

## **Agri-Business Incubation (ABI) Centre**

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### **Introduction**

The Agri-Business Incubation (ABI) Centre supports operations on business projects as a measure of enhancing the foundation for new technology-based industries and establishing a knowledge-based economy. It focuses on finding new ways of doing business in fisheries and allied agricultural fields by finding doors to unexplored markets. The Centre helps prospective entrepreneurs, by providing pro-active and value-added business support in terms of technical consultancy, infrastructure facility, expert guidance and training to develop technology-based business ideas and establish sustainable enterprises. It acts as a platform for the speedy commercialization of ICAR technologies, through an interfacing and networking mechanism between research institutions, industries and financial institutions. The Incubator at ICAR-CIFT differs from traditional ones. Business Incubators as it is tailored specifically for technology-based industries is operational at an area with a high concentration of fish production. This industry-specific incubator also allows new firms to tap into local knowledge and business networks that are already in place. ABI offers their services to industries not only in Cochin, but also all over India through virtual incubation. Beyond promoting business growth, the Centre is also trying to bring its benefits to all the fisheries communities in India.

Through this Centre, the Institute has reached out to more than 150 small and medium-sized technology and technology-enabled enterprises and has helped to create good number of jobs. ICAR-CIFT was able to successfully commercialize many technologies through the ABI Centre, and were the first among all ICAR Business Incubators to accomplish an international technical consultancy. Every month, more than 20 people approach the Centre for seeking business assistance, linkages, advice and tools. There are 93 registered incubatees at ABI, from all over India and it possess

good infrastructure facilities suitable for providing direct incubation to nine entrepreneurs in a corporate environment within the premises of Institute at a time. Twenty five companies catering to diverse fields in fisheries sector have already graduated from the Centre.

### **Role of Business Incubators in entrepreneurship development**

In a country like India, where entrepreneurs and small scale companies contribute to industrial growth, business incubators have become an important source of help for start-up entrepreneurs. Nowadays, government has been playing a key role in defining policies, programmes and instruments which support the development of micro, small and medium enterprises. The Government has been encouraging and supporting the small scale sector through policies for infrastructural support, technology up-gradation, preferential access to credit, reservation of products, preferential purchase policy etc. However the Indian SSI sector, despite its importance in industrialization strategy and immense potential for employment generation, confronts several problems in business development and management. In this context, business incubators which can help entrepreneurs turn their ideas into viable businesses and promote innovation, by providing business support services and resources have great scope and significance. In Indian agriculture, fisheries sector occupies a very important place in the socio-economic development of the country. It has been recognized as a powerful income and employment generator as it stimulates growth of a number of subsidiary industries and is a source of cheap and nutritious food, besides being a foreign exchange earner. Most importantly, it is the source of livelihood for a large section of economically backward population of the country. India's inland water resources including rivers, canals, ponds, lakes, and marine resources comprising the east and west coasts of the Indian ocean provide employment to nearly six million people in the fisheries sector. The fisheries technologies available with ICAR includes harvest and post harvest technologies, new and improved aquaculture methods, seed production technologies of finfish and shrimp, cost-effective and nutritious feed formulations for fish farming, test kits / diagnostic methods, ready-to-cook and ready-to-serve value added products, waste minimization/utilization technologies, byproduct utilization, pharmaceutical and biotechnological products, food packaging techniques etc.

### **Agri-Business Incubation (ABI) Centre at ICAR-CIFT**

The business incubation initiative of ICAR is directed to facilitate innovative involvement of all the players and stakeholders in the production and distribution of its

goods and services for attaining sustainable food and livelihoods security as well as for global competitiveness of Indian agriculture. The ABI Centre at ICAR-CIFT aims at establishment of agribusiness enterprises through IPR-enabled ICAR technologies. It targets creation of national wealth, employment generation and enhancement of stakeholder income by linking R&D system and prospective entrepreneurs through guidance, infrastructure facility, support services and training. The business incubation unit supports operations on business projects as a measure of enhancing the foundation for new technology-based industries and establishing a knowledge-based economy. It focuses on finding new ways of doing business in agriculture and allied fields by providing access to unexplored markets for achieving the objectives of increased productivity, poverty alleviation, nutritional, livelihood and income security. The objectives of the ABI Centre are:

