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Determinants of Agri-Based Venture Creation Among Rural Farmers in Sri Lanka: A Qualitative Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the determinants that influence rural farmers in Sri Lanka to establish agricultural-based business ventures. The agricultural sector plays a crucial role in strengthening the rural economy by providing both direct and indirect employment opportunities; however, rural communities face challenges such as unstable income, unemployment, price fluctuations, labor shortages, youth migration, and land fragmentation. A qualitative case study approach was used, with primary data collected through a pre-tested interview guide from 10 purposively selected farmers who had already started agri-businesses. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed that key factors motivating farmers to start businesses included the desire to earn profit rather than a salary, limited job opportunities, financial ability, availability of production factors, willingness to take risks, the aspiration to be independent, education and vocational training, family and stakeholder support, and access to excess labor or time. The study concludes that profit orientation, lack of alternative employment, financial resources, infrastructure, and family support are the most significant determinants of rural agri-entrepreneurship. Respondents also noted that government regulations negatively affected business growth and expressed dissatisfaction with government support. The study recommends financial and capital assistance, knowledge and awareness programs, and stronger government engagement with rural communities to promote sustainable agri-business development.

1. Introduction

In rural areas, farmers have enough resources, such as labor and land, but lack capital and business skills. The agricultural sector plays a vital role in the success of the rural economy by promoting environmentally friendly and sustainable development, which provides both primary and secondary employment opportunities for rural people. There is no single acceptable definition of entrepreneurship, but many researchers offer explanations for various purposes (Maluleke, 2016). Agholor et al. (2024) explained Agri base business ventures in two ways. The first one, Agri-ventures, is considered a business related to agriculture for survival. Second, it is the coordination and effective use of all farm operations, including production, distribution of farm supplies, processing, and marketing. Study further discussed the importance of

Agri entrepreneurship to the economy is remarkable, providing income for rural households, employment generation, and raw materials for industries" (Agholor et al., 2024).

Agholor et al. (2024) identified the contributions of agribusiness ventures to economic growth and poverty mitigation and noted the need for greater effort to motivate potential investors in the agriculture sector. Furthermore, a study recommended that starting one's own Agri business is an effective way to reduce hunger and unemployment. This study investigated two research questions: are there inspiring factors for individuals to start their own Agri-business? Furthermore, are there factors that hinder individuals from starting their own Agri-Entrepreneurship businesses? The study found significant influential factors for starting an agri-based

venture, such as self-realization variant (age and marital status), self-satisfaction variant (marital status), and independence variant category (level of formal education and farm experience).

The economic contribution of the agricultural sector in Sri Lanka has declined significantly, accounting for only 7.5% of GDP. However, it continues to provide both direct and indirect employment for people living in rural areas. This situation aligns with the results of Nuraini et al. (2024): the agricultural sector contributes 12.53% to Indonesia's GDP, ranking third after manufacturing and trade, and in 2022, 21% of Indonesia's younger population was employed in agriculture. The authors emphasized that agribusiness can contribute to economic growth and enhance the welfare of rural communities by expanding livelihood opportunities. According to the data from the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, SMEs in the agriculture sector contributed 7% of the country's GDP and employed around 2.072 million people, which accounted for 25.3% of the total workforce (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2019). The research study of Gamage et al. (2025) emphasized that "Sri Lanka has an agriculture-based economy, where the population is highly depend on agriculture and agriculture-related activities, particularly in the rural sector. Study result emphasized the total (100%) respondents experienced declining crop yields due to unpredictable climate patterns in rural sector, and also this study further explained the agricultural production is very unstable; around 30% of it get destroyed. (wastage) and also study concluded maintaining a stable income from farming activities is very challengeable task (Gamage et al., 2025). Priyantha and Premaratne (2014) emphasized that 70% of SMEs in Sri Lanka close down within the first three years of operation, with 60% failing within the initial year. Similarly, Prasanna et al. (2019) highlighted that SMEs face numerous operational challenges, which can be broadly categorized into sustainability, global, and technology challenges. According to Schumpeter's theory of entrepreneurship, innovation requires entrepreneurial skills to manage existing or new resources (Prasanna et al., 2019). Bandara (2009) emphasized the noticeable problem faced in Sri Lanka: the underemployment and unemployment rates among educated youth are very high, and the study proposed that entrepreneurship development can be used as a key strategy to overcome the problem of unemployment and underemployment in the rural sector. The Sri Lankan government has taken several steps over the past few years to create a more conducive environment for small and medium enterprises by introducing necessary policy reforms, laws and regulations, and supportive services, and by

providing increased incentives (Upulwehera et al., 2021).

