



3rd GLOBAL CONFERENCE on BUSINESS, ECONOMICS, MANAGEMENT and TOURISM,  
26-28 November 2015, Rome, Italy

## Agritourism: An Educational Tool for the Students with Agro-Food Profile

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### Abstract

Agritourism is an incredible educational tool with varied expected effects on the educational plan. Pupils, students, teenagers and adults understand better: the rural traditional culture, the production and the distribution processes of the agricultural products, the importance of healthy food in people's lives, the preservation of the environment, etc. Educational agritourism is an alternative form of mass tourism for areas where the latter cannot be organized. The educational agritouristic activities for the students with agricultural major envisage: a thorough understanding of the public function of agriculture, raising awareness for healthy food, developing healthy dietary habits, learning the way in which the agricultural products are produced and marketed, first-hand experience along the whole agricultural year. Furthermore, students can have a better understanding of the life in the rural areas and this can make them want to keep the agriculture culture, perpetuate the traditions. They are given the opportunity to experiment new situations and establish an emotional and direct contact with nature. As for the teaching higher education staff, the benefits will consist in the introduction of the environmentally friendly agricultural products in the faculty, in teaching the theoretical and practical knowledge needed for the new agricultural technology.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of BEMTUR- 2015

*Keywords:* farm tourism; education; direct educational activities; students;

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## 1. Introduction

The term agritourism is generally used to describe any type of activity based on the relation between agriculture and tourism. It designates an old concept, the same type designated by the other types of tourism, bounded particularly by practicing tourism in the rural areas: i.e.: agrarian tourism, agricultural tourism, farm tourism, village tourism, countryside tourism and recreational-educational rural tourism. All these forms of tourism tend to focus on the main types of activities practiced by the visitors in the rural environment. The main purpose consisting in becoming accustomed with the customs and the traditions of working the land, raising animals, craftsmanship; each activity leading to developing new knowledge about rural culture (Benea, Petroman: 2006; Mot, Petroman: 2014; Petroman et al, 2014).

The rural tourism is totally opposite to the urban tourism as its main purpose is to become aware of the rural culture, farm activities in rural areas, local authentic values, etc. Thus people will be able to value more the cultural identity (Momir et al, 2014). The rural tourism has other advantages as well, i.e.: learning how to prepare local food, learning about the natural resources and the heritage of the rural communities, etc. Romanian traditional food is not very well known around the world; however “those who have tasted it once will never forget it” (Constantin, 2014). More than this, rural tourism is a benefit for those looking for the specific tranquility of the rural areas, it brings to light the life, art, culture of the rural heritage; “to take part and to learn real activities is the essence of life at the country side”(Petroman 2013, p. 34, our translation).

Even if it is seen as a form of school tourism, the rural tourism and agritourism are less attractive than the adventure tourism, but it can be a strategy, worth taking into consideration, for the training the young people who are preparing to become specialists in various fields, i.e.: technical, biology, forestry, agro-zootechnical, etc.

Specialists make the distinction between the activities inside an agro-touristic farm and those outside it. They think that even if agriculture is the main activity in the rural area, the activities that take part outside the farm such as: craftsmanship, wood sculpture, leisure activities are becoming more and more important (Holmes, Tschanz, 2004; Petroman et al., 2015)

## 2. Material and method

To emphasize the educative role of the agritourism, we suggest several activities that can contribute to the cultural and educational development of the students who are trained to become specialists in the agro food sector, with emphasis on the activities where the involvement of those willing to learn is directed to favour the implementation of the theoretical knowledge in the practical activities.

## 3. Results and discussions

The agro-touristic activities have an educative character and they need to fulfill several characteristics: to take part in a rural area or at an agro touristic farm, to bring benefits to the agricultural industry, to have as a basis the activities or products offered by the producers, to have a direct contact between the agricultural producer and the student to be trained or the visitor of the rural residence.

