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Delivering Social Impact Via The Farm-to-fork Strategy and Sustainability Lens: The Kiwi Kisan Window

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the entrepreneurial story of KiWi - a portmanteau of the Kisan (meaning farmer) and Window (meaning window of opportunity) - a universally acknowledged Agtech start-up. The study exemplifies the continuous progress and innovations this start-up has made to develop a profitable model in the fresh food industry. KIWIKisan Window (KKW) aspires to provide a constant window of opportunities for Kisan (farmers) of India by means of Fair Trade practices that ensure transparency, respect, and fairness in business trading, as well as encouragement and support for marginalized farmers who strive for equality as they compete with middlemen and big players and loose on their fair share of access to business opportunities. The paper highlights milestones achieved in terms of the evolution of social enterprise KKW and Evolve Foundation, their business model to create a sustainable food system, and the challenges of initiatives to generate new ideas and experiments in the food industry. KKWaspires to live a healthy, sustainable life, and they apply this philosophy to all organic products, from farm to fork. It also emphasizes typical decisions and dilemmas faced by the start-up and the challenges ahead. Their strategic decision being analysed through VRIO framework.

Key words: Farm-to-Fork, Business model, Entrepreneurship, Startup, Innovation, Business development, Organic farming

Introduction

"An entrepreneur is someone who jumps off a cliff and builds a plane on the way down"

-Reid Hoffman

In mid-May of 2017, the cool breeze from the mountains and the sun's warmth inspired positive thoughts in the mind of the co-founder, who was sitting for registration at the Registrar of Companies located in ROC-Uttarakhand, India. She had no idea at the time that her company would one day be so successful that her business model would advance

to a point where she could haveover 700 offerings, 2 retail stores, international exports, and 3 Crore revenue in 18 months (Rebalance, 2019). The journey of KKW transpired from unusual successful attempts that emerged from usual failures in the Indian agriculture and food sector. KKW is a platform that allows Indian farmers to produce healthy food and customises product displays based on the consumer's life stage and medical conditions.

Two minds collaborated in the Himalayan foothills to create a better lifestyle and a healthier way of life. In search of their true purpose, Abhinav

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Ahluwalia, Founder and CEO of KKW and Cofounder of Evolve Foundation, and Nupur Agarwal, Co-founder and CMO of KKW and Founder of Evolve Foundation, founded KKW, a Dehradunbased Agtech Indian Start-up in food processing industry. Through this initiative, KKW, their target is to serve undiluted, unaltered, unpasteurized, free from additives and preservatives, raw, natural & direct from the farmlands. The desire to make a social impact has brought them to a point in their lives wherethey have accomplished a lot but feel as if they have done nothing. That bright day was full of opportunities and possibilities for them, like fresh morning dew, when they had the idea to provide a platform for local farmers across India to present the world with health-conscious foods. They are determined to uplift the lives and livelihood of the Indian farmers by providing a platform or window of opportunities to get fair prices for their produce and teaching farmers sustainable farming techniques to reduce exploitation of natural resources and pollu-

State of organic farming in India

India has the world's second-largest arable land resource. India has all of the world's 15 major climates, with 20 agri-climatic regions. The country also has 46 of the world's 60 soil types (Agriculture and Allied Industries, 2022). Chemical fertilizer consumption per hectare has risen over the years, particularly in the last two decades (Kumar, 2022). The Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare asserts that about 2.78 million hectares of farmland were under organic cultivation in March 2020. This represents 2% of the country's total net sown area of 140.1 million ha (Khurana and Kumar, 2020).

According to various research studies conducted in India, most farmers (except the large ones) are in debt to the point where they cannot even pay the interest on their debt because they are forced to take out new loans to keep their stoves running for just two square meals per day (Singh, 2022). It sets the farmers into a vicious cycle of low income or investment losses (Mahapatra, 2020). Chemical fertilizers are becoming increasingly evident as a non-sustainable solution to the problem of soil nutrient depletion caused by agriculture, particularly crop production (Kumar, 2022).

In comparison to the chemical fertilizer industry, the organic farming sector has received little attention and support from the Federal government and most state governments (Khurana and Kumar, 2022). Increasing the farmland under organic farming is one of the target that can be achieved by farm to fork strategy (Wesseler, 2022). The new ecoschemes are especially aimed at enhancing sustainable practices, such as precision agriculture, organic farming, agro-forestry, and carbon farming (Bazzan et al., 2022).

