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GROWTH TREND OF COMMERCIAL AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES IN SONITPUR DISTRICT, ASSAM

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ABSTRACT

Commercialization of agricultural activities is considered as the major tool for rural economic growth of a region. Involvement of small and medium classes of farmers in high income generating agricultural activities contributes not only to a positive growth of the economic status of the farmers, but such change of activity generates new areas of market and trade potentials. Like any other district of Assam, Sonitpur presents noticeable changes in its agricultural sector of economy over last five decades. Since 1980s, a variety of commercial agricultural farms immersed in the rural areas reflecting vibrant changes in the socio-economic landscape of the district. Present paper intends to focus on the growth trend of commercial agricultural activities in Sonitpur district of Assam and its impact on rural economic growth and employment generation of the region.

KEYWORDS: commercial farms, income growth, employment generation, rural economy, marginal & medium farmers.

1. INTRODUCTION

The contribution of agricultural sector in Indian economy retains paramount importance even after almost eight decades of national independence. One cannot think of boosting Indian economy ignoring the importance agricultural sector where innearly 46 percent of the national workforce is involved. Further, the entire proportion of workforce engaged in agriculture is the rural workforce. Since the national independence of India, all the fifth- year plans made specific growth proposals to boost rural economy with the conception that vibrancy to Indian economy cannot be achieved without accelerating the rural economic sector, which is exclusively agricultural. Since1980s growing unemployment, continuous fragmentation of land with growing population, higher concentration of rural workforce in agriculture and the traditional agricultural activities becoming non-profitable; compelled the farmers to search for high income generating agricultural activities more particularly in Assam. Such a changed mindset of the farmers resulted in commercialization of agricultural activities providing a boost to the rural economy.The rural economic landscape of Assam experienced



immersion of various types of commercial farms since 1980s contributing to a continuous economic growth spurt later. Gradual shift of the farmers accustomed to traditional self-sustaining agriculture to commercial farming is a socio-economic compulsion to them rather than motivation of the farmers by governmental agencies.

The study area Sonitpur district is situated in the central north bank plain of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam. Its geographic location is from 26⁰30'N to 27⁰01'N latitude to 93⁰05'E to 93⁰55'E longitude with a total areal coverage of 2076.7 square kilometer. The district is composed of 4 (four) revenue circles and 8 (eight) community developments blocks with a total population of 13,11,619 persons (2011). Further, the district has a total working population of 4,81,674 persons which constitute 36.72% of the total population. Of the total workforce 74.72% (3,59,886 persons) is main workers, while 25.28% (1,21,788 persons) is marginal workers. The proportion of the workforce engaged in farming activities is 38.81% (1,86,939 persons), while 65.68% of the agricultural workforce is medium class farmers, 16.38% is marginal farmers and 17.94% is agricultural laborers. The district has a total of 5,624 commercial farms ranging from 0.5 acres to 5.0 acres in size, which have been emerged in its agricultural landscape after 1980s. These commercial agricultural farms are comprised of small household tea farms, commercial fisheries, piggeries, dairies, duck farms, banana farms, beetle nut farms and poultry farms. The growth of these commercial farms imparted visible changes in the socio-economic life and living of rural communities of the study area over last few decades.

2. OBJECTIVES

The following are the objectives of the present study:

1. To access the trend of growth of the commercial agricultural farms in the study area,
2. To identify the most promising agricultural/allied agricultural activities that the farmers find high income generating,
3. To examine the extent of economic benefit gained by the farmers by adopting commercial farming, and
4. To identify the areas where the farmers need government policy support to sustain their farms.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions based on the objectives of the study are:

1. What is indicated by the growth trend of recently emerged commercial farms established by the indigenous farmers in Sonitpur district?
2. Which categories of recently grown commercial farms are economically promising?
3. Which categories of commercial farms show growth stagnancy?
4. To what extent the commercial farms are capable in generating income and employment in the study area?

5. What are the problems confronted by the small commercial farms of the study area? And
6. What type of policy support the commercial farms need for their future growth?

4. METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on both primary and secondary data. The secondary data on number & types of commercial farms are collected from the offices of the Community Development Blocks included under different Revenue Circles of the district. For identification of category, income status and commercial farm size, primary data are collected from 30% of the commercial farms with the help of questioners papered to accommodate such data and information. Samples for primary data collection are selected in equal numbers from each of 7(Seven) Community Development Blocks of the study area. The samples are so selected that they, too, include 30% of individual category of commercial farms present in a particular Community Development Block. All such data collected from Primary & secondary sources are tabulated, analyzed and interpreted which are presented in the paper in the form of tables, diagrams and graphs.

