

# THE MAIN DETERMINANTS OF AGRITOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

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## Abstract

*The aim of this paper is to investigate whether agritourism, as additional activity of farmers, has a potential to advance their business and to determine what their conditions are for the agritourism offer.*

*The key methods that are applied are historical method and interview, and other standard methods are used (analysis and synthesis, description, logic, etc).*

*Agritourism means providing services by farmers to tourists, which contributes to the economic empowerment, agricultural development and related activities in rural areas. However, although significant progress has been made in development of agritourism activity in the Republic of Serbia, the state is not encouraging and it is necessary to make additional effort in order to help farmers to get interested in providing services to potential tourists, in order to make tourists interested in services of agricultural holdings.*

*For agritourism development in the Republic of Serbia, it is necessary to develop adequate strategy, to invest in infrastructure, to educate farmers and potential tourists, to make promotions, financial incentives, legal framework and standard application.*

*Key words: agritourism, development, agricultural holding, Serbia.*

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## Introduction

Agritourism is an activity of agricultural holding and additional source of income, and includes agritourism activities such as: stay on the farm,

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educational visits, recreational activities and sales (promotion) of agricultural products and products of handicrafts. Agritourism is one of the way for improvement of economic stability of rural communities and agricultural holdings.

Agritourism helps to solve some of the problems of rural areas, such as unemployment, maintenance of culture and traditions, migration of the rural population, etc. (Havlicek et al., 2009).

Agritourism is an alternative to mass tourism, which has begun to develop at the end of the last century, as a result of a new apprehension of the agriculture importance, the saturation of urban lifestyle and marketing development, which diversified tourism supply. The visitors can participate in various agricultural activities and learn traditional rural activities.

In this paper, intention is to depict the state of agritourism activity in the Republic of Serbia, as well as factors, which affect this important activity. The attitudes of farmers in connection with possibilities for agritourism development are investigated, believing that they are essential.

Given that primary agriculture with increasing difficulty provides additional source of income, and that agritourism is one of the model of rural development in the European Union countries, it seems justified to make an effort to investigate possibility of this development in the Republic of Serbia and fixing the economic status of agricultural holdings.

Development of agrotouristic activity in the Republic of Serbia is not satisfactory, but system operation could provide additional income for farmers, stimulate rural development, stop migration from village to city and bring a number of other benefits.

Recently, significant number of researchers devoted to researching the agritourism supply, so their results will be presented in this paper. We tend to show definitional elements, impact factors, attitudes of farmers, development effects and perceived advantages and disadvantages of agritourism.

## **The Aim of the Paper**

The aim of paper is to present the possibilities for the agritourism development, to research readiness of farmers to offer agritourism supply in perspective, as well as to investigate more important impact factors on development of this potentially important activity.

## **Agritourism as Farmers' Activity**

In recent years in the Republic of Serbia agritourism is developing as a part of rural tourism, which takes place in agricultural holdings, where there are possibilities, beside primary production, to offer food, drink and accommodation service (Miletić & Todorović, 2003).

Rural areas have the potential to develop different forms of tourism, from which agritourism can give significant results with adequate support. In a situation characterized by an army of unemployed, abundance of natural resources and relatively developed agricultural sector, agritourism development provides an opportunity for achievement of revenue, stopping the depopulation of villages, infrastructure modernization and raising the educational and cultural level of the local population.

Balanced economic, environmental and social development includes investments in rural areas and not only in primary agricultural production, but in various activities, so the business activity in rural areas takes contours of multifunctionality or diversification of income sources. Therefore, society finds interest to support programs connected to agriculture, which the EU has recognized a long time ago. Each program, which has economic validity and is environmentally suitable can be co-financed by the province, state and the EU funds. Agritourism is certainly included in an activity that deserves attention.

The diversity of rural areas and cultural attractions in the Republic of Serbia are important and present developmental potential for agritourism activity. A condition of using the potential is the improving the infrastructure, in order to understand significance of nature and agriculture, culture, history and tradition.

Various strategies of income diversification of farmers encouraged agritourism through agriculture development of small investment, historical gardens, heritage festivals and food and cultural landscapes, interactive farms, processing of traditional products (Đorđević-Milošević

& Milovanović, 2012). It is evident that only those events, festivals and agritourism activities in rural areas, which are based on originality and authenticity, will make progress in future (Potočnik-Slavič & Schmitz, 2013).

Agritourism is an activity complementary to agriculture, because it absorbs agricultural food products and in that way contributes to achievement of the basic and additional income for farmers.

Advantages of agritourism are (Chiritescu, 2011):

- diverse and unique tourist supply,
- rich natural resources,
- huge cultural, spiritual and historical heritage,
- remarkable ethnographic source, folklore and gastronomy,
- hospitality of rural population and traditional crafts (handicrafts, sculptures, and the traditional organic food),
- the interest of the country and the European Union to support the rural areas, through program development of (agri)tourism.

The supply of agritourism activity refers to sightseeing and enjoying in the village setting, entertainment and various attractions, such as purchase of local products (food, crafts and souvenirs) (Adam, 2004).