Beginning with an ideological and socialistic mindset

Nupur grew into a passionate and courageous woman as a result of her trials and tribulations, which did not come easily or quietly. She has been persistently goal-oriented since her childhood. She enjoyed unparalleled opportunities to get good quality education from top A-plus schools and passed with high scores in all her exams. She recalled,

I was not promoted to the subsequent class because my father denied one proposal cum donation to the school. In the springtime of my life, this failure shattered me. I was frightened and feeling low. Then my parents decided to change my school. It was a life-changing decision. From that day onwards, I always stood in the top 5 students until my college.¹

Nupur participated in different social awareness programs during her schooling and graduation, which developed the moral fibre to hold her own opinions and viewpoints firmly. It also created a sense of understanding of the communities' problems and dignity of labour and instilled social consciousness. After completing her bachelor's from Lancaster University, England, it had been a helluva ride for Nupur, the co-founder of KKW, since returning. At Lancaster University, the experience of contesting for and winning the post of Vice-President being the first Indian woman inculcated leadership skills with a high level of Emotional Quotient.

Those days added a little glamour to her life, but she surrendered the past and moved on in search of doing something better for society. After returning to her home country, she was ready to find a fulfilling career. She joined her father's printing business. When one jumps into a family business wholeheartedly too early in their career, sometimes that turns out to be the wrong decision. She was displeased with the decision to go into her family business. Her socialistic mindset was not satisfied with the things coming her way. With her agile mindset, Nupur

tried to explore other things where she could be satisfied. She started preparing for civil services since it symbolizes great power and prestige in India. When she got a chance to work with the central government of India, the bizarre reality of the bureaucratic system changed her perception. She demarcated herself from it. Looking back, She recalled,

I was not the person who can be ruled. I quit civil services preparations. Because I got frustrated with what I can't change or do something about. I cannot be slaved. You know I am quite a rebel by my nature. Since being so privileged, if I will not give back to society, the nation, and the unprivileged, who will do. I realized that my life's purpose is to empower the people and communities.

First Milestone: Dehradun Drum Circle (founded in 2015)

Nupur incessantly reassessed and re-evaluated her thought process, philosophy, and perspective to create a purposeful and impactful life. In 2015, She came up with a Dehradun Drum Circle movement to connect people of different age groups, gender, and religion from different walks of life. The goal of this initiative was to foster a musical connection among different groups of the community and to hear muffled voices that will express through music. She has been very successful in turning Drum Circle into a national movement, with over 20,000 people now participating. For creating such a unique and impactful movement, the Uttarakhand government has named her the state's Youth Icon (Nupur Agarwal's Evolve Foundation Uplifts Rural Farming In Uttarakhand, 2018).

As she embarked on her journey, during one of the closing ceremonies of workshops, Nupur met Abhinav Ahluwalia, the brain behind the start-up, KKW. Abhinav attended the School of Rural Management, KIIT University, and completed MBA in Rural Management, Bhubaneswar in 2011. They both did an activity together. Nupur recalled,

I was captivated by Abhinav's vision and drive. He had a strong urge to do something with a more significant direct impact. After lengthy conversations, I learned that Abhinav comes from a family background wherein they have been into farming business for 100 years. His parents and grandparents are farmers and experienced tremendous changes in their businesses. They were into grocery selling through retail, wholesale farming, and dealing with

farmers. That is why Abhinav understands retail very well. He has a very stronghold in this field and understands all the dynamics. He has a plethora of experience in agriculture and farming.

Second Milestone: Evolve Foundation (founded in 2016)

Abhinav worked for the Gujarat government as an agriculture consultant for tribal development under Shri Narendra Modi, serving as the honourable Chief Minister of Gujarat. They were handing out subsidies to millions of farmers in Gujarat and fertilizers and pesticides with the motive that it would be incredibly consequential. However, Abhinav was fully aware that these government efforts would not make a significant difference in the lives of farmers. He understands the essential subtleties of every little crop and every part of harvesting and farming because of his vast experience and education in this field. Entrepreneurs always need feedback and learn from the network. They both were socially active, innovation-driven, tech-savvy, driven by enthusiasm to do something different, and strived to empower people, communities, and societies. They both were searching for purposeful and meaningful means of their livelihood.