5. ANALYSIS

The trend of growth of an economic activity reflects spatio-temporal spread of the activity which also adversely reflect its economic benefit status. The table given below presents the growth trend of various categories of commercial, agricultural & allied agricultural farms in Sonitpur district since 1980:

Table 1: Growth trend of different commercial agricultural & allied agricultural farms in Sonitpur district (1980 – 2025)

Year->	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020	2025	Total
House holdtea farms	48	416	1214	1872	32	04	3586
Fisherries	17	89	162	202	152	102	724
Piggeries	04	28	42	36	35	17	162
Poultry farms	46	92	114	121	31	12	416
Duck farms	06	28	44	26	22	18	144
Dairy farms	18	32	38	34	46	26	194

Banana farms	06	18	25	32	38	13	132
Battlenut farms	54	63	48	36	42	23	266
Total->	199	766	1687	2359	398	215	5624

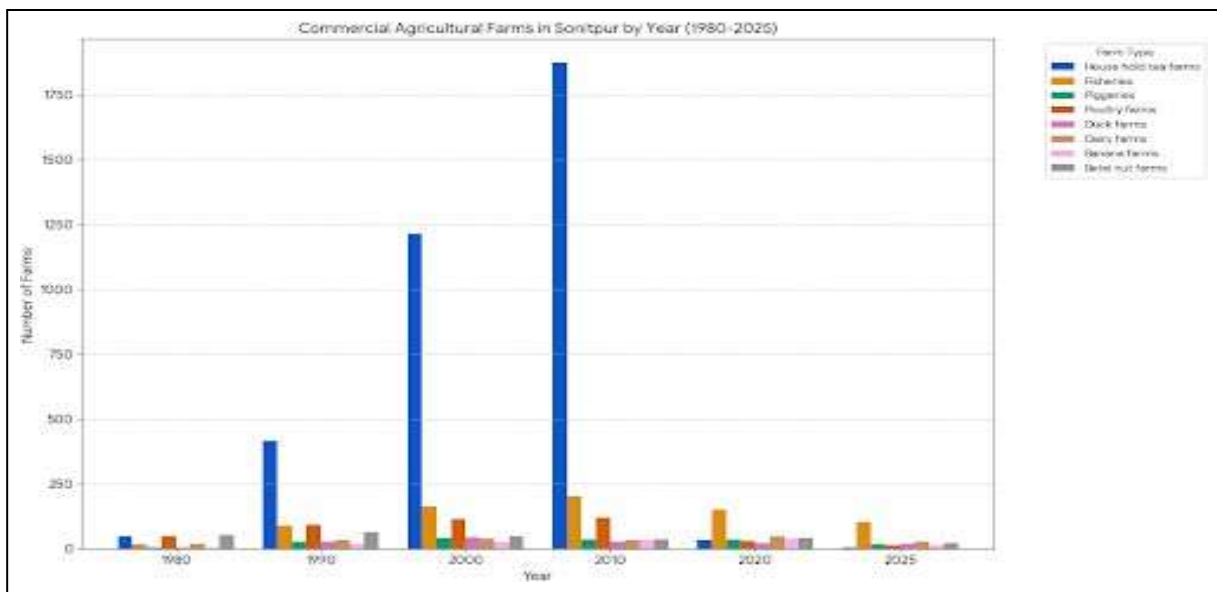


Figure 1(a)

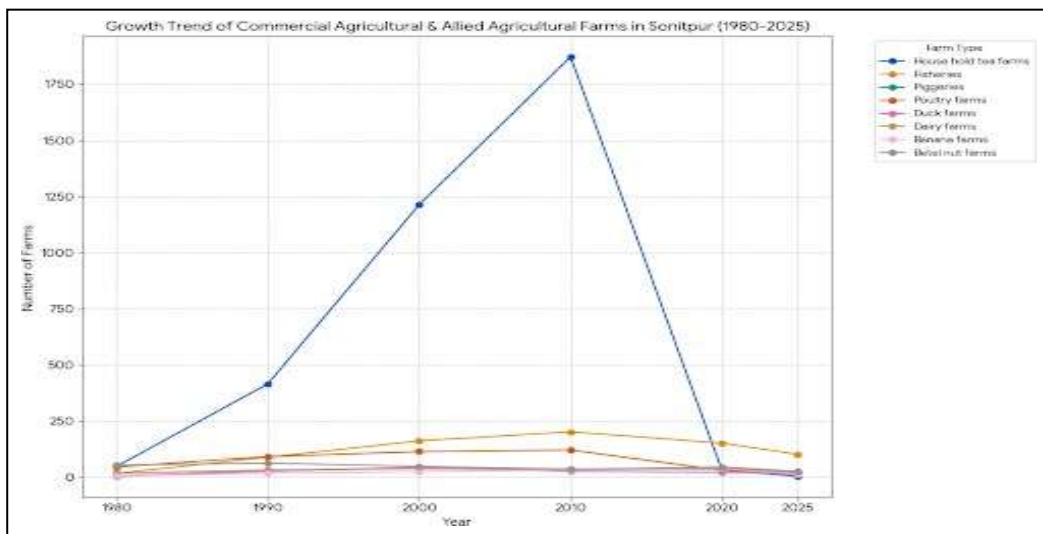


Figure 1(b)