Sri Lanka has an agriculture-based economy, with a large portion of the population, particularly in rural areas, heavily dependent on agriculture and agriculture-related activities. The decline in agricultural production has resulted in income insecurity and increased vulnerability among farming communities. To address these issues, promoting sustainable small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and business ventures in the agricultural sector can provide valuable opportunities for vulnerable groups. Such initiatives can help reduce poverty, generate income, and create employment opportunities. The main purpose of this study is to determine the factors influencing the initiation of agricultural-based business ventures by rural farmers in Sri Lanka. Our research question was "What are the influencing factors on the entrepreneurial intentions of rural farmers to start agriculture-based businesses"?

Most research studies have focused on and identified the factors that influence the intention to start business ventures at the global level. However, a gap remains when considering the factors that affect the start-up of an agricultural-based business venture in the rural sector in Sri Lanka. Most of the existing literature focuses on quantitative methods, whereas we are focusing on a qualitative approach in the rural sector to identify the affected factors in starting agri-based business ventures. The findings of the current study are significant for many stakeholders, like the Government, policymakers, and responsible government agencies, as well as unemployed people in the rural sector who have good intentions to start agriculture-based business ventures, to identify the factors affecting the start of new agri-based ventures and any other requirements requested by rural people.

1.2. Research objectives

- To identify the influential factors in agri-based venture creation by rural farmers in Sri Lanka.
- To observe and analyze the current situation of agriculture-based business operations.

2 Literature Review

Robinson and Kengatharan (2020) state that the SME sector in Sri Lanka accounts for more than 75% of enterprises, provides 45% of employment opportunities, and contributes 52% to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Furthermore, data from the Department of Census and Statistics of Sri Lanka indicate that there are 1,017,267 micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), with 73% operating in rural areas (Bandara et al., 2024). Korneeva et al. (2023), the establishment and development of sustainable agribusinesses can enhance food security, increase productivity, and support

environmental protection. SMEs account for over 95% of businesses in developing countries, underscoring their pivotal role in livelihoods and investment success (Fjose et al., 2010). About 2.6 million SMEs exist in South Africa, of which about 37% are presumed to be formal, while 54% are microenterprises, with 15% thriving in rural communities (OECD, 2022). SMEs account for about 53% of the USA's GDP, while in the UK they account for almost 62% of total employment and contribute over 25% of GDP (Baldacchino and Fairbairn, 2006; Day, 2000). Also, in China, SMEs account for at least 80% of employment and 60% of GDP (Sham, 2014).

Nuraini et al. (2024) explained that in Indonesia, 38 million individuals are employed in the agricultural sector, of whom 80% are over 45, while the younger population shows little interest in agricultural activities. To address these challenges, the Indonesian Government introduced several strategies to attract the younger generation to the agribusiness sector, including transforming agricultural vocational education, launching youth agricultural entrepreneurship programs, forming Joint Business Groups, organizing training and internship programs, and optimizing the role of agricultural extension officers in motivating youth participation. The Ministry of Agriculture in Indonesia launched the 'Millennial Agricultural Entrepreneurship Development Program' for the period 2020–2024. This initiative aims to promote agribusiness education and training among students and encourage the younger generation to pursue agribusiness careers. (Nuraini et al., 2024) According to Bandara (2009), many Entrepreneurship development programs have been implemented by the Sri Lankan government, but these programs have not been successful in solving the existing problem due to a lack of proper awareness of the concept and insight into the matter. The study suggested that Entrepreneurship Development programs should be designed in order to meet the needs of young, unemployed persons in the rural sector.