Abhinav intended to carry on his father and grandfather's agricultural and agribusiness business, but with a twist. Nupur's father owned and operated a printing and packaging company, where she had hands-on training initially. The idea took some time to germinate. Nupur and Abhinav targeted this industry as it is something they inherited, and they understood and learned unknowingly about it, which ultimately helped them create this idea. The union of Nupur and Abhinav resulted in forming a social enterprise, **Evolve Foundation** which was founded in 2016. This project was undertaken in order to eradicate poverty and hunger in rural areas of India.

The idea was to create smart and sustainable Indian rural villages. The Evolve Foundation is a social enterprise that believes in creating smart, sustainable Indian rural villages by developing a plan table stationery cottage industry. It also promotes ecotourism. The Foundation aims to empower people at the grass-root level, providing skill development, education, health care, and more livelihood means. To harness the potential of the rural part of our country and channel it for generating income,

they developed a plan table stationery that is 100% biodegradable and carbon-free. They produce plan table pens (Evolve Pen), paper, pencils (Evolve Pencil), calendars, and notepads. Once used, the Evolve Pencil can be planted, decomposed, mixed with the soil, and grow into a plant, same with other products. She stressed,

Our goal was to instil a respect for farmers in rural India. When you cultivate your own food, you realize its value and the person who grows it. It's extremely easy to buy four tomatoes and throw away two, but the farmer has spent three months nurturing it on the field.

They plundered everything from the village and it becomes the USP that they incorporate the entire community to create products and services. They buy seeds from farmers on a fair trade basis and offer social recognition as well as organic agricultural instruction and know-how. Women are paid to assemble and package things in exchange for monetary compensation and social respect. The Foundation participated in the elections by producing plan table badges in 2019 for the BJP government. Many MNCs began to use their goods for CSR activities, conferences, and promotional events (Norzom, 2020). The Foundation also collaborated with Greenpeace, made postcards for the United Nations (Norzom, 2020).

Third Milestone: The KKW Launch (founded in 2017)

After some time, they reassess the situation to comprehend, adapt, and implement changes in their business model in response to the Foundation's inability to have a tremendous meaningful change. Running a cottage industry was necessary but not sufficient for Nupur and Abhinav. They were going for the stars and hitting gold. By merely running this cottage industry, rural. Since it would not generate enough cash for poor and marginal farmers. They realized they were not adding enough value and needed to re-establish their livelihoods. They desired to develop a proper business model based on a socialist ideology. They believe that socialism does not imply that everything should be free but rather that everything should be just and sustainable. She observed,

The primary reason for our society's imbalance is the desire to be free of something. We adopted a Jaunsari village named Tauli while working with the Evolve Foundation. With the

adoption came the awareness that farming was the primary source of income for the majority of the villagers. Moreover, the moneylenders took most of what they earned in exchange for their goods. This reinforced our idea to create an ecosystem that benefits farmers and helps them realize their worth. Not only this we are dedicated to encourage responsible and healthy lifestyles, and also promotes organic and conscious farming (Madhurdave, 2020).

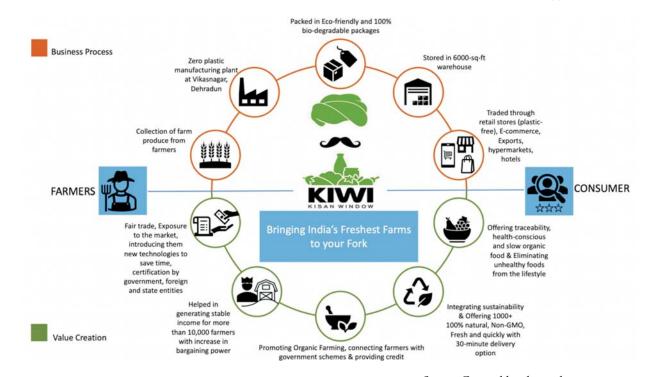
Again, they turned the problem into an opportunity by surrounding it with a business strategy that benefits all stakeholders. As a result, **KKW** was founded in 2017 by Abhinav Ahluwalia, Founder and CEO and Nupur Agarwal, Co-founder and CMO of KKW. KKW is a response to what they saw as a broken system in the agriculture business sector, one of India's largest sectors, unable to provide efficiencies. Since they have the gumption to seize the opportunity when it comes up, she stressed,

When we think about the basic necessities of living, food, undoubtedly, tops the list! Food is such a common part of our mundane lives that we barely pay any heed to it when it comes to nutritional value.

