

- Institutional support reduces startup barriers – Licensing university-developed technologies, concessions in testing, access to NABL-accredited labs, and support in IPR and patenting significantly ease financial and technical challenges for early-stage entrepreneurs.
- Market linkage and grassroots integration drive impact – Initiatives like the Product Promotional Centre and linkage with rural programmes enhance market access, visibility, and real-world adoption of innovations.
- Continuous monitoring improves startup performance – Strong evaluation and tracking mechanisms ensure accountability, efficient resource use, and steady progress of incubated startups.

Empowering Agri-Entrepreneurs through Technology, Testing & Training: The AAU Experiences

Mr. Nikunj Soni
CEO, AIC Anand Foundation Gujarat

The session delivered by Mr.Nikunj Soni focused on the incubation ecosystem developed at Anand Agricultural University and its role in nurturing agrifood startups through comprehensive institutional support. The speaker highlighted how a structured incubation framework that

integrates technology support, mentoring, and market linkages helps reduce the likelihood of business failure during the early stages of development. The incubation infrastructure at the university includes product development laboratories, product testing facilities, and dedicated co-working spaces designed to support early-stage entrepreneurs. In addition, startups receive guidance from a multidisciplinary mentorship pool and are supported through structured monitoring mechanisms to ensure systematic progress and accountability. A key insight emphasized during the session was that the Indian Agri-startup ecosystem does not face a shortage of innovative ideas; rather, it experiences what the speaker described as a "problem discovery gap."

The innovation process often lacks effective coordination among three critical stakeholders: farmers, researchers, and industry. Farmers frequently encounter difficulties in articulating their challenges in structured formats, which limits the ability of researchers and innovators to clearly understand field-level problems. Researchers, in many cases, focus more on technological feasibility than on the practical and contextual challenges faced by farmers under real farming conditions. At the same time, industry stakeholders typically become involved only at later stages of innovation, which restricts their participation in early problem identification and solution development. This disconnect among stakeholders can weaken the relevance of technological innovations and slow the development of practical, field-oriented solutions for the agricultural sector. To address these challenges and strengthen the entrepreneurial pipeline, the incubator at Anand Agricultural University has implemented several capacity-building and outreach initiatives across Gujarat. One such initiative, Futurepreneur Khoj, focuses on identifying potential startup founders from all thirty-three districts of the state and nurturing individuals with entrepreneurial potential into future agribusiness leaders through targeted training and incubation support. Another important initiative discussed was the AgCatalyst Agripreneurship Mentor Development Programme, a seven-day certificate programme designed to train professors from State Agricultural Universities and scientists from ICAR institutes in mentorship skills. The session also highlighted the ASPIRE Club initiative, which establishes entrepreneurship cells within colleges to promote student innovation and provide structured pre-incubation support through a standardized operating framework.

Key Insights

- Bridging the "problem discovery gap" is crucial – Effective coordination among farmers, researchers, and industry is essential to ensure that innovations address real, field-level challenges.
- Grassroots talent identification strengthens the ecosystem – Initiatives like district-level outreach and mentorship development programmes help build a strong pipeline of future agripreneurs and ecosystem enablers.
- Early stakeholder involvement improves innovation relevance – Engaging industry and farmers from the initial stages leads to more practical, market-oriented solutions.

Building a Vibrant Agristartup Ecosystem: Insights from ANGRAU AIED

Dr. Kadiri Mohan
PI & CEO, ANGRAU Poshan Incubator Tirupati
Andhra Pradesh

The session delivered by Dr. Kadiri Mohan highlighted the various initiatives undertaken by the ANGRAU Poshan Incubator to promote innovation, agripreneurship, and startup development within the agricultural and nutrition sectors. The speaker provided an overview of the institutional efforts aimed at strengthening the Agri-startup ecosystem through structured incubation support, academic engagement, and ecosystem-level interventions. During the session, Dr. Kadiri Mohan explained that the incubator has been actively conducting innovation and entrepreneurship programmes across different regions of Andhra Pradesh to encourage grassroots-level entrepreneurship. These programmes are designed to identify individuals with innovative ideas and provide them with opportunities to develop their concepts into viable business ventures.

As part of these initiatives, the incubator has created structured platforms that enable startups to present and pitch their ideas before expert panels, thereby facilitating the selection and nurturing of promising entrepreneurial ventures. Through this process, approximately twenty-five startups have been provided opportunities to showcase their ideas and receive guidance for further development. The session also emphasized the importance of integrating entrepreneurship into academic programmes to build a strong foundation for innovation. In this context, the incubator has established active collaborations with MBA institutions to promote entrepreneurial thinking among management students. By integrating startup-oriented learning with management

education, the initiative aims to develop a new generation of professionals who possess both managerial skills and an entrepreneurial mindset.

The speaker further highlighted the importance of research-driven questioning and systematic problem identification as the foundation for meaningful innovation. The session emphasized that the process of identifying real-world problems and critically examining existing systems plays a crucial role in generating impactful and sustainable entrepreneurial solutions. Overall, the presentation reflected a focused institutional approach towards strengthening the Agri startup ecosystem through academic integration, startup mentoring, and innovation promotion.

Key Insights

- Grassroots innovation needs structured support – Regional outreach and pitching platforms help identify and nurture local entrepreneurial ideas into viable startups.
- Academic integration strengthens entrepreneurship – Collaboration with academic institutions promotes entrepreneurial thinking and builds a skilled, innovation-driven workforce.

Strengthening the Millet Value Chain through Incubation: The Nutrihub Journey

Dr. J Stanley
CEO, Nutrihub, ICAR-IIMR Hyderabad

During the session, Dr. J. Stanley discussed the growing significance of millets in addressing major global and national challenges such as rural poverty, malnutrition, and climate change. The presentation highlighted the role of innovation, incubation, and technology commercialization in strengthening the millet value chain and promoting sustainable agribusiness development. It also traced the evolution of Nutrihub as a pioneering incubation ecosystem dedicated to supporting millet-based enterprises and the development of value-added millet products. The discussion identified several constraints within the millet value chain across the production, processing, and marketing stages. It was emphasized that one of the most critical strategies for reviving millets in the country is the creation of sustained market demand for millet-based products. Strengthening consumer awareness and expanding market opportunities were highlighted as essential steps for encouraging farmers, processors, and entrepreneurs to invest in millet cultivation and value addition.