As presented in **Table 1 & Figure 1(a) and 1(b)**, commercial agricultural & allied agricultural farms in the study area started growing steadily since 1980 reaching the peak growth during the period 2000 – 2010 and since then there is an overall declining trend. Even if a declining growth trend is presented by 5 (five) out of 8 (eight) different categories of commercial farms, 4(four) specific categories, namely-fisheries, piggeries, beetle nut & dairy farms appear to maintain a positive growth trend during 2010-2025. Such an observation indicates that there is a growing consumer demand for these categories of consumer products in the study area. **Table 2** represents the income growth of the farmers after converting their farm land from traditional agricultural practices to commercial farming:

Table 2: Income growth of the farmers after adoption of commercial farming in Sonitpur district during 1980 – 2025

<i>Type of commercial farm</i>	<i>Net annual income by an acre of farmland generated by earlier agricultural Practices (in Rs.)</i>	<i>Net annual income generated by an acre of farmland after adopting commercial farming (in Rs.)</i>	<i>Rise/fall in annual income per acre of farm land after adopting commercial farming (in Rs.)</i>	<i>Rise/fall in annual income after adopting commercial farming. (in %)</i>
<i>Household tea farms</i>	2,200.00	4,600.00	+ 2,400.00	+ 109,9
<i>Fisheries</i>	1,600.00	8,400.00	+ 6,800.00	+ 425.0
<i>Piggeries</i>	2,600.00	10,200.00	+ 7,600.00	+ 292.3
<i>Poultry farms</i>	2,800.00	9,400.00	+ 6,600.00	+ 235.7
<i>Duck farms</i>	2,400.00	6,200.00	+ 3,800.00	+ 158.3
<i>Dairy farms</i>	2,200.00	12,500.00	+ 10,300.00	+ 468,2
<i>Banana farms</i>	3,000.00	14,800.00	+ 11,800.00	+ 393.3
<i>Beetle nut farms</i>	2,400.00	12,600.00	+ 10,200.00	+425.0

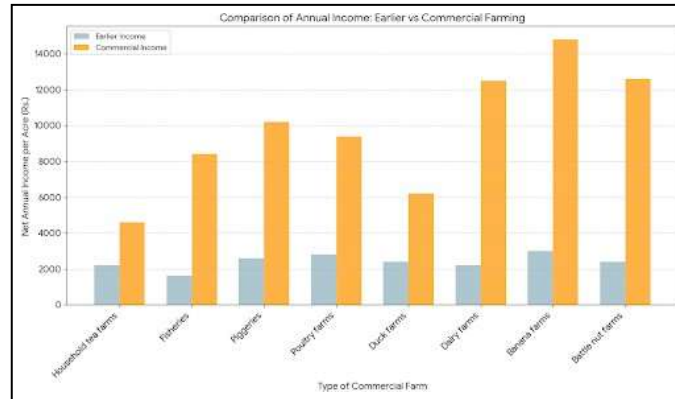


Figure 2(a)

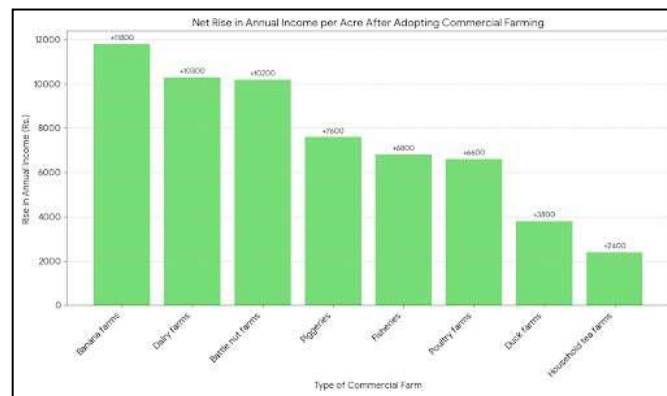


Figure 2(b)