The farmer remains at the heart of KKW. Abhinav believes, "An agripreneur can only become a true agripreneur once he understands and feels the pain, joy, anger, success, failure and hardship of a farmer" (Rawat, 2022). The following is their value creation model presented in Figure 1.

The Dilemma

"Farmers don't have money for logistics, and are in a hurry to sell the produce. The reality is that an Indian farmer does not have enough money to pay for logistics and as the product is highly perishable, he is always in a hurry to sell his produce as soon as possible," explains Nupur Agarwal in an interview (Thaker, 2020). Initially they encountered significant difficulty in establishing stores because they are in agribusiness and deal with groceries. Their main concern was that the grocery store should be open where there would be high footfall. However, where there would be higher footfall, the rent will also be higher. They do not have a big budget and cannot afford the high-priced places because the grocery selling business involves a low margin and a high risk. As a result, they sought out locations with high footfall, space at lower rents, and sound economics.



Source: Created by the author

Fig. 1. Value creation and business process of KIWI Kisan Window (see online version for colours)

Then they decided to open their first store at a petrol station, which generally have a high footfall. She said.

To reach more people & spread our goal further, we decided to start with Chandigarh. We collaborated with Indian Oil Corporation to promote & 'Pledge a Healthier Chandigarh.' To aid this initiative, alongside IOCL, we offered people the opportunity to fuel not only their vehicles but also their health.

She further added,

We are also attempting to change consumers' perceptions that groceries can be purchased from fancy stores as well. Groceries do not have to be purchased in the most unsanitary locations. Because you are what you eat, fresh fruits and vegetables can be purchased from premium and unique grocery stores. Most Kirana stores are filthy, with mice jumping over vegetables and spiders and insects.

VRIO Analysis of the "Where to Sell" Strategy

The resource-based view (RBV) is a theoretical framework for studying and explaining organisational competitive behaviour (Das and

Teng, 2000). The RBV resource approach assumes that the organization's success lies within itself, or

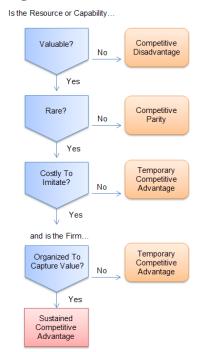


Fig. 2. VRIO framework adopted from Strategic Management (F.T. Rothaermel, 2013)

BIGGEST DILEMMA: "WHERE TO SELL"			
Valuable?	Rarity?	Costly to imitate?	is a company organized to exploit it?
YES	YES	YES	YES
When compared to the decision to open a store in a mall, this strategy adds value to the organization by allowing the company to take advantage of high footfall at the petrol station. Because this location is inexpensive, it will lower their overall costs.	Their skill, capabilities, know-how and process expertise is rare. They know how to leverage distribution and transportation capabilities in the most efficient and effective manner.	Maintaining relationships within and outside of the organization and using them to gain support and cooperation is expensive and time consuming. No other competitor is doing it the way they are executing.	Certainly, the founders an aware of ground realities They know how to efficiently manage and ful utilization of resources.

Fig. 3. KIWI Kisan Window: VRIO analysis

Source: Created by the author

more precisely, in its valuable, intangible, and imperfectly imitable resources (VRIO condition), allowing it to achieve a long-term competitive advantage (Barney and Clark, 2007).

KKW's capability to arrive at the decision of opening the retail stores at petrol stations and resolving the dilemma of "where to sell?" can be analysed with the applications of VRIO model. Let's see what kind of competitive advantage, if any, does this capability provide?

In case of capability to resolve the "where to sell" dilemma and opting petrol station for the same, KKW enjoys a sustainable competitive advantage.

Disruptive Business Model: KKW

This social enterprise is leading with new dominant design in the food processing industry. It deals with more than 1000 products, including fresh fruits, dry fruits, tea, and coffee. The products are certified organic by Jaivik Bharat, Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Nupur and Abhinav work with small and marginal farmers from all over the country and procure fresh and healthy food from them, which they bring to their warehouse & distribute throughout the country and abroad after processing it. The company provides fair and direct trade to the farmers and good quality food to the consumers and ensures the betterment of the **environment** by helping farmers indulge in organic farming.