The session further addressed the concept of the "missing middle" in agri-entrepreneurship, which often limits the scaling of millet enterprises. Fragmented value chains frequently create a disconnect between growers and processors, restricting the efficient development of the sector. The presentation also explained the "Valley of Death" in innovation, referring to the gap between laboratory-based research and successful commercialization. In addition, a technology gap exists, as many entrepreneurs have limited access to food-grade processing technologies. The absence of pilot-scale facilities makes product validation and testing difficult, creating barriers for entrepreneurs attempting to develop market-ready products. First-generation entrepreneurs also face challenges related to regulatory compliance, branding, and market entry.

To address these issues, Nutrihub has developed a comprehensive ecosystem that supports diversified technology development and commercialization. Several technologies have been developed and licensed for commercial use, and a range of value-added millet products has been introduced under the Eatrite brand. The incubation system follows an end-to-end commercialization framework that includes technology identification and validation, pilot-scale product development, utilization of the Common Facility Centre, licensing and know-how transfer, and incubation supported by enterprise mentoring.

Nutrihub also connects multiple stakeholders such as self-help groups, farmer producer organizations, MSMEs, and startups with industry and market opportunities. By adopting institution-based, public–private partnership, cluster-based, and virtual incubation models, Nutrihub aims to strengthen the millet value chain while promoting innovation-driven entrepreneurship in the agri-food sector.

Key Insights

- Market demand is key to millet revival – Creating sustained consumer demand and awareness is essential to drive production, processing, and entrepreneurship in the millet value chain.
- Integrated incubation ecosystems enable commercialization – End-to-end support, including technology development, pilot testing, licensing, and stakeholder linkages, is vital for building sustainable millet-based enterprises.
- Multi-stakeholder collaboration drives ecosystem growth – Connecting SHGs, FPOs, MSMEs, and startups through public–private and cluster-based models strengthens the millet-based entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Hyderabad's Incubation Ecosystem: Institutional Experiences

Sustainable Innovation Ecosystems: Lessons from IKP

Ms. Rajeshwari
Assistant Manager, IKP, Hyderabad

The session delivered by Ms. Rajeshwari focused on the role of innovation ecosystems and incubation platforms in fostering entrepreneurship and facilitating technology commercialization. The speaker introduced IKP Knowledge Park as a not-for-profit private science and technology park to promote innovation-driven enterprises through incubation support, research translation, and industry collaboration. The session highlighted the scale and impact of IKP's innovation ecosystem, which has supported numerous companies, innovators, and technology-based projects across multiple cities. The speaker explained how the organization provides infrastructure, incubation facilities, and institutional support to startups while enabling access to funding, markets, and global partnerships. The presentation also discussed the IKP-PRIME Technology Transfer Office, which facilitates intellectual property management and supports the commercialization of research innovations. Overall, the session emphasized the importance of strong institutional frameworks, collaboration, and technology transfer mechanisms in building sustainable innovation ecosystems

Key Insights

- Technology transfer is key to commercialization – Dedicated mechanisms like technology transfer offices enable effective management of intellectual property and translation of research into marketable solutions.
- Collaboration enhances startup growth – Linking startups with funding agencies, industry partners, and global networks accelerates innovation and market access.

Accelerating Agripreneurship: Insights from a-IDEA and AGRI UDAAN

Dr. Vijay Avinashilingam
Additional CEO - a-IDEA & Principal Scientist,
ICAR-NAARM Hyderabad

During the session, Dr. Vijay Avinashilingam discussed the role of incubation and accelerator programmes in strengthening agripreneurship in India, with particular emphasis on the initiatives of a-IDEA and the AGRI UDAAN programme. The discussion highlighted how structured incubation support, combined with mentoring and institutional collaboration, can help innovative Agri-startups transform their ideas into scalable enterprises. The session highlighted the importance of the incubator's strong scientific ecosystem through its association with the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), which provides startups with access to a wide network of scientists and research expertise across agricultural and allied disciplines.

A major focus of the session was the AGRI UDAAN accelerator programme, which was introduced to support agribusiness and food technology startups in advancing their innovations toward market readiness. The programme was presented as a platform that not only identifies promising entrepreneurial ideas from different regions of the country but also guides startups through mentoring, capacity building, and networking opportunities with investors, industry partners, and farmer-producer organisations. Through this structured approach, startups are supported in refining their business strategies, strengthening their technological solutions, and preparing for investment opportunities. Events such as pre-demo and demo days allow entrepreneurs to present their innovations before potential investors, creating pathways for funding and enterprise growth. The session also highlighted how the programme connects startups with laboratories, experts, and institutional facilities, thereby supporting product validation and business development.

The discussion further described the AGRI UDAAN 8.0 accelerator and its outreach activities. Overall, the session illustrated how integrated incubation and acceleration efforts can create a supportive ecosystem for Agri-startups, helping them move from early innovation stages to sustainable enterprise development.

Key Insights

- Integrated incubation and acceleration support startup growth – Combining incubation with accelerator programmes like AGRI UDAAN helps startups move from idea stage to scalable enterprises.

- ◇ Strong scientific networks enhance innovation quality – Linkages with Indian Council of Agricultural Research provide access to expert knowledge, research facilities, and technical guidance.
- ◇ Structured exposure platforms build startup confidence – Pre-demo and demo day events provide opportunities for startups to present ideas, gain feedback, and attract investment.