A study by Athuman (2023) examined students' perceptions of agribusiness in Tanzania and the factors influencing their intention to pursue it. The study found that certain demographic factors, such as age, marital status, place of residence, parents' educational level, practical experience in agriculture, and risk tolerance, significantly influence students' intentions to engage in agribusiness after graduation. Similarly, Borda et al. (2023) emphasized that a high level of agricultural knowledge among youth is a strong motivator for pursuing careers in sustainable, modern agribusiness. Furthermore, skills training plays a crucial role in enhancing students' confidence and work readiness for employment in the agribusiness sector.

Agri-entrepreneurship is critical for food security, poverty reduction, economic growth, and sustainable development (Diaz Pichardo et al., 2012). In rural areas, farmers and business owners' financial literacy is very low, and they rely on traditional financial methods to connect with legal financial institutions to fulfill their financial requirements.

Sapkota's (2025) research study was conducted to examine the entrepreneurship ability among rural farmers and the impact of

empowering them to achieve socio-economic status and economic sustainability rather than traditional poverty alleviation. The research examined how microfinance affects the improvement of the socio-economic status of farmers living in rural areas and those typically excluded from traditional banking. It further investigated how access to microcredit, savings practices, and training programs contributes to income generation, asset accumulation, and livelihood sustainability among rural households. Finally, the study suggested that there is a significant impact of rural development and the sustainability of rural entrepreneurship; therefore, the Government should start microcredit schemes and agricultural loans to support rural farmers and promote their socio-economic development through agricultural entrepreneurship.

Ermawati et al. (2024), Microfinance provides financial services and financial assistance to farmers, marginalized communities, women, and the rural poor who lack access to traditional banking. Furthermore, the study by Panthi & Chalise (2022) further confirms that these institutions provide small loans, financial assistance, and savings facilities to rural populations. These institutions support farmers in purchasing seeds, fertilizers, livestock, and other necessary inputs that can improve agricultural productivity and Income. This paper further emphasized Microfinance has become an essential financial tool for rural farmers in Okhaldhunga, Nepal, offering a pathway to economic improvement and resilience for communities with limited access to traditional banking services.

3 Materials and Methods

In line with the objectives of the study, a qualitative research approach was adopted using a case study design to gain a deeper understanding of the research problem. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews, a widely recognized qualitative research technique. A combination of convenience and purposive sampling methods was used. The study population consisted of agriculture-based business owners in the North Western Province of Sri Lanka. The sample was selected with the support and consultation of government officials with good knowledge of the sample area, which is characterized by a high concentration of rural villages where both direct and indirect agricultural activities are prominent. The main data collection tool was a pre-tested interview guide. The sample comprised 10 respondents who had already established agriculture-related business ventures in rural Sri Lanka. Farmers who had no involvement in agriculture-based businesses were not included in the sample. The sample size was determined based on the principle of data saturation, whereby additional data collection was not needed for the study. The selected sample size is considered sufficient and appropriate for achieving the study objectives. The interviews ranged in duration from approximately 30 to 60 minutes. The strategic reason for choosing this location as it is highly dependent on farming and characterized by the availability of excess labor, land, and agricultural experience. At the same time, the area faces challenges such as income vulnerability and post-harvest losses, which highlight the potential for developing new agriculture-related businesses.

Furthermore, the majority of people living in the study location are directly or indirectly involved in agricultural activities. The collected data were coded and organized into specific themes using thematic analysis. In addition,

secondary data were obtained from published research articles, reports, dissertations, books, and official publications of relevant government agencies.

4 Results and Discussion

The results and discussion section is arranged into two main parts. In the first part, we discussed the basic and demographic factors of agricultural-based business owners. In the second part, influential factors in selected thematic areas for starting new Agri-related business ventures by rural farmers in Sri Lanka.

Basic and demographic factors

This study was conducted with 10 selected agri-related business owners in the rural sector of Sri Lanka using a purposive sampling method. The demographic data include Age, Education level, TVET training, Family size, Family income, Business experience, Gender, Religion, etc., which influence their business intentions, as shown in tables 01 and 02.