Creating values for Customers

Nupur is not only empowering the farmers (producers) but also the consumers as they sell great quality, healthy, and organic food, produced at a cheaper rate through their retail stores (Pathak, 2020). The KKW has diligently tried to bring the best to the con-

sumers. From acquiring the best quality organic and healthy conscious foods to making them available for the consumers through different platforms. She recalled,

Our consumers are our priority. End users are essential to us; we need to get good value for their money. In turn consumers must understand the brand's efforts, why we're doing this, and why buying this product will not only add value to the product but also to their good karma, allowing them to enter an ecosystem where they know where the product comes from, how it benefits their health, and that they're paying for the right product, unlike any other FMCG grocery product.

They reasonably supply a diverse product line and raise customer understanding to help them make better product choices while making a purchase decision. They even categorized foods and recipes based on health conditions, including PCOD, depression, anxiety, gastrointestinal, high blood pressure, diabetes, thyroid, migraine, and many more. In addition to this, they are:

- Offering organic and genuine products for a healthier living
- Playing a crucial part in eliminating harmful products from the diet through our products
- Introducing an organic way of living
- Eliminating unhealthy foods from the lifestyle

Carve out a new market for farmers

The problem of small farmer livelihood is aggravated since small farmers suffer from production risks and many market risks like the absence of a market, poor price realization, high transaction cost, and poor bargaining power due to small market surplus (Singh, 2020). KKW provides a lot of value in terms of product expertise, such as what to grow, when to grow, and how to grow. Even though they work in this sector, farmers are still oblivious of various government schemes and policies. She said,

We are trying to help them to give them schemes, provide them an affiliation with the government schemes to go into organic training and training them with other modern farming technologies and things like that. Also bringing them into online system which is future of the world.

Trading with KKW allowed farmers to increase their income from farming and take pleasure in what is still considered a labor job in India. They are helping them to convert traditional farming into an organic one. She recalled,

During the green revolution, when the government declared that they would send fertilizer to the farmers, but these farmers did not get any fertilizer. They, by default, become organic and sold their crops as the normal ones. So, what we did was we got those vegetables certified and completed all legalities related to the certification process. We are doing our best to get them formally enter the ecosystem by advising and helping them.

In addition to the above, KKW is also helping the farmers by

- Providing the farmers with opportunities for fair trade, which guarantees stable finances
- Getting them involved in organic ways of farming proves beneficial for their crops
- Introducing them with new technologies helps save time
- Arranging loans for them through trusted sources to ensure reasonable terms
- Giving bargaining power to farmers

Ensuring sustainable production and consumption

Since organic farming is a method of growing produce, but it does not guarantee high quality. KKW strives to bridge the gap between the most natural production method and a high-quality standard. Producing at a slower pace increases the purity & authenticity of products. Therefore the whole line of Organic KKW products is called SLOW ORGANIC FOODS. It is certified by the USDA (NOP), India Organic (NPOP), and the European Union (Madhurdave, 2020). She said,

When it comes to our product, we offer healthy food options. People in India eat Maggi and Momos despite knowing they are unhealthy. There are minimal healthy food options available. In India, very few people discuss health benefits at the core micronutrient level. This is what KKW is doing; we emphasize health benefits in our products. We share delicious recipes with our customers via social media, YouTube, and other channels. Even so, we engage in various activities to create a healthier generation. We are ensuring that farmers and other stakeholders receive a fair trade price and that people treat food as medicine, thereby making the world a better place to live.

Businesses are increasingly embracing traceabil-

ity as part of their efforts to improve sustainability. Traceability and transparency are becoming increasingly crucial for business success (Konstantinov, 2021). Traceability give their company a competitive advantage. She said in the interview,

We are using a promotional technique wherein our customers would get entire storytelling from Farmer to Fork for every product. Any customer who visits our store or buys products online can scan the QR code over the product. It will show the entire journey, supply chain, and location of the farmers. Because of the privacy issue, we do not disclose the address and contact details of the farmers. We are very different from other start-ups. We are providing traceability and adding value in guiding them about different techniques and getting associated with a lot of other agencies.

Kisan Window has won an award from the Government of Uttarakhand "Paryavaran Gaurav Saman" for having zero plastic manufacturing plant and retail stores. Nupur and her team do not use any plastic equipment and infrastructure at the factory and retail stores. All their packaging is ecofriendly and 100% bio-degradable (Pathak, 2020).