The educational agritourism is a kind of strategy in order to use a farm to attract tourists and students for educative purposes, either for fun or for active involvement in the farm activities or in the rural environment. This type of tourism is also an alternative to increase the income and the potential economic viability of small farms and of the rural community and a way to support the agricultural economy, when the local agricultural producers are no longer competitive.

The educational agritourism can be developed as a basic component of a business model able to support the agricultural entities to promote their activities at various festivals, i.e.: the agro-tour type. It can also lead to set up leisure farms for people interested in exclusive agricultural activities: mostly students, in our case. In these types of activities people cannot only experience common agricultural products, but also food, walks in corn field labyrinths, direct contact with farm animals, contention, cow milking, and equitation.

Several requirements need to be fulfilled so that the educational effect be at the level imposed by the educational trainers:

1. The planning of the visit or of the training stage depends greatly on the season and on the specific activities that take place at a farm in a certain time of the year. We suggest a prior discussion between the accompanying teacher and the farm owner. The latter is not only the host, but also an educator in charge of transmitting valuable information to the students preparing to become experts in the agro food field. The students who take part actively in the farm activities can be remunerated or be offered a meal with the products at which they contributed and at the technological fluxes they witnessed.

In the case when the educational agritourism activity consists only in a farm visit, either fees have to be considered, as this is a common practice, or visitors are given the opportunity to buy specific farm products.

2. The management of the general activities. In planning the activities at an educative agritouristic farm, the farmer has to take into account the following aspects for an effective training of the students:

- flexible way in planning the activities;
- offer each student the possibility to take part at every practical planned activity;
- establish clear rules to make the visit secure and comfortable, and without disturbing the farm activity.

3. The management of the group of students and their safety. The management of the behaviour of the group of the students who take part in the practical training or who visit an agritouristic farm is the responsibility of the teachers and of the accompanying staff. The success of the activity depends entirely on the cooperation of the parties involved; the information needed for the practical training can be sent only if the visitors' group is eager to know.

We think that it is needed to introduce a supplementary type of management, i.e.: the management of the impact of the visitors on various areas of the educative agro touristic farm. Therefore, we elaborated several strategies and visitor management practices function to the area of the farm where the practical training or where the educative visit takes part.

On the above mentioned area the following strategies and politics are to be considered:

- on the alleys on the farm, impact resistant vegetation are to be planted;
- on the field - the visitors' paths have to become overgrown with grass;
- set up programs to eliminate invasive plant species;
- set up special places for resting and eating;
- inside the farm: build access areas to ensure the protection of the visitors and limit the contact with dangerous animals;
- cover the canal holes to ensure safe movement;
- announcements- to give instructions for visitors.

In the case of educative vegetal agro touristic farms, the most popular activity is "pick with your own hand"; a kind of recreational educational tourism for students and the same time a source of income for the farmers.

A practical training model, based on seasons could consist of:

Spring:

- technological training of vegetable growing;
- lessons given by the producer;
- fruit and vegetable presentations, etc.

Summer:

- preliminary explanations on the crop maintenance (herbicidation, weeding, fertilizer administration, etc.)
- cereal harvesting;
- picking fruits and vegetables;
- walks on the wheat field;
- traditional way of preparing bread;
- learning the baking technique and boiling corn technique.

Autumn:

- picking fruits;
- learning the wine technology: preparing, storing wine;
- learning the traditional way of preparing canned vegetables and pickles;
- learning the traditional way to make prepare a traditional sheep cheese, branza de burduf;

Winter:

- learning the methods of pruning fruit trees and vines;

- learning the technology of preparing the traditional pork meat products.

In the case of the animal farm agritourism or the educative agritouristic farms, of mini zoo type, the most popular type of educational activity is to learn to care for your favourite animal. This is a kind of both recreational tourism and education one, for those who are specializing in the agricultural field because they can apply firsthand the theoretical knowledge they acquired, under the direct supervision of the farmer and the accompanying teachers. The chance to interact with animals can be a wonderful learning experience, not only for students but also for the adults.