Table 01- Sample profiles adapted in the study

Case number	Experience in business years	Business category	Gender of owner	Number of employees	Education level	Age
Case- 01	06	Rice milling	Male	3	O/L	44
Case- 02	15	Rice milling	Male	5	O/L	62
Case- 03	03	Rice milling & chilly, coconut oil	Male	1	A/L	25
Case- 04	01	Green house	Female	2	O/L	44
Case- 05	02	Vegetable shop and grocery	Male	2	Grade 8	42
Case- 06	03	Fruit and vegetable shop and grocery	Male	2	A/L	54
Case- 07	05	Small rice milling and fruit cultivator	Male	2	Grade 8	55
Case- 08	03	Animal husbandry - egg production	Male	2	O/L	37
Case- 09	15	Medium-sized rice milling	Male	20	A/L	42
Case- 10	15	Unseasonal vegetable cultivation	Male	2	O/L	44

Source- Survey Data, 2025.

According to the table 01, the sample representation shows that 05 rice milling ventures have a suitable business environment, with good demand and market opportunities in the country, and that raw materials like paddy can be collected from very close to the business premises at low transport cost. Two fruit and vegetable shops, and another two Greenhouse vegetable cultivation centers. One was animal husbandry. The respondents' business experience varied, with the majority having less than 10 years, while only three reported 15 years or more

in their fields. The sample included only one woman, and 90% were male, highlighting that agriculture-based business ventures in the rural sector remain male-dominated. Regarding education, 50% of respondents had completed their O/L qualification, and two business owners had only reached Grade 8, indicating that lower educational levels may limit business development and growth in this sector. Age also emerged as an important factor in starting a business. Primary data showed that the majority of respondents (70%) were in the 41–60 age group, with only one business owner aged 62, suggesting

that mid-life individuals are more likely to engage in agriculture-based entrepreneurship, potentially due to accumulated experience, resources, and risk tolerance. Overall, these findings

reflect that rural agribusiness is shaped by a combination of gender, education, age, and prior business experience, which influence both the decision to start a business and its subsequent development.

Table 02- Basic information of business owners

Case number	Family members	Religion	Registration status: yes/no	TVET qualification (yes/ no)	Extra occupation	Monthly Income from business- approximately	Family income average per year
Case-01	M-1 F-3	Buddhism	yes	No	No	150000	150000
Case-02	F-3 M-2	Buddhism	yes	No	*Agriculture	200000	250000
Case-03	M-3 F-1	Buddhism	No	No	No	30000	100000
Case-04	F-3 M-1	Buddhism	No	Yes	*Agriculture *Tailor shop	60000	80000
Case-05	F-4 M-1	Buddhism	No	No	*Agriculture *Smal business	50000	80000
Case-06	M-2 F-2	Buddhism	yes	No	*Agriculture *Pension	80000	100000
Case-07	M-3 F-2	Buddhism	yes	Yes	*Agriculture * Electrician	100000	120000
Case-08	M-1 F-3	Buddhism	No	Yes	*Pension *Agriculture *Coconuts harvesting	100000	180000
Case-09	M-3 F-2	Buddhism	yes	No	*Agriculture	500000	500000
Case-10	M-2 F-2	Buddhism	No	No	*Agriculture *Driving - provide transport facility	60000	80000

Source- Survey data, 2025.

According to Table 2, many agriculture-based business owners engage in farming activities alongside their primary business. The study findings indicate that most respondents earn a satisfactory monthly income. Five out of ten business owners reported earning LKR 100,000 or more per month, while Case 09 reported a monthly income exceeding

LKR 500,000 and provided employment opportunities for approximately 20 residents. A careful analysis of the in-depth interview data allowed the researchers to identify the key factors influencing rural people to start agriculture-based businesses. The thematic areas derived from this analysis are presented in Table 3.

