

The Gig Economy's New Frontier: Animal Husbandry

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ABSTRACT

The gig economy is driving substantial changes across industries, including India's animal husbandry sector, traditionally reliant on full-time agricultural labor. Increasingly, the sector is embracing gig work for its flexibility and efficiency. Technological advancements, like widespread smartphone use and improved rural internet access, have enabled digital platforms to connect farmers with temporary workers and specialized services, mitigating economic challenges and labor shortages. However, significant workforce management reforms are needed. Despite these challenges, the gig economy's growth in India's agriculture promises enhanced productivity, cost reduction, and improved access to professional services. Nevertheless, ensuring fair treatment of gig workers and maintaining high standards of animal care are critical priorities that require careful management. Overall, the evolution towards a more adaptive and resilient animal husbandry sector in India reflects its readiness to capitalize on technological progress and flexible labor practices for sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION

The gig economy has made significant strides across various industries, from ride-sharing to food delivery, and it's

now starting to impact the animal husbandry sector. This traditionally stable industry is undergoing a transformation, bringing about

both challenges and opportunities. The gig economy is reshaping many traditional sectors, including animal husbandry in India. This industry, a cornerstone of the rural economy, is undergoing significant changes driven by technological advancements and evolving labor markets. Historically dependent on full-time agricultural workers, the sector is now leveraging the flexibility and efficiency that gig work offers. The widespread use of smartphones and increased internet access in rural areas, coupled with economic challenges and labor shortages, are key factors in this shift. Innovative digital platforms and startups are central to this transformation, linking farmers with temporary labor and specialized services. These services range from veterinary care and dairy management to breeding and nutritional consulting, providing farmers with access to a wide array of skills and expertise without the need for long-term employment. As per a report by Niti Aayog, in India during 2020-21, approximately 77 lakh (7.7 million) workers were involved in the gig economy. The gig workforce is projected to grow to 2.35 crore (23.5 million) workers by the year 2029-30 (Bajaj and Rajan, 2024).

According to the 20th livestock census in 2019, India's total livestock population was recorded at 535.78 million, out of which bovines accounted for 302.79 million. However, the number of registered veterinary practitioners stands at just 67,784, which is significantly lower than the Veterinary Council of India's recommended range of 1.1 to 1.2 lakh practitioner (Tripathi *et al.*, 2024) emphasizing need of workforce management in this sector through gig work. As the gig economy expands within India's agricultural framework, it promises enhanced productivity, cost-effectiveness, and better access to professional services. However, this shift also presents challenges, including the need to ensure fair treatment of gig workers and uphold high standards of animal care. The

continued growth of the gig economy in animal husbandry signifies a move towards a more flexible and resilient agricultural sector in India.

1. Gig economy and emergence of Gig Work in Animal Husbandry:

The 'gig economy' refers to a labor market characterized by short-term, on-demand, and task-based work engagements (Tan *et al.*, 2021). Animal husbandry, which includes dairy farming, poultry, and livestock management, has traditionally relied on full-time farmers and agricultural workers. However, the gig economy is introducing part-time and freelance opportunities. Several factors are driving this change:

1.1. Advancements in Technology: The widespread availability of smartphones and internet access in rural areas has made it easier for platforms to connect gig workers with farmers. These platforms facilitate the hiring of temporary workers for seasonal tasks and the recruitment of specialists for animal health and breeding.

1.2. Labor Shortages: Many farmers struggle to find full-time workers willing to commit to the demanding lifestyle of animal husbandry. Gig workers provide a flexible solution, helping out during peak times like harvests or breeding seasons.

1.3. Economic Necessity: For individuals in rural areas, gig work offers a way to supplement their income without relocating or drastically altering their lifestyle.

2. Gig Roles in Animal Husbandry

2.1 Seasonal Farmhands: During busy periods, such as calving or lambing seasons, farmers often need extra help. Gig workers can assist with feeding, milking, and general animal care.

