

ASPECTS OF SUSTAINABLE RURAL TOURISM - FARMERS' MARKETS AND FARM VISITS

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Abstract

Agriculture is an essential component of sustainable food tourism and there are numerous benefits to a broad range of stakeholders that can be derived from enhancing and sustaining agriculture-tourism linkages in this context. The potential to contribute to rural development and sustainable livelihoods, support for the agricultural and artisan food sectors and reduced economic leakage in the tourism sector are just a few of the potential positive outcomes. Tourists also benefit through the opportunity to experience authentic local culture and heritage, and engage in a meaningful way with local producers and suppliers. Agrotourism differs from food tourism in that agrotourism is inherently rural, while food tourism is predominantly urban, but can be rural as well. The paper shows the role of farmers' markets and farm visits like parts of sustainable tourism.

Key words: agrotourism, local products, market

INTRODUCTION

There is a solid business case to include agriculture in a discussion of food tourism. An increasing number of consumers and travellers alike are interested in the origins of their food. This interest has set the stage for rural economic development in the form of agricultural tourism. A central and well-known component to local food systems includes farms and farmers's markets, which is a form of agricultural tourism, also referred to as "agrotourism".

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The paper is based on a bibliographic study regarding the farmers' markets and farm visits. The case study refers to farmers' markets and farmers' stores which are opened in Sibiu county.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Agrotourism can be broadly defined as any agricultural operation serving consumers that may include retail sales and provision of services involving food, fiber, flowers, trees, shrubs and any other farm products. [3]

The agrotourism is compatible with green economy. That compatibility is sustained by the idea of green tourism is tourism practiced in relation with Nature. Green tourism represents one of the three branches of tourism industry, together with travel industry and hospitality industry. [6]

Two emerging components of agrotourism are activities and events centered around farmers' markets and farms. Food tourism trends to focus on prepared food and drink, while agrotourism focuses more on the raw ingredients and the farming experience.

Farmers' markets and farm visits connect travelers to local culture while offering a wide variety of activities focused on local agriculture and cuisine. Agrotourism can also be an opportunity to build partnerships and collaborations that promote more sustainable economic development for urban and rural areas, support farm preservation and increase farmers' livelihood, while helping create diverse and memorable food tourism experiences for travelers. To fully understand the current trend of food tourism's relationship with agricultural tourism, a brief review of farms and farmers' markets is needed.

The historical story of Europe is not only about the many kingdoms and wars, but also of the lesser known lives of ordinary people. Europeans lived largely in the countryside until the last century, when more people began moving into the cities. The work of the local inhabitants was connected to nature and their products were eco-centric. Their inherited experience and expertise were passed down from generation to generation. Travel distances were far, so people were very connected on the local level. Local cuisine developed that still today distinguish countries and regions on the Old World. Most people know at least something about the historical influence on French, Italian, Greek, Spanish and Scandinavian food worldwide. The contribution aims to open the door from the local farms and farmers market into the simple kitchen that evolved in the New World. Today, there is a food movement to get back to the basics. [9]

The Old World way of eating is now becoming the mainstay in the modern countries of central Europe and America and is influencing the food culture of today on a global scale. [2]

To survive during the middle ages, villagers often worked as traders and craftsmen, while at the same time needing to harvest their gardens for food production. With the development of trade in the Middle Age, large urban clusters, also known as agglomerations, were formed. As the population grew, a growing number of villagers could no longer be fed by suburban gardens. Out of this problem grew a solution: “the fair day”. Once a week, farmers and artisans from neighboring villages would come to sell their produce and artisan products. These “fair days” or “markets” always took place in larger towns. Every today, traditional food markets are not generally held at small farms, but in towns. In the same tradition, they are open or covered outdoor marketplaces where the sellers and buyers do business. One of the oldest continuing markets in Europe is the Borough Market in London, England. [20] North America’s oldest market is located in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. [21]

Along with establishment of farmer’s markets, where food is sold directly from farmer to consumer, the role of farming has also evolved.

Farming in Twenty-First Century

Although the primary goal of agriculture is food production, even with government subsidies, farmers often need other gainful activities on the farm to survive. One good way for farmers to do this is through “farm tourism”, where visitors can rest or enjoy farm activities in a natural environment. A central farm activity is consuming homemade food and drink in an authentic environment, including homemade wine from the farm or from a local winery. Many farms also have their own farm store to supplement their income. In some places a tourist can spend more days on the farm and “help” in traditional tasks.

In Austria there are over 10.000 farms solely engaged in tourism activities. [11] These activities include farm and vineyard tours, farm stays and educational workshops, farm stores and stands, wine tasting and tours of vineyard, homegrown farm meals with farmers, hosting and participating in local food fairs, festivals and events. In Slovenia there are thousands of farms that engaged in these gainful agri-business activities, over 500 of which deal with daily trips and tourism.

Farms in Nowadays

The structure of farms and farming has experienced many transformations during the past two centuries. Farming moved from family operated to the large corporate industrialization of mono-agriculture farming. Over time, the negative effects of commercial farming intensified, as did their negative influences on the environment and the health of farms workers and consumers. [1]

The current trend is moving away from large commercial farms in favor of small and medium sized farms working to reestablish more sustainable farming methods, coming to be known as the alternative food system. It arises out of concern for issues such as biodiversity loss, global competition, environmental degradation, economic downturns, and consumer influence. The concept is that an alternative food system is

sustainable and offers an alternate model to conventional agriculture. The overarching concept of an alternative food system is to include practices such organic farming, aquaculture, direct marketing such as community supported agriculture (CSA), farmer's market, and community based farming. Engaging in these alternative practices typically requires farmers to build or strengthen new skills sets and it encourages diversification.