Promoting AgTech Innovation: The ABI-ICRISAT Journey

Dr. Srinivas Bollam
Manager, Agribusiness & Innovation Platform of ICRISAT
Hyderabad

During the session, Dr. Srinivas Bollam, discussed strategies for strengthening Agri-incubation through national convergence and global partnerships. The presentation highlighted the importance of collaborative incubation models that integrate scientific research, industry partnerships, and institutional mentoring to support the growth of Agri-startups. The speaker explained that incubation initiatives at ICRISAT focus on providing continuous mentoring by experienced scientists and domain experts while facilitating access to lab-to-land facilities, particularly for startups working in areas such as seed and fertilizer innovations. The session also emphasized the role of pan-India collaborations with established companies to deepen incubation support and enhance the scalability of Agri-enterprises. In addition, the speaker highlighted the growing international engagement of Indian Agri-startups, particularly across the Global South, including countries in Africa that share similar agro-climatic conditions. Collaborative programmes between India and African nations were presented as opportunities for technology exchange, joint innovation, and enterprise expansion. Participation in global innovation competitions was also highlighted as an important mechanism for increasing international visibility and recognition for Indian Agri-startups. Overall, the session emphasized that scientific excellence, strong industry linkages, and global partnerships are essential for positioning Indian agri-startups in international markets.

Key Insights

- ◇ Collaborative incubation strengthens scalability – Integration of scientific research, industry partnerships, and continuous mentoring enhances the growth and success of Agri-startups.
- ◇ Global partnerships expand opportunities – International collaborations, especially across the Global South, enable technology exchange, innovation scaling, and global market access for Indian Agri-startups.

Hub-and-Spoke Incubation: The AgHub Experience

Mr. Mohammed Sharukh Qureshi
Project Manager, AgHub, PJTAU, Hyderabad

The session focused on the role of AgHub Foundation, a First-of-its-Kind Agri Innovation Hub supported by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), in promoting innovation and entrepreneurship within agri-food systems. The session elaborated on the structural framework and operational philosophy of AgHub Foundation, which functions through a Hub and Spoke model. The central Innovation Hub is located at Professor Jayashankar Telangana State Agricultural University (PJTAU), Hyderabad, while innovation spokes operate in the districts of Jagtial, Warangal, and Vikarabad in Telangana. This two-tier system enables the institution to connect research institutions, startups, farmers, rural entrepreneurs, and investors, thereby creating a dynamic Agri-innovation ecosystem.

The speaker also discussed several specialized programmes designed to support diverse stakeholders, including agritech startups, student innovators, farmer-producer organisations (FPOs), self-help groups (SHGs), women entrepreneurs, rural youth, and grassroots innovators. Student-focused programmes such as design thinking workshops, ideation programmes, and student incubation initiatives were highlighted as mechanisms to nurture innovation among undergraduate and postgraduate students. In addition, rural entrepreneurship programmes were implemented through sensitization, skill development, rural incubation, and community enterprise-building initiatives that target women self-help groups, farmer organizations, and grassroots innovators. Several practical illustrations were presented to demonstrate the operational impact of the AgHub ecosystem. The session described agritech pilot programmes in which startup technologies were validated across multiple agricultural seasons, resulting in the development of use cases and successful mobilization of seed and venture capital investments.

Collaborative product development efforts between startups and research teams were also highlighted, including initiatives related to IoT-based pest monitoring and drone-based agricultural technologies. The session further noted the institution's engagement in international and national development projects related to climate-resilient agriculture, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable agricultural systems. The session concluded by emphasizing the importance of integrated innovation ecosystems in strengthening agricultural entrepreneurship and promoting inclusive rural development. The AgHub model was presented as an effective institutional mechanism that links scientific expertise, entrepreneurial talent, investment networks, and rural communities to create scalable agricultural innovations with potential for both national and global impact.

Key Insights

- Hub-and-Spoke model enables inclusive innovation – Connecting a central innovation hub with district-level spokes helps integrate research, startups, and rural communities for wider impact.
- Targeted programmes strengthen diverse stakeholders – Specialized initiatives for students, FPOs, SHGs, women, and rural youth promote inclusive entrepreneurship and grassroots innovation.
- Field validation accelerates technology adoption – Pilot testing of agritech solutions across seasons helps refine innovations, build use cases, and attract investment for scaling.

Strengthening Startup Selection and Evaluation Systems: The Way Forward

Session III focused on strengthening the processes used for the selection and evaluation of startups within agribusiness incubation programmes. The discussion brought together experienced evaluators, mentors, and incubation experts who shared practical insights drawn from their involvement in startup funding, mentoring, and incubation committees. The discussions highlighted that effective evaluation systems play a crucial role in identifying promising entrepreneurs, ensuring responsible utilisation of incubation resources, and improving the long-term success rate of startups.

Mr. A.S. Rao
President, Indian Innovators Association

"The ideal candidate is someone who has 'skin in the game'. they have invested their own time, effort, or money. Ideas alone cannot be assessed; action demonstrates commitment."

Mr. A.S. Rao shared his extensive experience in evaluating start-ups, drawing from his role in government programs supporting innovators. He distinguished between pre-seed and seed funding, noting that seed capital is intended for ventures with around three years of traction, making assessment relatively straightforward, whereas pre-seed funding occurs at the ideation stage, where the evaluation is more challenging. At the pre-seed stage, he emphasized assessing the applicant's initiative and engagement with their idea. For students, this could include participation in hackathons; for faculty, publications or patents; and for individuals connected to the agricultural sector, practical problem-solving within farm operations or the supply chain. Mr. Rao highlighted the importance of probing claims such as "better solutions" by examining existing alternatives and the concrete improvements offered. He stressed that applicants who have invested their own time, effort, or personal funds demonstrating "skin in the game" are easier to evaluate and more likely to succeed. While acknowledging that evaluators cannot act as vendors, he underscored the value of making a fair assessment based on actual actions taken rather than mere ideas.

Dr. Radhika Meenakshi Shankar
Founder, Wise Owl Consulting, Hyderabad

"In God I believe; the rest of you bring documents"- importance of evidence, validation, and proof in evaluating startup ideas.

