Growth Trend of Commercial Farming Activities in Goalpara District, Assam: An Assessment on Change of Rural Economic Landscape

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Abstract

In an agrarian economy, upliftment of rural economy depends on the growth of high income generating farming activities. The rural workforce is traditionally known to be skilled in agricultural activities; their economic fortune is essentially associated with modernisation and commercialisation of agricultural and allied agricultural efforts. The majority of the indigenous population in Goalpara district is tribal who had long been practised self-sustaining agricultural activities with limited exposure to market economy. The concept of market oriented agricultural production was introduced to the district mostly by the huge influx of agricultural Muslim immigrants since the early part of the last century. These immigrants who are at present 54.09% of the total population of the district, introduced commercialisation of agriculture and also agricultural marketing system for their economic survival.

The unique commercial agriculture of the Muslim immigrants is characterised by intensive use of land and multiple cropping, whereby they have captured the local markets. Under economic pressure from the immigrants and growing economic aspirations of the younger generations, the indigenous communities including the tribal population stated searching options to raise their income within their skill areas. Such a motivation of the indigenous population resulted in the growth of a number of commercial agricultural and allied agricultural farms since 80s of the last century.

Over last five decades Goalpara district witnessed a significant growth of commercial farms, which needs investigation as to their success, viability and economic contribution. The growth of such farms imparted visible change in the rural economic landscape of the study area and warrants policy supports for their viability and sustenance. The present work intends to evaluate the growth trend of such farms and to highlight the problematic areas confronted by farmers for a smooth and secured growth.

Keywords: rural economy, income growth, commercial farm, employment generation, sustain

Introduction:

Goalpara district is situated in the extreme western part of the south bank plain of the Brahmaputra river of Assam. Its geographical location is from $25^0 07"15"$ N to $26^0 13'15"$ N latitude to $90^0 06'30"$ E to $91^0 06'30"$ E longitude. The district has a total geographical area of 1824 sq.km. and a total population of 8,70,121 persons (2011). The district has a tribal population of 2,45,940 persons and a scheduled caste population of 43,493 persons, which constitute 33.26% and 3.79% of the total population respectively. Out of the remaining 62.95% of population 8.86% is indigenous non-tribal population and 54.09% is immigrant muslin population. Thus, the study area is an immigrant majority area.

All the tribal and other indigenous communities have long been practised self-sustaining agriculture as against the commercial agriculture of the immigrant farmers. The economic condition of the indigenous communities gradually started deteriorating as their market for their marketable items such as vegetables, pulses, oil seeds, fish, milk, etc. had been captured by the immigrant farmers. Under such circumstances, the indigenous tribal and non-tribal population started searching alternative economically beneficial farming activities that resulted in the growth of a number of commercial farms like small holding tea cultivation, rubber cultivation, banana farms, dairy farms, fishers, poultry farms, piggeries, Duck farms, etc. Presently, there are 1385 such commercial farms in the district owned mostly by the marginal and medium class indigenous cultivators. The growth of such commercial farms not only brought in significant socio-economic change in the rural landscape, but also provided better income to the rural communities. Such an economic growth-oriented motivation of the rural workforce needs to be sustained in order to boost both agricultural production and rural economy. A study of the related growth pattern is likely to provide the direction of government policy support that the farmers anticipate for survival and further growth of commercial farms.

Objectives:
The following are the objectives of the present study:
1. To access the trend of growth of 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 famers by adopting commercial farming, and
4. To identify the areas where the farmers need government policy support to sustain their farms.

Research Questions:
The research questions based on the objectives of the study are:
1. What is indicated by the growth trend of recently emersed commercial farms established by the indigenous farmers in Goalpara 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 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?

Methodology: The work is done with the help of both secondary and primary data and Information. The secondary data relating to location, distribution and number of different categories of commercial farms are collected from the data base of Agriculture & Veterinary Departments of Goalpara district and also from the C.D Blocks. The primary data related to income of the farmers and employment generation by them are collected personally from 30% of the farmers of each category of commercial farms using a questioner. The data and information collected both from primary and secondary sources are presented in the work in the form of tables, graphs and diagrams.

