

Progressing towards holistic development

Agrarian development will bridge the gap between rural poverty and urban affluence, says Dr. Ajit Kumar.



National Institute of Food Technology Entrepreneurship and Management (NIFTEM) was conceptualized by Government of India on persistent demand of the food industry to have an apex body as a "One Stop Solution Provider" for the various problems of the sector. The institute intends to act as a centre of excellence and an apex world class centre of global standards in the area of food technology and management. It caters to the needs of various stakeholders such as entrepreneurs, industries, exporters, policy makers, government and existing institutions. NIFTEM being an apex institution under Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI) has developed strong linkages with industries.

Dr. Ajit Kumar, Vice-Chancellor, NIFTEM attended 7th India Foodex 2015. **AgriBusiness & Food Industry's Rummana Zaidi** interviewed Dr. Kumar. *Excerpts:*

What has been the founding idea behind NIFTEM?

The main idea behind NIFTEM has been to make agriculture a viable career option for our country's young minds. We attempt to do so, by connecting it with the food processing industry. We aim to spread the message that if we process the agricultural produce and add value to it, the income can grow manifold. The need of the hour is to realise the great potential that Indian agriculture holds. We are the second largest producers of food and crops, but a large amount of our production is wasted. So, we have to develop methods, organise extensive programmes and work towards skill development in this sector.

We have to work in such a way that gradually the technological gap

can be reduced and our villages can be transformed into centres of affluence. As Indian villages are primarily dependent on agriculture, we have to develop the agricultural sector for the all-round development of our country.

How does NIFTEM help its students in connecting with the farmers and villages?

We have a programme that is registered with Village Adoption Programme. Under this programme, we conduct workshops in villages, which are 1 week long. From this, we select 50-100 people. If the participants are interested, we extend it into an entrepreneurship programme and guide them through for 6 months. We provide them help regarding sourcing of raw materials, machinery, maintaining quality & food

safety standards.

This programme is made possible by our B.Tech and M.Tech students, who work in groups of 10-15, headed by a faculty member. They choose one village and work for its over-all development. The main focus is to provide exposure to the participants and bring them face to face with ground reality. They stay in the village for 10 days in each semester. They also engage in and try to find solutions for various social issues. They act as a bridge between the villagers and administration.

How far have you succeeded in this programme?

Our institute is only 3 years' old, and I am extremely proud to say that so far, we have adopted around 39 villages across 18 states. In these villages,

our students have worked on various social and developmental issues. They have facilitated the paving of roads, construction of toilets, installation of almost 200 solar street lights and solar lamps. The idea is to connect the students to the grass roots and bridge the gap between rural poverty and urban affluence.

How can NIFTEM contribute to the vision of "Make in India"?

Through our village adoption programme, we have been working for the holistic development of India. Furthermore, our research in the area has been of substantial help. When we started researching about the traditional Indian cuisine, we were overwhelmed by the number of dishes in small areas. In thirty nine villages across nine states, we have documented nine hundred dishes. At every 100 km in India, the lifestyle and food habits change. It is difficult to

even imagine that how many dishes we will have if we cover the six lakh Indian villages. The Indian cuisine ranges from Goshtaba to Idli. We have to realise the potential of our indigenous foods.

So, it presents a huge opportunity to upcoming entrepreneurs. If we go ahead with "Make in India", in terms of traditional Indian food, we can be the food factory for the world. It is a huge sector, and holds amazing opportunities. The demand is definitely there. So, we have been encouraging our students to explore this area.

It is a huge dream, but it's a dream that we are envisioning with our open eyes. We are aware how much effort it involves. It can only come true if each stakeholder comes together.

What is your suggestion to the young promising entrepreneurs in this field?

Well... as I have said earlier that this sector holds great opportunities. We only

need to have the right approach. The young entrepreneurs have to be very particular about adhering to food safety and hygiene regulations. The recipes and ingredients too need to be standardised. If one wishes to capture the market, one has to go for mass production and strictly maintain the quality standards. They have to be very methodical and consistent.

Do you think India Foodex is also a move in the direction of realising the "Make in India" vision?

Of course! It brings people together on one platform. It is a commendable effort. In fact, I feel it should be held more often. We should have such programmes at least once a month in every state. People from across the globe and from different parts of India take part in this expo. It enables an exchange of ideas, which is essential for bringing about any change.



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