Dr. Radhika Meenakshi Shankar emphasized the importance of evidence and validation in evaluating startup proposals. She referenced economist Edward Deming's quote, "In God I believe; the rest of you bring documents," highlighting its relevance in incubation. Candidates who demonstrate that

their ideas have been validated, whether by experts or practical engagement, instill confidence in evaluators, as it reflects a willingness to share risk. She noted that even validation by non-experts is valuable, reinforcing that "the proof of the pudding is in the eating." Dr. Shankar stressed the research background of candidates, observing that many in the ideation phase conduct only superficial research, such as simple online surveys, which limits confidence during pitching. Those who actively engage with their problem environment by meeting experts, conducting fieldwork, or analyzing existing solutions display greater credibility. She emphasized assessing whether the problem is real, existing solutions have gaps, and whether the proposed solution addresses them effectively. For startups seeking ₹25 lakh funding, traction is critical. Third-party adoption, research station evaluations, expert endorsements, or awards serve as strong validation. Finally, milestone tracking and reviewing progress against evaluation criteria indicate growth potential and startup viability.

Mr. PVGK Murthy
Founder, Ingrain Technologies

"Passion is not claiming interest; it is demonstrated through commitment and action."

Mr. PVGK Murthy emphasized the importance of assessing genuine passion, commitment, and sector understanding when evaluating startup founders. He highlighted that many participants in entrepreneurial programs are motivated primarily by incentives rather than a true intention to pursue the venture. In startup assessments, founders must demonstrate "skin in the game," showing dedication, operational knowledge, and a clear understanding of the sector. Language skills or presentation abilities are secondary to the ability to execute effectively. Mr.Murthy cautioned against joint applications, where involvement may be nominal or for recognition rather than operational engagement, noting that the presenting founder must fully understand the business's core functions. He also stressed that solutions should address real sectoral problems rather than being driven solely by technical capabilities, reflecting the principle that founders must align their innovation with actual needs. True passion requires personal risk and commitment, not maintaining a secure job while seeking funding. Finally, he noted that some candidates are receptive to mentorship, while others are resistant, and evaluators must identify individuals unlikely to learn or improve.

Mr. Emmanuel Murray
Investment Director, Caspian

"Funding should multiply into a sustainable business, not serve as a one-time benefit."

Mr. Emmanuel Murray shared his perspective as a member of the incubation committee, emphasizing his expertise in funding and commercialization. Over the past decade, he has worked with startups through debt financing, supporting first-generation entrepreneurs with limited equity, and has assessed the viability of ventures across multiple sectors. He evaluates startups from an investment and commercialization standpoint, focusing on whether funding can help a venture become profitable, scalable, and attractive for further investment

When reviewing presentations, he examines whether ideas are unique or copycat, the value they bring to the ecosystem, how clearly founders articulate their plans, and their passion and commitment to execution. Beyond evaluation criteria, he emphasizes inclusivity, identifying entrepreneurs who might be overlooked due to language or presentation challenges, particularly from smaller towns. He actively mentors startups beyond formal programs, which deepens his understanding of how to support high-potential founders and strengthen the startup ecosystem effectively.

Thinking Together: Mapping Challenges in Incubation Ecosystems

Day 2 of the workshop began with a group activity designed to encourage active participation and collective reflection on the challenges faced by incubation centres. The objective of the activity was to facilitate collaborative learning among participants and to identify key operational and strategic issues affecting incubators through structured discussion. For this purpose, the participants were divided into five groups, each consisting of five members. Activity sheets were distributed to all participants to guide the exercise. In the first phase of the activity, each participant was asked to individually list the problems or challenges faced by incubators based on their understanding, experiences, or observations. This individual exercise allowed participants to reflect independently and articulate their perspectives on the issues affecting incubation ecosystems.

Following the individual exercise, members within each group engaged in group discussion to consolidate and review the identified problems. During this stage, participants shared their ideas and collectively examined the issues listed by each member. Through discussion and deliberation, each group prioritized three major problems that they considered most significant for incubation centres.

Subsequently, representatives from each group came forward to present their prioritized challenges before the entire gathering. The groups briefly explained the issues identified and the reasoning behind selecting them as key concerns. These presentations provided an opportunity for participants to learn from the perspectives of other groups. The activity concluded with a collective discussion involving all participants, where the identified challenges were further deliberated. Participants exchanged views on the nature of the problems and discussed possible approaches to address them. The activity served as an effective platform for collaborative problem identification and encouraged meaningful engagement among participants

Challenges Expressed by Incubators

◇ Financial Sustainability and Funding Constraints

One of the most prominent challenges highlighted was the financial sustainability of incubation centres. Many incubators reported difficulties in maintaining operations due to delayed funding from funding agencies, lack of perennial funding support, absence of revenue generation programs and limited external funding opportunities. Another challenge identified was the limited access to sector-specific investors, CSR funds, and equity-based investment opportunities for startups.

◇ Startup Engagement and Monitoring Challenges

Incubators reported several challenges in monitoring and engaging startups after funding support. Participants indicated that some startups inefficient or inappropriate utilization of incubation funds, while others show delayed response or reduced engagement after receiving funding. Problems such as delay in document submission, poor adherence to timelines, and difficulty in tracking the progress of startups were also commonly reported. Another concern was that a few startups receive funding repeatedly from different incubators under various programs, which reduces opportunities for new ventures.

◇ Challenges in Scouting Innovative Ideas and Expanding Outreach

Another major issue expressed was the declining number of applications and the difficulty in scouting innovative startup ideas. Participants highlighted difficulties in expanding outreach to rural and tribal areas and engaging a wider audience of innovators. Getting innovative startup ideas is becoming increasingly difficult, with a noticeable lack of deep-tech innovations, while many proposals are repetitive or common, reflecting limited innovation in emerging areas such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital technologies. The group also emphasized the absence of farmer-centric programs and grassroots innovation platforms, which limit the inclusion of rural innovators in the startup ecosystem.

◇ Human Resource and Capacity Limitations

Incubators also expressed challenges related to the availability of skilled manpower for managing

incubation activities. There was a perceived lack of expertise, creative professionals, and innovative manpower within incubation centres. Participants emphasised the need for capacity-building programs for incubation staff to enhance their capabilities in mentoring startups, managing incubation processes, and facilitating innovation development.