Analysis:
Growth trend of an economic activity reflect not only further growth prospect, but it also the advantages & constrains confronted by such activity. Table – I given below presents the growth trend of different types of commercial farms in the study area, since their initial stage of emergence (i.e., -since 1980)

Table – I Volume & growth trend of commercial farms (1980 -2024) in Goalpara district.

Type of commercial farm	1980 (number)	1990 (number)	2000 (number)	2010 (number)	2020 (number)	2024 (number)	TOTAL
small tea farm	12	86	368	154	29	01	650
Rubber farm	09	24	46	31	12	06	128
Duck farm	02	11	18	12	06	02	51
Poultry farm	12	34	58	38	19	05	166
Piggeries	03	22	36	16	08	02	87
Fisheries	O6	35	42	18	14	05	120
Banana farms	04	13	21	12	05	03	58
Betelnut farm	06	16	27	19	08	03	79
Dairy farms	02	09	17	11	05	02	46
Total ->	56	250	633	311	106	29	1385
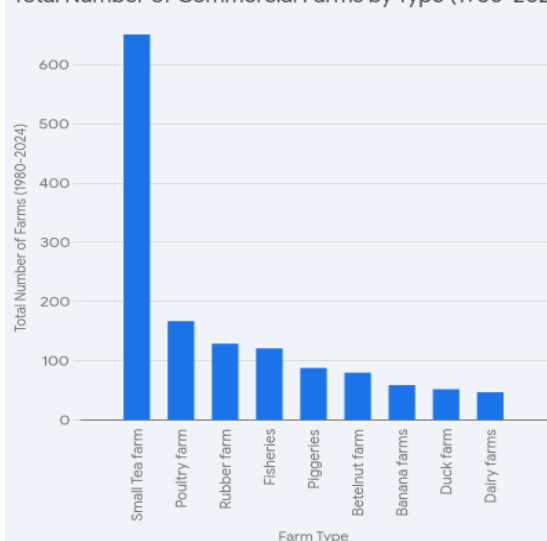
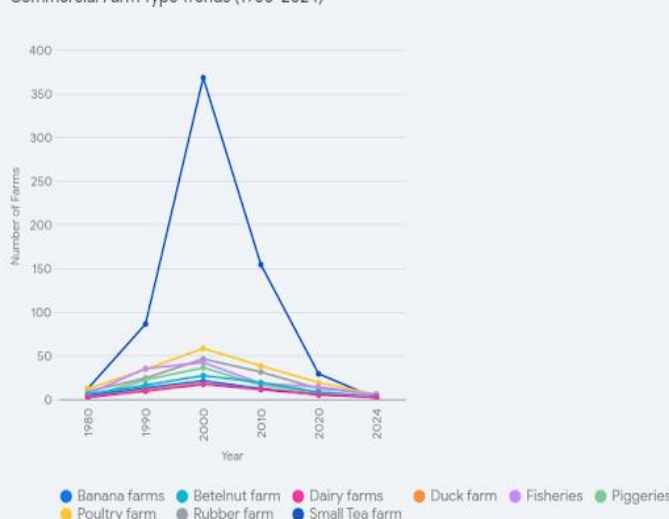**Fig. 1 (A)**

Fig. 1 (B)

As presented in Table-I and figures 1(A) & 1(B), all the categories of commercial farms had grown steadily during the period from 1980 to 2000 recording 1980 – 2000 as the peak growth period. But, since 2000, the growth presents a declining trend reaching a nearly stagnant stage after 2020. Such a growth trend is the clear indicator of involvement of certain retarding socio-economic or policy support related problems confronted by the farmers.