At this time, we have to highlight that even if the healthy animals could be carriers of bacteria that could make people ill, most people do not get sick by simply touching an animal. The truth is that certain categories, i.e.: very young people, very old people, pregnant women and any people irrespective of their age, with a deficient immune system are at risk of getting sick because of the bacteria carried by the animals from an agritourism farm.

That is why we are suggesting several monthly educational activities that can take place on a farm without endangering the lives of those who, for their education, interact with animals. In January, you can visit the farm to see new-born lambs, goat kids, to observe their behavior or the behaviour of the lactating females, or simply enjoy a ride with a horse drawn sledge.

In February, people can interact with the new-born foals or even take care of the horses. In March, they can admire the flocks of sheep in the field, can hike or enjoy a ride with a horse drawn cart. During the months April and May, people can take part at the animal identification, sheep shearing, estimation of sheep products and of the consumption of traditional food, such as lamb roasted, fresh sheep cheese, balmos (a traditional food made of corn, milk, cheese, etc.) etc.

In June and July, visitors can observe the behaviors of animals in loose housing or on the pasture and experience the way of obtaining traditional products. In August and September, students can learn the technology of preparing dairy products for the winter, how the mutton pastrami is made by the shepherds, etc. In October, students will learn how to preserve forage for animals and the ways in which the main species of animals are prepared for the winter period. During the months of November and December when the animals are in housing, students will learn to appraise the animals, i.e.: estimate production, take part in establishing the yields out of pig slaughtering and learn the traditional technologies for the preparation of the raw-dried traditional sausage.

It is essential to understand that the main purpose of educational agritourism farm is, besides the practical training of the future specialists in the agricultural field, the sale of products produced in farms.

Thus we give some suggestions for the "market management" of the educational agritourism farm:

- display of the price for the products exhibited at the farm entry;
- priority in the display of the seasonal products, such as strawberries, tomatoes, cherries;
- free access to products;
- direct sale on the site for the products hand-picked by visitors ;
- provide information about the products;
- group the plant and the animal products;
- offer bonuses to visitors;
- use unique and diverse display devices.

We think that in this way shopping tourist villages can be organized in the areas where there are educative agritouristic farms; in areas where handmade products can be sold and where the folk craftsmen can make demonstrations as far as the manufacturing of ceramics or wood products are concerned. This can be a very profitable experience for those willing to learn new things.

First-hand experience does not always mean an involvement in a practical activity; it can also consist in watching the stages of a process to be aware of the phases of a technological process, more or less elaborated. The contact of the students living in urban areas with the vegetables, fruits, dairy products is limited to their use under different processed forms. They are not aware of the seasonality concept. That is why if practiced at a lower level, but with a higher cultural, economic and social impact centered on education, agritourism can cover a varied range of educational- recreational activities, unexpected for those unfamiliar with the rural life, local traditions and customs.

#### 4. Conclusions

Educational agritourism as well as its other types of tourism: agrarian tourism, tourism in the countryside, farm tourism, rural tourism, etc. denotes any type of activity that is based on the relationship between agriculture and tourism. The agritourism farm is open to the public looking for amusement and education, pupils and students who are preparing for the agro food domain. This kind of educative tourism is in the form of educational tourism is considered a form of strategic alternative to mass tourism in the rural areas where it cannot be conducted due to the negative impact on the human communities and on the environment.

Agritourism is an incredible educational tool, the agritourism farm having two great educational principles: direct experience and direct observation.

Although it is considered a form of niche tourism because it addresses a limited number of visitors, the educative agritourism can also be considered a kind of school tourism that can help educate not only those who are preparing for the agricultural field, but also those seek the tranquility of the rural areas and at the same time interested in the traditional rural art and culture.

#### Acknowledgements

This paper was published under the frame of European Social Fund, Human Resources Development Operational Programme 2007-2013, project no. POSDRU/159/1.5/S/132765.

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