Table-03. The influential factors to start Agri base business venture in the rural sector

Thematic areas (main influential factors to start a new Agri-base business)	C-1	C-2	C-3	C-4	C-5	C-6	C-7	C-8	C-9	C-10
Demographic factors such as Age, Gender, Religion, and Culture	*			*					*	*
Desire to earn profit instead to salary (monthly or salary Income not enough of job)	*	*	*	*		*			*	*
Lack of job opportunities in the economy (Create jobs for myself, family, and others)	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Willingness to take risks, dedications/ Positive mindset, and own boss concept	*	*	*	*				*	*	*
Education level/ TVET/ Experience		*							*	*
Support from family, friends, Government,	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Other factors -freedom to take decision and freedom to work,	*	*		*		*		*		*

Note: *- Indicates qualitative responses by respondents.

Source- Survey Data, 2025.

Demographic factors such as Age, Gender, Religion, Culture, - Some demographic factors, such as age, gender, and experience in the respective field, positively influenced the decision to start agriculture-based business ventures in the rural sector. For example, Case 01 stated, "I started my business at 38 years of age, and I was able to develop it further." Case 04 highlighted the role of gender in shaping business choices: "It is very easy for me as a woman, we cannot engage in hard work. This greenhouse is very easy; a few minutes are enough for watering and applying fertilizer. My family and I can easily manage the work." Similarly, Case 09 emphasized the importance of starting at a younger age: "I started this business when I was young and developed it to this level. If someone wants to start a business, I think it is better to begin at a young age; otherwise, there is not enough time to grow it." These responses suggest that individual demographic characteristics can significantly affect both the feasibility and growth of rural agriculture-based businesses.

Desire to earn profit instead to salary (salary income not enough of job) - Many business owners indicated that their primary motivation for starting agriculture-based ventures was to earn profit rather than relying on a conventional monthly salary, which

often proved insufficient to manage high expenditures, especially in the context of rising inflation. Case 10 stated, "I can earn good profit from my vegetables, and it also provides a job opportunity for my family members." Case 09 explained, "I come from a very low-income family with no permanent income. I performed various jobs to support my family, but we could not rely on a small monthly salary, so I started this business." Case 05 added, "I started the business because my agricultural income was not enough, so I used this venture as an additional source of income." Similarly, Case 01 highlighted long-term dissatisfaction with salaried work: "There was not enough Income from any private or Government job. I worked for more than 20 years in the private sector, but only survived without success. Now, in my business, I can earn a profit." Several respondents (Cases 02, 03, 04, and 06) also emphasized, "I take profit, not a salary or monthly wage." These statements collectively indicate that profit motivation and financial independence are key drivers for engaging in rural agriculture-based businesses.

Lack of job opportunities in the economy (Create employment for myself, family, and others) - due to a lack of employment opportunities in both the Government and private sectors in rural areas of

developing countries, most people face unemployment and underemployment problems. To address these problems, many people attempted to start their own businesses to create job opportunities for themselves, their families, and others. (Case 01, 02,03,07,08,10) "main problems we faced in this rural sector is lack of job opportunities, therefore we need to create the job, my business can create job for me and my family" (Case 01) "I have created job for others- I have given jobs for 4 persons" (case-02) "i start this business to create the employment opportunities for me, my family and others (Case-07) "I don't like to do job, I stopped the university education and start the business, with my commitment and dedication I have developed my business up to this level..... when I was in 21 years, I thought education was useless" I need create jobs for others, at present I already given 20-30 jobs for people of our village" (case-09)

Willingness to take risks, dedication/ Positive mindset, own boss concept- another important influential factor for start business is risk-taking ability and thinking like I am the boss of my company as well as positive mind set. many business owners have special mind set and abilities which difference from other people, they always committed to achieve their target. "it is different from other job we can develop our business with good commitment" (case-03), I can run my business with my own pattern, no one influence me- I am taking decision very freely, I started my own business and I am the boss of my company, this is my business I am the boss, " this work for me not others, I like to take a risk (Case-01.02,03,04,09) "I like to attend with my own business and I do not like to work under the other people" in my business I have good freedom and relax "(Case-08) "this is not easy task, most challenges faced by me during this cultivation- ex-insect attack, wild animal attack such as elephant, pig, peacock, monkey.etc., they damage my cultivation because others are not attend any cultivation in unseasonal time" (case-10)