The observations from Table- I, necessitates an analysis on income status of the farmers before and after setting up their commercial farms. Such an analysis is likely to help in understanding income growth pattern of the farmers and also in identifying the highly beneficial and poorly beneficial types of commercial farms. Table – II shows variation in income growth from different types of commercial farms in Goalpara district.
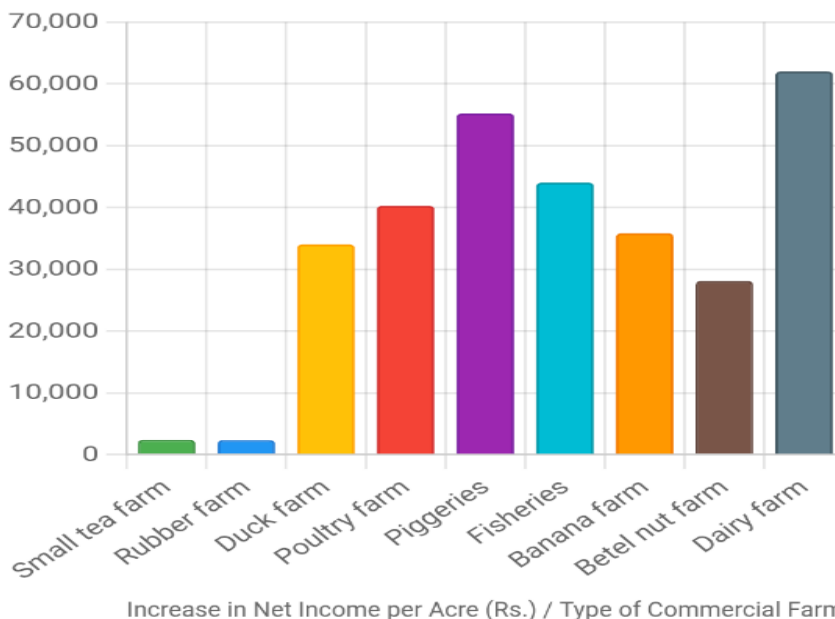
Table – II

Type of Commercial farm	Average annual net income per Acre of land from earlier agricultural practises (in Rs)	Average annual net income per Acre from the present commercial farm (in Rs.)	Increase/decrease of average annual net income per Acre (in Rs.)	Growth/ Fall in Average annual net income per Acre (in %)
Small tea farm	1,800.00	4,200.00	+ 2,400.00	+ 33.3
Rubber farm	1,500.00	3,850.00	+ 2,350.00	+ 56.7
Duck farm	2,000.00	36,000.00	+ 34,000.00	+ 1600.0
Poultry farm	2,250.00	42,500.00	+ 40,250.00	+ 1688.9
Piggeries	2,800.00	58,000.00	+ 55,200.00	+ 1871.4
Fisheries	4,000.00	48,000.00	+ 44,000.00	+ 1000.0
Banana farm	2,200.00	38,000.00	+ 35,800.00	+ 1527.2
Betel nut farm	2,400.00	30,500.00	+ 28,100.00	+ 1070.8
Dairy farm	2,000.00	64,000.00	+ 62,000.00	+ 3000.0

Variation in income growth of different types of commercial farms per acre of farming in Goalpara district, 2024.

FIG. - 2

As presented in Table – II and figure – 2; in all the categories of commercial farms farmers' net income increased significantly as compared to their earlier agricultural practises But, being marginal and medium class farmers, these newly grown farms are confined to limited land sizes ranging from 0.5 acre to 1.5 acres which restricts expansion/ further growth of such farms. Adversely, this limitation restricts the income growth of the farmers within a particular level. Further, among the 9 (nine) different categories of commercial farms found to be grown up in Goalpara district, dairy farming & piggeries are found to be high income generating, while fisheries, poultry, banana farms, duck farms & betelnut farms are found to be of moderate income generating and tea & rubbers farms

are found to poorly income generating. It is interesting to note that the commercial farms dependent on processing factories (ie,- tea & rubber) provide poor income growth to the farmers, while the farms with direct consumer products are observed to be high income generating. Such an observation indicates that there is some lapse in pricing system of un processed tea and rubber produced by the farmers. Table – III, presents sample-based estimate of employment generated by the small commercial farms in Goalpara district:

Table – III Sample based estimate of employment generated by different types of commercial farms in Goalpara district, 2024.