- ▶ Commercializing technologies developed by ICAR- CIFT
- ▶ Helping entrepreneurs to commercialize business ideas utilizing the R&D back up of the institutes
- ▶ Providing pilot level production facilities in fisheries to entrepreneurs
- ▶ Imparting training for creating prospective entrepreneurs and value added manpower

### **Process of Incubation**

The ABI Centre supports entrepreneurs, from fledgling startups in need of basic small scale processing capacity to sophisticated businesses in need of R&D back up, office infrastructure and pilot/test market processing facility for the development of new products. It possesses good infrastructure facilities suitable for providing direct incubation for about nine entrepreneurs at a time in a corporate environment within the premises of ICAR-CIFT, at a time. The purpose of direct incubation is to support emerging companies through their infancy. It also provides virtual incubation to budding entrepreneurs who want to start new enterprises as well as to established entrepreneurs who need to increase the efficiency of existing ventures. The Unit regularly conducts awareness and technology promotional programmes for sensitization of entrepreneurs and to identify interested potential candidates for physical and virtual incubation. The residency period for direct incubatees will be normally two years, extendable by another year in special cases, depending on the progress of incubation. As the business venture

becomes mature enough, the concessions and the facilities provided to the incubated companies will be gradually withdrawn.

### **Enterprise and entrepreneurship development**

The Agri-Business Incubation unit has become a 'One Stop Shop', where entrepreneurs can receive pro-active, value-added support in terms of technical consultancy, and access to critical tools such as entrepreneur-ready technologies, vast infrastructure and other resources that may otherwise be unaffordable, inaccessible or unknown. With the aim of transforming the business incubator into a symbol of entrepreneurship and innovation, the ABI Centre explores the various structures and strategies to help small enterprises to grow and ensure a promising future in the global market. It provides an environment for accessing timely assistance and support required for establishment of technology-based business ventures. The Unit has already provided training to the incubatees on thermal validation, retort operations, development of value added products, shelf life study of canned fish products and hygienic handling and preparation of ready-to-cook chilled fishery products. It uses the right expertise in relevant fields to identify and analyze the constraints and barriers hindering the growth of a business, and devise appropriate strategies. The Unit has envisaged several capacity building programmes to help the incubatees build their competence in the areas of business practices, technology up-scaling, networking and financing strategies.

### **Incubation facilities under one roof**

- ▶ Furnished office suites within the premises of ICAR-CIFT, with shared facilities like secretarial assistance, computing, copying, conferencing, video conferencing, broadband internet and communication services.
- ▶ Pilot level product formulation facilities
- ▶ Access to modern laboratory facilities for product testing and quality control
- ▶ Access to well equipped physical and digital libraries

### **Pilot level production facility in fisheries**

A state-of-the-art generic semi-commercial production facility is made available to incubating entrepreneurs for developing value added products from fish. The ABI Centre provides facilities and staff support on a 'fee for use' basis to assist companies and individuals, with production and testing of product formulations provided by the

client. The user can experiment with new equipment and processing steps on old products or to link old equipment in new ways. For incubatees, the pilot plant is an ideal testing arena to determine commercial run viability of new products. The pilot plant also serves as a process lab, a place to see how processing equipment impacts food products under varying conditions. The pilot plant facility at ICAR-CIFT includes production lines for:

- Pre-processing
- Cooking
- Retort pouch processing
- Canning
- Sausage production
- Extruded products
- Chitin and chitosan
- Smoking
- Curing and drying
- Breeding and battering
- Product packing

### **Conclusion**

The ABI Centre at ICAR-CIFT, Cochin offers wide variety of technical, managerial, and administrative support to the incubating entrepreneurs. The incubation unit is expanding its activities at a rapid pace and trying to build a foundation for new technology-based industries, establish a knowledge-based economy and create new jobs in the agricultural sector by bridging the gap between private and public sectors, and finding suitable mechanisms for ensuring good entrepreneurial climate.