- Institutional, Administrative and Infrastructure Constraints

Several institutional challenges were also reported, including procedural and administrative delays in program implementation and limited autonomy of incubators due to their dependence on host institutions. Lack of coordination among different support schemes sometimes leads to discontinuity in funding and mentoring support for startups. Without adequate facilities for testing and validation of startup technologies, startups often face delays in product development and commercialization.

Branding Beyond the Logo: Positioning Incubators for Visibility and Impact

Mr. Phani Kondepudi
Ex- CDO, T-Hub, Hyderabad

The session delivered by Mr. Phani Kondepudi examined the strategic role of branding in strengthening the visibility, credibility, and long-term impact of agribusiness incubators. The session emphasised that branding is not merely a visual or promotional exercise but a strategic institutional process that shapes how an incubator is perceived by entrepreneurs, investors, mentors, and development partners.

The speaker explained that a clearly articulated identity determines the type of entrepreneurs and stakeholders attracted to the incubation ecosystem and helps define the incubator's positioning within the larger innovation landscape. In the agribusiness context, where stakeholders include farmers, cooperatives, rural enterprises, and investors, communication must reflect the specific needs and expectations of diverse audiences. The speaker emphasized that meaningful differentiation in such a complex ecosystem requires authenticity. Incubators must therefore position themselves based on their genuine strengths and capabilities rather than aspirational claims, as misalignment between brand promise and institutional capacity can undermine credibility and weaken stakeholder trust.

Another important theme discussed during the session was that the credibility of an incubator's brand is strongly influenced by the commitment and expertise of its internal ecosystem, including

staff members, mentors, and selection committees. A mission-driven institutional identity tends to attract domain experts and experienced mentors who align with the incubator's objectives. In turn, startups associated with the incubator benefit from this institutional reputation when interacting with investors, industry partners, and customers.

The session also emphasized the importance of consistency in building long-term brand value develops gradually through sustained performance across successive cohorts, successful collaborations, and credible mentorship networks. Strong brand recognition can facilitate partnerships, while also strengthening investor confidence in startups emerging from the ecosystem.

In conclusion, the session highlighted that branding functions as a critical strategic asset for agribusiness incubators. By maintaining clarity of purpose, authenticity in positioning, and consistency in institutional practices, incubators can strengthen their credibility, attract high-quality innovators and partners, and contribute more effectively to the growth of sustainable agribusiness startup ecosystems.

Key Insights

- Branding is a strategic asset, not just promotion – A clear institutional identity shapes perception, attracts the right stakeholders, and defines the incubator's position in the ecosystem.
- Authenticity builds credibility – Aligning brand promises with actual capabilities is essential to maintain trust and avoid weakening stakeholder confidence.
- Consistency strengthens long-term impact – Sustained performance, credible mentorship, and successful outcomes over time build strong brand value and investor confidence.

WE HUB – Ideate, Implement, Inspire

Mr S.M. Tajdar Ali Taj
WEHUB, Hyderabad

The session highlighted the initiatives of WE Hub, India's first state-led nodal organization dedicated to enabling women entrepreneurs from diverse socio-economic backgrounds across both urban and rural landscapes. The discussion explained how WE Hub plays a crucial role in improving women entrepreneurs' access to government support systems by facilitating the operationalization of various government schemes while also engaging in policy research, advocacy, and implementation support. The speaker emphasized that another important dimension of WE Hub's work lies in ecosystem building through collaborative partnerships with international aid agencies, corporate organizations, government institutions, incubators, industry bodies, and academic institutions across the world. Through these partnerships, the organization designs programmes that encourage girls and women to pursue entrepreneurship and build sustainable ventures.

The session also described the Urban Innovation Programme, which focuses on preparing women entrepreneurs to participate effectively in technology-driven markets. To maximize its impact across the state, WE Hub follows a synergistic approach that emphasizes collaboration and coherence among stakeholders. Rather than implementing parallel or isolated initiatives, programmes are aligned to ensure coordinated implementation. This approach facilitates shared learning, promotes the adoption of best practices, and enables efficient resource utilization through strategic partnerships, ensuring that appropriate expertise and support systems are mobilized without duplication of efforts.

Further, the session discussed several initiatives of WE Hub aimed at fostering social impact and youth entrepreneurship. Programmes such as the Grassroot Youth Innovation Program (GYIP), iLEAP, Campuspreneur, and iConnect are designed to strengthen students' academic and professional competencies by providing access to technological tools, innovation platforms, and opportunities for critical thinking and problem-solving. Finally, the session highlighted the impact of WE Hub's initiatives through various achievements, demonstrating the organization's growing role in strengthening the entrepreneurial ecosystem and promoting inclusive economic participation among women and youth.

Key Insights

- ◇ Inclusive ecosystem building empowers women entrepreneurs – Dedicated institutional support helps women from diverse backgrounds access opportunities, resources, and markets.
- ◇ Collaboration enhances programme effectiveness – Partnerships with government, industry, academia, and global organizations enable coordinated implementation and wider impact.
- ◇ Targeted programmes foster youth and innovation – Initiatives like GYIP, iLEAP, and Campuspreneur build skills, encourage innovation, and promote entrepreneurship among students and young women.

Innovate, Prototype, Manufacture: Best Practices from India's Largest Prototyping Centre

Mr. Sahaj Sandhu
Associate Vice President, T-Works

The session delivered by Sahaj Sandhu from T-Works provided insights into the journey of transforming ideas into viable products through innovation, prototyping, and manufacturing, while also highlighting the support systems available for entrepreneurs through incubation programmes. The speaker began by explaining the importance of selecting the right ideas for entrepreneurial ventures and described the typical entrepreneurial journey, which begins with the initiation of an idea and initial enthusiasm, followed by challenges that test its viability. Through persistence and continuous refinement, successful ventures eventually achieve product acceptance, market entry, and business growth. The session discussed entrepreneur profiling by identifying three types of entrepreneurs in the agritech ecosystem.