Farm diversification offers farm several benefits including reducing environmental impacts, entry into niches markets, creating new agriculture industries which can strengthen rural communities, decreasing economic risks, and creating a more sustainable food system. [5]

Agrotourism fits nicely into this model. It can consist of local farms providing attractions and activities on their farm while inviting local residents and tourists to participate. In the U.S. alone there are 23.350 farms that provide some kind of agrotourism services. [12] Carlo Petrini founded the Slow Food Movement in Italy as a movement against the industrialization of food that became not only toxic to the land and the consumers, but also which created a monoculture of tasteless food. [15] He had to show consumers that they had the power to choose the type and quality of food they eat. Also he understood that the industrialization of food was standardizing taste and leading to the annihilation of thousands of food varieties and flavors. He saw that "it was imperative for an eco-gastronomic movement to exist-one that was ecologically minded and concerned with sustainability, and one that acknowledged the connection between the plate and the planet". That slow food movement can support and protect small growers and artisan producers, support and protect the physical environment, and promote biodiversity. [14]

In USA Alice Waters "is a pioneer of a culinary philosophy that maintains that cooking should based on the finest and freshest seasonal ingredients that produced sustainably and locally"[13] She created an integrated community of local farmers, ranchers, and food artisans dedicated to

sustainable agriculture practices to supply local restaurants with finest and freshest variety of ingredients available. They have created a new form of "farmers' marketing" by providing organic, sustainable, locale produce, meats, and artisanal foods directly to the restaurants. [8]

Now to international level there is a Slow Food Movement which include more than 1000.000 members from over 130 countries. [15, 19] We can say there is a real marriage of food and travel which opened up opportunities for agrotourism worldwide: travelers can readily include farm-to-fork experiences as they travel abroad.

Local farmers, ranchers, food artisans and entrepreneurs, including farmers' market associations, have a chance to tap into the agrotourism business in a creative manner.

Farmers' Markets

Farmers markets are found in shopping centers, in streets, banks, hospitals, art centers, indoor shopping centers, arenas, empty lots, and many other areas where permitted by local jurisdictions. The main purpose for farmers' markets is to provide fresh regional food to local residents and support local agriculture [7]. They can also serve as strong connectors along food tourism trails and create destinations that attract tourism in rural communities, such as the development of local and regional food festivals. Roles that farmers' markets can fulfill include providing a venue for nutritional education, cooking demonstrations, food security and social justice education, community building, supporting the local food movement, and entrepreneurial incubators for food artisans.

The new multimedia methods includes dynamic websites, social media and applications developed for smart-phones and tablets. Farmers and farmers' market managers need to stay on top of the constantly changing electronic media tools available to them to remain competitive and to be successful.

Food tourism presents of individuals and organizations that created successful farm-to-fork enterprises. These endeavors not only

help sustain the local food system, but they also have created agrotourism opportunities. Promoting a farms' market as a leisure experience for consumers is also an emerging topic in the recreation and leisure fields, but just like other forms of leisure provision, it requires thoughtful facilitation to be successful.

Some authors show that for Romania, tourism is one of the branches of the economy, which together with agriculture could contribute to increase of GDP per capita. For this purpose, there are needed innovative and sustainable strategies in these sectors. [4]

Local products and traditional products support the local economy, by selling the products the capital returns to the farmers. For the farmers, these activities are the main source of income. The local products shelled directly by the farmers maintain the cultural heritage of the rural area by preserving local traditions (local events and festivals). [10]

Case study: farmers' market and farms opened for visits in Sibiu county

At Sibiu the first store for BIO products was opened since 2004. The 10 farmers associated in this shop can also be contacted through its site. [16] Some of them allowing to visit the farm, while all these farmers and sell their products directly from the farm.

Another part of the farmers joined together and founded the Association of Producers of traditional and organic products "Marginimea Sibiului".[17]

Farmers selling local / traditional / BIO products attend weekly to the peasant market "Transylvania". From spring to autumn they can sell their products to the "Fair Country" which are opened in Open Air Museum from Dumbrava Sibiu. [18]

Some examples of farms which are opened for educational visits in Sibiu county or in surroundings are: Willy Shuster household, Moşna, Sibiu county, Cişmaş household from Albeşti, Mureş county, Călugăr Anca household from Saschiz, Mureş county.



Photo 1. William Schuster household from Moşna, Sibiu county



Photo 2– Cişmaş household from Albeşti, Mureş county



Photo 3. Products from Anca Călugăr household, Saschiz, Mureş county

CONCLUSIONS

Farmers and farmers' markets have a long history of providing locally grown food to their communities. The development of industrialized mass food production and processed foods of the twentieth century

disengaged many urban people from the land and the local food production that once was part of daily family and community life. With the resurgence and growth of food movements worldwide, along with education and outreach by food producers and supporting associations, local food products are once again begin integrated into many people's daily lives.

The integration of agrotourism elements such as farm visits and farmers' markets is a necessary part of the food tourism offering. As potential for food tourism grows, it is critical for tourism and agriculture industries to build networks, partnerships, and alliances within the communities where they operate and across regions and industries to ensure sustainability of these ventures.

Traditional marketing campaign methods such as brochures, signage, radio and television, need to be enhanced with new multimedia methods.

The development of new niches for farmers' include mobile farmers markets, on-site farm stores open to the public, on-site education programs, tours and cooking demos, and commercial kitchens founded by farmers.

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