Type of commercial farm	Average full-time employment generated based on samples (in persons)	Average part time employment generated based on samples (in persons)	Average employment generated (both full & part time) based on samples	Estimated employment generation based on sample average (in persions)
Small tea farm	2	5	7	4,550
Rubber farm	4	4	8	1,024
Duck farm	1	3	4	204
Poultry farm	2	2	4	664
Piggeries	2	3	5	435
Fisheries	1	2	3	360
Banana farm	3	3	6	348
Betelnut farm	2	2	4	316
Dairy farm	4	4	8	368
Total	-	-	-	8,269

Fig. – 3

Estimated Employment Generation by Commercial Farm Type in Goalpara District, 2024
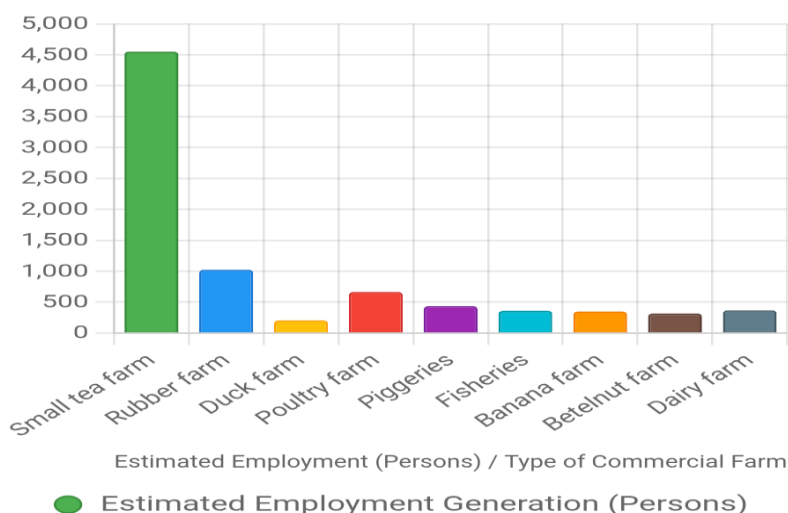
As shown in table – III and figure – 3, on the basis of sample based estimation, the existing commercial farms provide employment to 8,269 persons out of which 3,005 (36.3% of the total employment generated) as full time employees and 5264 (63.7% of the employment generated) as part time employees. The high employment generating farms are found to be tea & rubber farms, while the moderate employment generating farms are poultry, piggeries, fisheries, banana farms, betelnut farms & dairy farms. The lowest employment generating farm is the duck farms. It is interesting to note that the high employment generating farms, viz- tea & rubber farms are observed

to be low income generating, while the lowest employment generating farm, viz –dairy farms are the highest profit making.

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, 80,s of the last century reached the peak growth stage during 1990 - 2000 & a declining trend since then,

2. The two types of farms, viz -tea & rubber, which attracted growth priority among the farmers attains a nearly stagnant stage of growth after 2020,

3. High recession in growth of tea & rubber farms after 2010 is caused by gradually diminishing income due to incompatibility of price received by the farmers from the procurers despite of being high 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.

5. Excluding tea & rubber farms, all other commercial farms find secured local markets as their products are directly consumable, even if further growth anticipate intra district market connectivity,

6. Tea and rubber farms being dependent on processing factories, needs a sound and profit making pricing system for their survival and viability, and

7. The growing commercial farms preserve high potential of employment generation which is considered as an associated factor with income growth of rural population.

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 Goalpara 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 can be resolved by introduction of multiple cropping/raring strategies. The tea and rubber farms specifically need government-controlled price fixating authority for their re-vitalisation. All the commercial farms need financial, market and price support from the government for 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 to boost their growth.

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