The Rural Operator is ground-connected and relationship-driven, with strong farmer trust and effective last-mile execution. The Tech Innovator is engineering-oriented and focuses on developing technology-driven, data-based solutions. The Market Architect is strategically and financially oriented, emphasizing scalable business models, capital raising, and strategic partnerships. The session also explained key factors used to evaluate entrepreneurial ventures within incubation ecosystems. Incubators assess aspects such as target customer empathy, customer lifetime value, technical feasibility, prototype complexity, capital requirements, distribution channels, feature prioritization, and time to market while working with entrepreneurs. Internally, they also evaluate market potential using indicators such as Total Addressable Market (TAM), Serviceable

Available Market (SAM), and Serviceable Obtainable Market (SOM), along with factors such as manufacturability, regulatory barriers, and the strategic alignment of the startup with the incubator's objectives.

The session concluded with an overview of the incubation programmes offered by T-Works, which aim to support innovators in transforming their ideas into functional prototypes and scalable products. Through its prototyping infrastructure, mentorship, and ecosystem support, T-Works plays a critical role in enabling entrepreneurs to move from concept to commercialization while strengthening the broader innovation and manufacturing ecosystem in India.

Key Insights

- Idea-to-product journey requires persistence and refinement – Successful ventures evolve through continuous testing, overcoming challenges, and adapting until achieving market acceptance.
- Customer-centric approach is essential – Deep understanding of customer needs and value proposition is critical for designing successful products

Valedictory

Dr. Saravanan Raj, Director (Agricultural Extension), MANAGE & CEO, MANAGE-CIA, in the valedictory session of the workshop, highlighted a strong roadmap for strengthening the agribusiness incubation ecosystem. It was decided that a Compendium of Good Practices of Agribusiness Incubators will be prepared and shared with incubators to document successful models, innovative approaches, and actionable insights, supporting learning, replication, and continuous improvement. A Capacity Building Programme for Incubation Teams will be conducted to enhance managerial, technical, and mentoring competencies, ensuring incubators are better equipped to support Agri-startups in a dynamic environment. Furthermore, a National Workshop will be organized annually to connect agribusiness incubators across the country, fostering collaboration, experience sharing, partnerships, and a stronger national incubation network. The workshop emphasized that collaboration, knowledge exchange, and continuous capacity enhancement are key to nurturing resilient and impact-driven Agri-startups.

Summary of the National Workshop on

Reimagining India's Agri-Incubation Ecosystem:

Innovations, Good Practices and Future Pathways

Summary of the National Workshop on
Reimagining India's Agri-Incubation Ecosystem: Innovations, Good Practices and Future Pathways

Over the past decade, the Agri-startup ecosystem in India has witnessed significant expansion, driven by the growth of agribusiness incubators across universities and ICAR institutions, stronger academia–industry–startup collaborations, and increasing participation of youth, Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs), and rural entrepreneurs. The emergence of sector-specific incubation models further reflects the evolving and diversifying nature of the ecosystem. However, as the sector becomes more knowledge- and technology-intensive, it also demands more coordinated, cross-disciplinary, and capital-intensive incubation systems.

In this context, the National Workshop on Reimagining India's Agri-Incubation Ecosystem: Innovations, Good Practices and Future Pathways, organized by the National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE), Hyderabad, brought together representatives from leading incubation centres and ecosystem enablers across India to share successful models, deliberate on key challenges, and explore strategies for developing demand-driven, financially viable, and impact-oriented Agri-incubation programs. This article synthesizes the key insights and reflections that emerged from the workshop.

Navigating Challenges in Startup Scouting through Ecosystem Connectivity

One of the key concerns expressed by incubators was the declining number of applications and the difficulty in scouting innovative startup ideas, reflecting deeper challenges such as limited outreach and weak stakeholder coordination within the Agri-startup ecosystem.

"Facilitating interaction among diverse stakeholders strengthens grassroots entrepreneurship and expands the impact of incubation programmes."

-Dr. Saravanan Raj
Director (Agricultural Extension), MANAGE and CEO, MANAGE-CIA

Dr. Saravanan Raj, Director (Agricultural Extension), MANAGE and CEO, MANAGE-CIA, highlighted that programs such as Agri-Eureka identify new ideas, while the Pre-Incubation Programme supports early-stage innovators in refining concepts and developing Minimum Viable Products before formal incubation. He also emphasized that strengthening stakeholder connectivity is key to addressing ecosystem gaps, and the Agri-Startup Stakeholders Connect Programme enables startups to showcase innovations, build networks, and increase incubation applications, with potential for district-level expansion to strengthen grassroots entrepreneurship and outreach.

"The Indian Agri-startup ecosystem does not lack innovative ideas; rather, it suffers from a 'problem discovery gap."

-Mr. Nikunj Soni
CEO of AIC Anand Foundation

A critical underlying factor is the "problem discovery gap," as noted by Mr. Nikunj Soni, CEO of AIC Anand Foundation, Gujarat. He observed that farmers often face challenges in articulating their needs in structured forms, while researchers tend to focus on technological feasibility rather than contextual realities, and industry participation remains limited in early stages. This disconnect limits the translation of real-world problems into viable field-oriented startup opportunities.

"The Hub and Spoke model fosters inclusive, context-specific innovation in the agri-startup ecosystem."

-Mr. Mohammed Sharukh Qureshi
Project Manager, AgHub

Complementing this approach, structural incubation models such as the Hub and Spoke model, as highlighted by Mr. Mohammed Sharukh Qureshi, Project Manager at AgHub, play a significant role in integrating diverse actors within the ecosystem. By connecting research institutions, startups, farmers, rural entrepreneurs, and investors, and through specialized programmes targeting students, FPOs, SHGs, women, youth, and grassroots innovators, the model broadens participation and fosters inclusive innovation.

Guiding Innovation: Key Criteria for Agri-Startup Selection and Incubation Success

The effectiveness of an incubator largely depends on the quality of startups it attracts, making robust selection and evaluation mechanisms critical. Expert perspectives highlight that startup assessment should extend beyond mere ideas to encompass founder commitment, validation of concepts, and commercial viability.