As observed from **Table 2** and **Figure 2(a)** and **2(b)**, the conversion of the farm practices by the marginal & medium class farmers from traditional to commercial form contributed to a significant growth of their annual income. Among the eight different categories of commercial farms commonly established by the farmers of Sonitpur district, the household tea farming & duck farming– are found to be low income generating as compared to the other six categories of commercial farming. Price instability of the green tea leaves produced by the household tea farmers is identified as the basic cause of low income generating to the farmers. On the other hand, continuation of traditional method of duckrearing & lack of inclusion of modern scientific techniques are found to be the cause for providing low-income generation by duck farming as compared to other commercial farming. It is interesting to note that the six types of commercial farms, viz- fisheries, piggeries, poultry farms, dairy farms, banana farms & battle nut farms, which are associated with direct consumer production are observed to be highly profitable to the farmers. These six categories of commercial farms could provide income enhancement of the farmers ranging from 235.7 % to 468.2 %. But, all the farmers opting for

commercial farming being marginal or medium class farmers having farmland sizes ranging from 0.5acres to 5 acres; their gross family income is not adequate to provide them a high-income status. **Table 3** given below presents a sample-based employment pattern generated by these recently established commercial agricultural & allied agricultural farms:

Table 3: Employment generation (sample based) by the commercial agricultural activities in Sonitpur district, (1980 – 2025)

Type of commercial farm	Average full-time workers (in persons)	Average part-time workers (in persons)	Average full & part-time workers (in persons)	Total employment generation (in persons)
Household tea farms	2	4	6	9,516
Fisheries	1	1	2	1,448
Piggeries	2	2	4	648
Poultry farms	3	1	4	1,664
Duck farms	1	1	2	288
Dairy farms	3	4	7	1,358
Banana farms	3	2	5	660
Battle nut farms	2	1	3	798
Total->				16,380

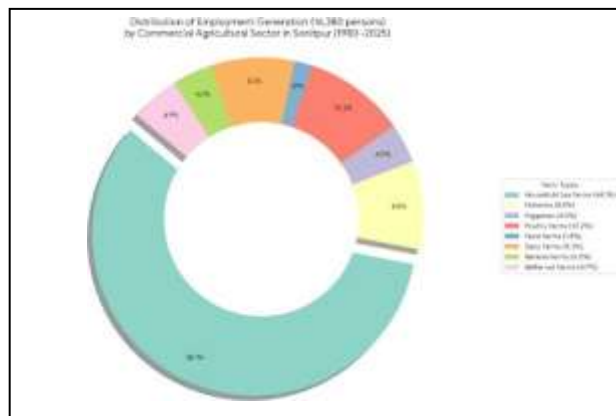


Figure 3

As presented in **Table 3 & Figure 3**, the estimated employment generated by the recently grown commercial agricultural & allied agricultural farms is 16,380 persons, out of which 11,122 (67.9%) is full time employment and 5,258 (32.1%) is part-time employment. It is observed that apparently household tea farms are the highest employment generating farms; but when compared the number of such farms with the proportion of employment generation (household tea farms constitute 63.8% of the total commercial farms and generate only 58.1% employment), this sector of commercial farms is considered as poor employment generating. High employment generating commercial farms with lower number of concentrations are respectively- dairy farms (3.4% of concentration & 8.8% of employment generation), poultry farms (7.4% of concentration & 10.1% of employment generation), banana farms (2.3% of concentration & 4.0% employment generation) and piggeries (2.9% of concentration & 4.0% employment generation). Thus, these four categories appeared to be both high incomes generating & employment generating.

6. FINDINGS

The findings of the study are as stated below:

1. The commercial farms initiated by the marginal and medium class farmers started emerging since 80s of the last centuries reached the peak growth stage during 2000 - 2010 & shows a declining trend since then,
2. The household tea farms which attracted growth priority among the farmers till 2010 appear to attain a nearly stagnant stage of growth after 2010,
3. High recession in growth of household farms after 2010 is caused by gradually diminishing income due to incompatibility of price received by the farmers from the procurers despite of being significant employment generating,
4. Farm size & financial limitation of the farmers serve as restricting factors for them to foster further growth even of the highly profit- making farms such as fisheries, dairy farms, banana farms & piggeries,
5. Excluding household tea farms, all other commercial farms find secured local markets as their products are directly consumable, even if their further growth anticipates well planned intra-district market connectivity,
6. Household tea farms being dependent on processing factories, needs a sound and profit- making pricing system of green tea leaves for their survival and viability, and
7. The secured growth of commercial farms preserves high potential of employment generation which is also considered as an associated factor with income growth of rural population.

7. CONCLUSION

The emergence of small commercial farms started by marginal and medium class farmers aiming at meeting the consumer demand in the local markets brought in visible socio-economic changes in the



rural landscape of Sonitpur district. The major contribution of these farms is to be observed in income and employment growth among the rural population. Smaller land sizes stand as a hurdle before the farmers which can be resolved by introduction of multiple cropping/raring strategies. The tea farms specifically need government-controlled price fixation authority for their re-vitalisation. All the commercial farms need financial, market and price support from the government for their sustenance and further growth. A clear and effective policy and creation of support agencies for these small rural commercial farms are the need of the hour not only to boost their growth but also to strengthen rural economy.

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