Education level/ TVET/ Experience- according to the perspectives of business owners we identified educational background including TVET as little influential factor to start new business in rural sector-most of the respondents do not have TVET education, and some cases identified as very low educational qualification, they only have passed Grade 08 (case- 05 and 07), but the business owners have good educational background we observed and identified the good mechanism they implemented. (ex-Case 09) Compared with the other key influential factors, TVET and educational qualifications were found to be slightly less

influential. "I do not like to do a job under other people; I was in a government university, which was boring for me. I dropped out of university, came home, and started my business. With good commitment and dedication, I have developed my business up to this level..... when I was in year 21, I thought education was useless"(case 09). We identified and observed the experience of the respective field, which has a positive impact on the development of the existing business. (case- 02,09 and 10)

Family, friends, and government support- the external party support is also a good factor for starting the business, as well as developing the existing business. According to our study, most business owners have strong support from their family, including parents and spouses. However, the most notable finding is that most participants are not satisfied with government support, especially the government officials' behavior towards the development of the business. From a business perspective, government policies, rules, and regulations negatively impact businesses; for example, tax policy, import and export policy, and price-controlling activities. "I have no satisfaction with both government and government officials' work for the development of the agribusiness, it is very poor, no proper coordination, and no proper awareness programmed conducted. and also efficiency of government officials are very poor, if we take a loan from bank they asked more document, guarantees, etc. therefore very difficult to take a loan for new businessmen "it should be built the trust with bank for approved the loan ", I have no idea of government support; I have not received any help to develop this business", "no any programmed or awareness session conducted for us by government- I have not attended any programme" (case-02,03,05,06) most of the time government and officials are very inefficient and they are very lazy, salary will take from Government without good commitment" (Case-07) "the government is more inefficient, most of the officials work for only money-example- sometime after the power cut I called to the electricity board but they not been considered and ignored, then after I called to my friend of the board he will come and recover it soon, I pay some money for that service"(Case-09)

Excess labor/ enough time for start business - many of the farmers attended to the seasonal employment and they faced underemployment problem therefore enthusiastic people can start the business using the excess labor. "we as farmers attend to agricultural activities for only two main seasons few days, and using high technology and

modern equipment's in agriculture activities less demand for the labor, therefore we have excess labor to attend another job" (case-06) "I have freedom for my work, for example if we work in government or Privat sector we have to go to work every day if we cannot go to work will mark as leave and salary reductions" (case- 01)

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The current study aimed to address the research question: What are the influential factors in starting agricultural-based business ventures in rural Sri Lanka? Rural farmers faced many challenges in carrying out their agricultural activities; therefore, the creation of agri-based business ventures in the rural sector can be a main strategy to mitigate the problems of rural farmers. According to the result of the study, there are many influential factors to start agri base business venture by rural farmers, such as earn profit instead to monthly salary, due to fewer job opportunities in the rural economy, good financial ability/ availability of production factors, including technology, availability of infrastructure, and family support, which also impacts the business. At the same time, rural agri-based businesspeople were not satisfied with government support or the contributions of government officials toward the development of their rural business venture. They emphasized that they were not satisfied with government rules and regulations, which negatively impacted business development.

Study can be suggested following recommendation to the Government and policymakers to develop Agri base business venture in rural sector and create business culture in rural agriculture sector which are, Provide financial and initial capital to the rural unemployed people to start business ventures, provide the knowledge and awareness to build strong competencies of those who wish to start business ventures most of the business owners do not have enough knowledge and awareness for business operations, business registration, bookkeeping, stock controlling, marketing, price setting for their products.etc., Develop infrastructure in the rural sector including roads, transportation, market opportunities., Establish TVET institutions at the rural level of the country and attract the general public to TVET training. Provide awareness and enough knowledge dissemination programmes on how financial and capital resources can be managed. Most of the respondents (business owners) demonstrated very poor financial literacy and financial behavior.

6. Limitations

The current study does not reflect the entire rural sector; some regional variations can't be represented nationwide. Additionally, our study results may be limited to the sample group and may not include all regional differences. Finally, we propose that future research use large samples and mixed methods.

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