"The ideal candidate has 'skin in the game' investing their own time, effort, or money because ideas alone cannot be assessed; only action reveals true commitment."

-Mr. A.S. Rao
President, Indian Innovators Association

A key criterion is the level of commitment demonstrated by founders. Mr. A.S. Rao, President of the Indian Innovators Association, emphasized the importance of fair evaluation based on tangible actions rather than conceptual claims, noting that applicants who demonstrate "skin in the game" through personal investment of time, effort, or resources are more likely to succeed.

Similarly, Mr. PVGK Murthy, Founder of Ingrain Technologies, underscored that genuine passion and sector understanding are reflected in a founder's willingness to take risks, rather than pursuing entrepreneurial opportunities solely for incentives while maintaining job security.

"Passion is not claiming interest; it is demonstrated through commitment and action."

-Mr. PVGK Murthy
Founder, Ingrain Technologies

Equally important is the validation of the startup idea. Dr. Radhika Meenakshi Shankar, Founder of Wise Owl Consulting, highlighted that credible proposals are grounded in evidence, with stronger applicants engaging in fieldwork, consulting experts, and critically assessing existing solutions. Such validation not only strengthens the feasibility of the idea but also builds evaluator confidence by indicating a shared willingness to bear risk.

"In God I believe; the rest of you must provide evidence, validation, and proof, as ideas without demonstrated credibility hold little value."

-Dr. Radhika Meenakshi Shankar
Founder, Wise Owl Consulting

From a market-oriented perspective, Mr. Emmanuel Murray, Investment Director at Caspian, pointed out that startups must also be evaluated based on whether the venture can effectively utilize funding to achieve profitability, scalability, and attractiveness for future investment.

"Funding should multiply into a sustainable business, not serve as a one-time benefit."

-Mr. Emmanuel Murray
Investment Director, Caspian

Mr. Sahaj Sandhu, Associate Vice President at T-Works, highlighted key evaluation factors including customer empathy, lifetime value, technical feasibility, prototype complexity, capital needs, distribution, feature prioritization, and time to market.

"Successful incubation depends on evaluating ideas not just for innovation, but for customer relevance, feasibility, and market readiness."

-Mr. Sahaj Sandhu
Associate Vice President, T-Works

Bridging Innovation to Market: Strengthening Agri-Startup Development and Readiness

A central challenge in the ecosystem is the so-called "Valley of Death," as explained by Dr. J Stanley, CEO of Nutrihub, ICAR-IIMR Hyderabad. This gap between laboratory research and market commercialization, compounded by limited pilot-scale facilities, impedes product validation and market readiness, highlighting the need for mechanisms that support early-stage development and risk mitigation.

"Bridging the 'Valley of Death' is essential, as the gap between lab research and market readiness hinders product validation and delays commercialization."

-Dr. J Stanley
CEO, Nutrihub, ICAR-IIMR

Addressing this, incubators provide structured support throughout the startup journey. Mr. A.V. Gnanasambandam, Managing Director & CEO of ABIS-TBI, TNAU, highlighted end-to-end assistance, including financial support through NABL-accredited lab testing concessions, facilitation of technology licensing to commercialize university innovations, and access to the Product Promotional Centre, which enhances product visibility, market exposure, and direct customer access. Complementing these efforts, Mr. Mohammed Sharukh Qureshi, Project Manager at AgHub, described collaborative product development initiatives and agritech pilot programmes that validate startup technologies across multiple seasons, generate use cases, and mobilize seed and venture capital investments. Ms. Rajeshwari, Assistant Manager at IKP, Hyderabad, discussed the IKP-PRIME Technology Transfer Office, which manages intellectual property and supports the commercialization of research innovations.

"Providing end-to-end support allows startups to navigate the journey from idea to market, ensuring visibility, validation, and successful commercialization."

-Mr. A.V. Gnanasambandam
Managing Director & CEO ABIS-TBI

"Managing intellectual property and guiding research innovations to market ensures that ideas translate into real-world impact."

-Ms. Rajeshwari
Assistant Manager, IKP

Specialized incubators further extend support by integrating sector-specific knowledge and capacity building. Dr. KP Sudheer, Head of RABI, KAU, Thrissur, emphasized the combination

of traditional knowledge systems with modern food science to standardize products, enhance safety, and improve marketability while preserving cultural authenticity. Mr. S.M. Tajdar Ali Taj of WEHUB, Hyderabad, highlighted the organization's role in improving women entrepreneurs' access to government schemes, policy support, and ecosystem development through strategic partnerships. Programmes like the Urban Innovation Programme equip women for technology-driven markets, while a coordinated, collaborative approach ensures aligned implementation, shared learning, and efficient resource use, enhancing the scalability and impact of women-led ventures.

"Empowering women-led ventures depends on collaborative ecosystems and targeted programmes for market readiness."

- Mr S.M. Tajdar Ali Taj
WEHUB

Similarly, Dr. Vijay Avinashilingam, Additional CEO of a-IDEA and Principal Scientist at ICAR-NAARM, highlighted the AGRI UDAAN accelerator programme, which mentors startups, builds capacity, facilitates networking with investors and FPOs, and provides pre-demo and demo day platforms to advance innovations toward market readiness and funding.

"Accelerating agribusiness innovations requires platforms that connect startups with investors and markets."

- Dr. Vijay Avinashilingam
Additional CEO - a-IDEA & Principal Scientist, ICAR-NAARM

Beyond national support, enhancing scalability and international engagement is increasingly important. Dr. Srinivas Bollam, Manager of the Agribusiness & Innovation Platform at ICRISAT, underscored pan-India collaborations with established companies to foster enterprise growth. He also highlighted engagement of Indian Agri-startups with countries in the Global South, particularly in Africa, through technology exchange, joint innovation, and participation in global competitions, which strengthens international recognition and market opportunities.

"Pan-India partnerships and global collaborations expand opportunities for agri-startups, enabling technology exchange, joint innovation, and international visibility."