Farm-to-Fork Strategy

The Farm-to-For Strategy is an essential part of the KKW and the European Green Deal as well. The F2F Strategy, lauded as a cornerstone of the European Green Deal under the 2019–2024 European Commission, intends to make the EU food system equitable, healthy, and ecologically sustainable (Schebesta and Candel, 2020). In light of this, the Farm to Fork strategy aims to improve food consumption patterns through the following actions: (1) making the sustainable and healthy choice the easy choice; (2) making it easier to identify sustainable and healthy products; (3) stopping the rise in overweight and obesity rates; and (4) halving the per capita food waste (König et al., 2021). Even studies have demonstrated that the F2F strategy considerably improves the effectiveness of the innovation system by supplying a clear and consistent objective and a variety of practical measures intended to assist creativity, knowledge, and skill development (Reinhardt, 2022). KKW is also working on the line of the European Green Deal.

In 2017, Nupur Agarwal co-founded the KKW, through which she works directly with farmers on a fair trade basis to create jobs by purchasing fruits,



Fig. 4. Farm-to-Fork Route Source: (Startup India Showcase, 2020)

vegetables, and grains from them. Then this agricultural produce is passed through different stages in a facility in Vikasnagar, Uttarakhand, before selling through KKW retail locations. Then they store them in warehouses, package them, and ultimately sold through different distribution channels. She recalled,

Connecting farmers with the company, paying directly to them, has doubled their income. Farmer are economically benefitted by this.

6.5 Offline to Online (O2O) Sales (2020)

KKW does its bit for farmer brethren of its origin state Uttarakhand by making sure local produce is bought from them on a regular basis creating a cycle of business for them on fair pricing. KKW also organise Farmer's Market for state based farmers who can directly sell to customer there (Pathak, 2020). KKWis a business-to-customer (B2C) and business-to-business (B2B) marketplace that began with the vision of operating through a brick and mortar transactional model.

KKW's retail outlets account for the majority of sales, and they now have three in India: two in Dehradun and one in Chandigarh, as well as a 6000-square-feet warehouse and processing facility in Vikasnagar, Dehradun.Awareness about healthy and conscious food in the general publics is a very time consuming process, which consumes a lot of time and financial resources (Pathak, 2020). Online mode offers leverage to scale and grow. She recalled,

KKW was always designed to be an offline retail store. ByMarch 22, 2020 though, we collected orders over WhatsApp and delivered them to people's houses. Because of the coronavirus outbreak, we developed our App during the first stage of the pandemic between 22nd and 30th March, 2020. We launched the same on 1st April, 2020.

The Covid-19 pandemic has prompted new shop-

ping habits, and even as the pandemic fades, customers continue to demand cross-channel shopping (Burns et al., 2022). They immediately launched their app and an e-commerce site after the first lockdown (kisanwindow.com). Their products are sold on Amazon, Big Basket, Flipkart, Gogii, Otrove, Tata Cliq, Green Life Bazaar, Smytten, and a variety of other websites. E-Commerce is proved to be a promising channel with economies of scale structure well in place for KKW and dependability of tried and tested sales channel for food products in India. It will likely help KKW capitalize on the growing momentum in online shopping by allowing customers to buy from anywhere, expanding customer reach, avoiding standing in line to make payments, being available 24/7, saving time, increasing brand awareness, and assisting with business expansion. In addition, it also provides the opportunity to feature all products listed according to the food categories based on health conditions; less cost of setup, operation & maintenance, and reviews available can help build more customer trust.

Conclusion

Farmers are considered the backbone of India in our country, where more than half of the population is engaged in agricultural activities. KKW works directly with farmers at the ground level to encourage them to practice organic farming. They assist farmers by providing them with technical know-how to ensure sustainable resource use and the production of high-quality goods. The organization aims to provide a channel for farmers to sell their produce directly to the market, thereby eliminating the middleman. KKW works to facilitate a more direct relationship between consumers and farmers. This relationship is the result of their sincere efforts to ensure the purity of the product as it passes between the farmer and the consumer.

The tasks they are doing is very challenging. The

main problem is the production of authentic organic food. Production of certified organic food is rarity and is very challenging to grow due to unforeseen weather conditions. Logistics is an added issue that they have with the agriculture field. Transporting the food product in time and in proper conditions from farm to consumer is very big challenge. It is challenging to bring digital efficiency to the farm-tofork journey, despite the fact that they are doing their best. Nevertheless, KKW has provided a stable income to over 10,000 farmers, and the company plans to connect with many more in the coming years. Alongside its stellar growth, the company is also taking rapid strides toward achieving profitability. They wanted to make a difference through their integrated farm-to-fork business model.

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