2.2 Specialized Experts: Veterinarians, animal nutritionists, and breeding specialists are increasingly offering their services on a freelance basis. This allows smaller farms to access high-level expertise without the overhead of full-time employment.

2.3 Tech-Savvy Workers: Modern farming often uses drones and remote monitoring systems. Technicians who can manage and interpret data from these devices are in demand and often offer their services on a gig basis.

3. Advantages of the Gig Economy in Animal Husbandry

Integrating gig work into animal husbandry offers several benefits:

3.1 Worker Flexibility: Individuals can choose gigs that suit their schedules and expertise, leading to a more satisfied and motivated workforce.

3.2 Cost Savings for Farmers: Hiring gig workers as needed can be more economical than maintaining a larger full-time staff, especially for small to medium-sized farms.

3.3 Access to Specialized Skills: Farms can benefit from a wide range of skills and knowledge without long-term commitments, enhancing their operations and productivity.

4. Challenges and Considerations

Despite the advantages, the gig economy in animal husbandry presents some challenges:

4.1 Job Security and Benefits: Gig workers often lack the job security and benefits that come with full-time employment, such as health insurance and retirement plans.

4.2 Maintaining Quality: Ensuring gig workers meet the necessary standards and

possess the required skills can be challenging.

4.3 Regulatory and Ethical Issues: Ensuring fair treatment and compensation for gig workers is crucial to the sustainability of this model.

5. Platforms and Startups in the Indian gig animal husbandry

India is witnessing the rise of several platforms and startups that are facilitating gig work in the animal husbandry sector:

5.1 Agribolo: This platform links farmers to a variety of agricultural services, including those related to animal husbandry. It provides access to veterinary care, farm management advice, and other essential services, thereby helping farmers find skilled labor when needed.

5.2 Stellapps: As a company offering dairy technology solutions, Stellapps aids farmers in optimizing their dairy operations using IoT-based tools. This technology allows gig workers to effectively monitor and manage dairy farms, enhancing productivity and efficiency (Banerjee and Kunamaneni, 2019).

5.3 Ninjacart: Although primarily aimed at connecting farmers with markets, Ninjacart also creates gig work opportunities in the logistics and supply chain management areas relevant to animal husbandry. This helps streamline the movement of goods and services within the sector.

5.4 VetnCare: VetnCare connects farmers with qualified veterinarians for on-demand services, including telemedicine consultations. This makes professional

veterinary care accessible to farmers in remote areas.

5.5 MooFarm: An app-based platform, offers farmers dairy management tools, veterinary services, and nutritional advice, training programs and connects farmers with gig workers for various dairy farming tasks.

5.6 Animal Husbandry Startup Network (AHSN): It links farmers with service providers and gig workers who specialize in different aspects of livestock management, such as breeding and disease control.

5.7 VetConnect: It connects farmers with freelance veterinarians and animal health specialists. It offers both in-person and virtual consultations, ensuring that farmers can access expert advice and treatment for their livestock whenever needed (Guzman *et al.*, 2021).

5.8 DairyGuru: This platform provides comprehensive dairy farm management solutions, connecting farmers with freelance consultants, veterinarians, and nutritionists.

5.9 KisanVet: KisanVet connects farmers with veterinarians and animal husbandry experts for on-site visits and virtual consultations.

6. The Future of Gig Work in Animal Husbandry

As the gig economy continues to evolve, its impact on animal husbandry is likely to increase. Technological innovations and a growing emphasis on flexible, efficient farming practices are driving this change. For the gig economy to thrive in this sector, stakeholders must address the associated challenges, ensuring that the benefits are shared among farmers, gig workers, and the animals themselves.

CONCLUSION:

The gig economy is creating new opportunities in animal husbandry, offering flexibility, cost savings, and access to specialized skills. As this trend continues, it promises to reshape the industry in ways that could benefit both workers and livestock farmers, paving the way for a more adaptable and resilient animal husbandry sector.

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