-Dr. Srinivas Bollam
Manager, Agribusiness & Innovation Platform of ICRISAT

Building Agri-Business Leaders for the Future

A key challenge identified by incubators is the limited availability of skilled manpower to manage incubation activities, with many centres reporting a shortage of expertise, creative professionals, and innovation-driven personnel. Addressing this gap has become central to strengthening the agripreneurship ecosystem and ensuring effective support for startups.

"Training students as interns strengthens industry-ready talent in the ecosystem."

-Dr. Saravanan Raj
Director (Agricultural Extension), MANAGE and CEO, MANAGE-CIA

Dr. Saravanan Raj, Director (Agricultural Extension), MANAGE and CEO, MANAGE-CIA, highlighted the MANAGE Internship Programme, which trains students as interns within incubation centres, simultaneously supporting startup operations and developing industry-ready talent for the ecosystem. Complementing this, Mr. Nikunj Soni, CEO of AIC Anand Foundation, Gujarat, presented the ASPIRE Club, which establishes entrepreneurship cells in colleges to cultivate entrepreneurial thinking among students early in their academic careers.

Integration of academic programmes with incubation efforts further strengthens skill development and translational research. Dr. KP Sudheer, Head of RABI, KAU, Thrissur, emphasized a Postgraduate Diploma in Food Industry Management and Quality Control, which equips students with industry-relevant skills while reinforcing the incubation ecosystem. Similarly, Mr. S.M. Tajdar Ali Taj of WEHUB, Hyderabad, described initiatives such as GYIP, iLEAP, Campuspreneur, and iConnect, designed to enhance students' competencies, provide access to innovation platforms, and promote critical thinking and problem-solving, thereby fostering youth entrepreneurship. Dr. Kadiri Mohan, PI & CEO of ANGRAU Poshan Incubator, further highlighted collaborations with MBA institutions to integrate entrepreneurship into management education, developing graduates with both managerial expertise and an entrepreneurial mindset.

"Integrating entrepreneurship into management education cultivates graduates equipped with both business acumen and an entrepreneurial mindset."

-Dr. Kadiri Mohan
PI & CEO, ANGRAU Poshan Incubator

Ensuring Sustainability and Credibility in Agribusiness Incubation

A critical challenge confronting agribusiness incubation centres is financial sustainability, which is often constrained by administrative delays, limited autonomy, insufficient revenue-generation mechanisms, and restricted access to sector-specific investors, CSR funds, and equity-based investment opportunities.

Addressing these challenges requires both robust infrastructure and strategic management. Dr. KP Sudheer, Head of RABI, KAU, Thrissur, emphasized that incubator-controlled facilities such as processing units, laboratories, and pilot-scale production systems enable efficient testing, refinement, and validation of products, lowering entry barriers and accelerating market readiness. Complementing this, he highlighted the importance of diversified revenue models, including consultancy services, technology transfer, training programmes, facility usage charges, and incubation services, which enhance financial sustainability and reduce reliance on external grants.

"Robust infrastructure and diversified revenue models empower incubators to accelerate product readiness while ensuring financial sustainability."

- Dr. K.P Sudheer
Head RABI, KAU

Beyond operational and financial considerations, institutional branding plays a strategic role in strengthening incubator impact. Mr. Phani Kondepudi, CDO of T-Hub Hyderabad, noted that effective branding is more than a visual exercise; it is a deliberate process that shapes stakeholder perceptions, attracts aligned entrepreneurs, investors, and mentors, and establishes credibility in a complex innovation ecosystem. Authentic branding, grounded in genuine institutional strengths and reinforced by committed staff and mentors, enhances the incubator's reputation, which in turn benefits startups by improving their visibility, investor confidence, and industry engagement.

"Internal brand precedes external brand; true brand value is built through consistent performance over years, not campaigns."

-Mr. Phani Kondepudi
Ex- CDO, T-Hub, Hyderabad

In addition, continuous knowledge-sharing platforms contribute to ecosystem vibrancy. Dr. Saravanan Raj, Director (Agricultural Extension), MANAGE and CEO, MANAGE-CIA, noted that the Saturday Webinar Series, engaging over 60,265 participants, exemplifies how a well-structured, continuously active incubation ecosystem can nurture agripreneurs, strengthen innovation networks, and support the overall growth of India's Agri-startup ecosystem.

The Way Forward

The future of India's Agri-startup ecosystem lies in transitioning from grant-driven approaches to impact-oriented incubation, strengthening market linkages, and preparing startups for global opportunities. Strengthening the ecosystem requires a strategic focus on diversified revenue models, robust infrastructure, effective technology transfer, and stronger national networks among incubators. Ultimately, the future of India's Agri-incubation ecosystem depends on its ability to move beyond fragmented efforts toward a more coordinated, inclusive, and impact-driven model that nurtures context-specific innovations, supports entrepreneurs across stages, and contributes meaningfully to agricultural transformation

PM-RKVY

The Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (PM-RKVY), formerly known as Remunerative Approaches for Agriculture and Allied Sectors Rejuvenation (RKVY-RAFTAAR), is a flagship scheme of the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare (MoA&FW), Government of India. It aims to strengthen infrastructure in agriculture and allied sectors by promoting agripreneurship and fostering a robust agri-business ecosystem in the country. The scheme provides financial support to potential Agri-startups and facilitates a structured system of business incubation for the growth of Agri-startup ventures. It leverages innovations, technologies, and the existing capacities of academic, technical, management, and R&D institutions across the country, utilizing them to harness synergies. Further, the scheme ensures timely seed support to deserving incubates within R-ABIs, enables the transformation of minimum viable products (MVPs) into market-ready enterprises with scope for scaling up, and offers a platform for rapid experimentation and refinement of innovative solutions, processes, products, services, and business models.

Website: https://agristartup.gov.in/

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 programme, 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 630 agri-startups and mentored more than 1,164 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

MANAGE-Centre for Innovation and Agripreneurship (MANAGE-CIA)

National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE)

Rajendranagar, Hyderabad - 500 030, India

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

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