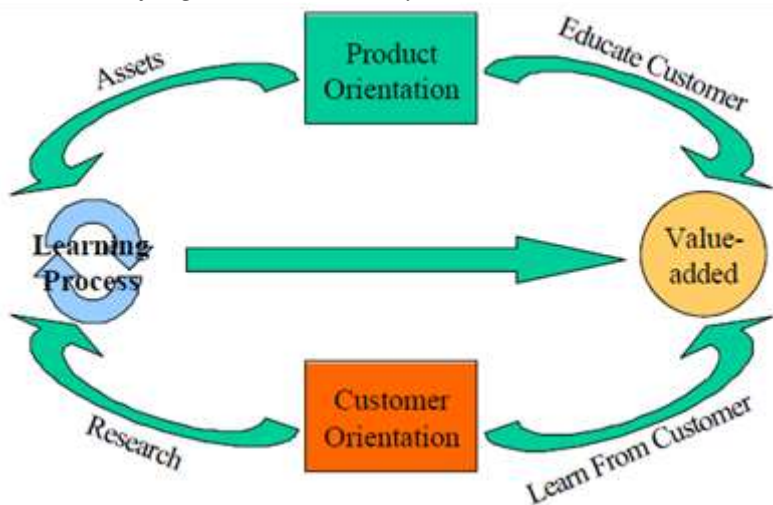
The European Union (EU) in the framework of program of rural development encourages, supports and finances development of additional activities in rural areas, where agritourism is one of the most significant activities.

The share of farms, which offer tourist services, in Sweden and Switzerland are 20%, in Austria 10%, in Germany and the Netherlands 8%, in France 4%, in Italy 2%, while in Spain, undoubtedly one of the major tourist destinations in the world, only 0.5% of farms provides tourist services (Fagioli et al., 2014).

In the recent years in the Republic of Serbia, the agritourism projects are initiated, developed and promoted, financed by both internal (budgetary and private) and international sources, mainly from the European funds. Product of agritourism is complex and is a result of some specific interactions between rural areas, people who live in these areas and local specific products. The quality of agritourism products refers to the quality of natural resources (the beauty of the environment, flora and fauna,

pollution levels), the quality of social infrastructure (welcome, tradition), the quality of accommodation capacity (local style), services quality (accommodation, food, entertainment), instruments for communication, promotional activities quality, hygiene, involvement in traditional activities (e.g. grape harvest, painting Easter eggs, etc.) (Muhcina, 2009).

Figure 1: *Focus of Agritourism Activity*



Source: *Comen and Foster, 2006*

In the study of Potočnik-Slavič & Schmitz (2013), there are two general trends of agritourism development in the European Union:

- modern prevalence of small-scale and distributed agritourism enterprises, which are mostly operated by active members of farming family (real agritourism). Ciervo (2012) claims that the real agritourism, firmly connected with agriculture, local culture, rural lifestyle, is able to resist the global market power, commoditization of culture and homogenizing the place and behavior. If the rural tradition and cultural heritage are put in attraction function, the harmony, which previously existed, can be significantly disrupted.
- progressive separation from agricultural activity, where agritourism company infiltrates in the tourist market, offering product as a response to the requirement of potential tourists (commercial agritourism). In fact, commercial agritourism is aimed to enhance the income, regardless of socio-cultural, landscape and environmental requirements. In such way, agriculture is marginalized, comes to urbanization of rural lifestyle and cultural hegemony, which may damage the reputation of the rural areas.

Agritourism in the Republic of Serbia is not recognized by the youth (Đenadić et al., 2016), which implicates that it is necessary many things to do in order to promote and improve agritourism services. Agritourism marketing is often directed to specific niches of visitors, because it is difficult to obtain the information from the market. Special magazines, local newspapers, newsletters trade associations and trade shows can be useful, because agritourism capacities are often advertised through them. After identification of customers, it is important to document clearly what requirements or specifications visitors have for products or services (Kuehn et al., 2000).

Agritourism marketing should be focused on (Ryan et al., 2007: Potočnik-Slavič & Schmitz, 2013):

- identification of clients that are interested in attractions
- research the activities that are popular or are becoming popular
- differentiation from competitors (heritage, location with attractive contents, special services and products),
- enhancing the allocation for marketing (10-30% of total income)
- branding agritourism is necessary due to current confusion of rural tourism, which results in unrecognizable tourist product.

Veselinovic (2013), finds that agritourism does not give significant economic results in the Republic of Serbia. Agritourism development will stimulate creation of normative framework by opening a multitude of opportunities for development of this type of tourism, but also agriculture development and total development of rural areas.

### **Factors of Agritourism Development**

Nowadays lifestyle, which is characterized by stress, hurry, lack of time and lack of quality activities, contributes to development of rural tourism, giving the possibility of spending a holiday in a pleasant atmosphere, which reminds us of the ways of our ancestors (Đenadić et al., 2016).

Over time, agritourism will take a mass character, encouraged by tourism associations. In order to develop agritourism, tourist societies and associations of municipalities are founded. Agritourism activity includes farmers' associations and hospitality and tourism industry. Data of Association "Rural tourism in Serbia" for 2013 rather gives optimism for agritourism development, and it is about 970 registered sites, which could

be classified as agricultural stay and self-service bed (Petrovic et al., 2015b).

In the study by Gao et al. (2016), respondents mostly value landscape features, which can be found near the farm, especially the natural and cultural values. They want to see wildlife, water resources, historical elements and domestic animals, suggesting that they can serve as an attraction.

Peace of mind and comfort are significant motives for many tourists, and it is not surprising regarding the stress level during work, especially by the most active individuals (Nitescu, 2015).

For providing services of agritourism, farmers are motivated by diversification of income sources, social window to the outside world, clients education about possibilities of consuming the agritourism offer, through farm work and other activities. Over time, it is possible that agritourism generates more profit than primary production on the farm.

Urban population is interested in agritourism for the next reasons (Ou & Shih, 2002):

- stay in nature, recreation, rest, peace, relaxation,
- the need for new experiences,
- search for domestic quality food,
- escape from everyday activities,
- events and manifestations,
- saving money comparing to other forms of tourism,
- nostalgia of people who originate from rural areas.

Agritourist may be (Chase et al., 2007):

- someone who has an interest in preserving the farms and rural lifestyle,
- someone interested in higher food quality,
- someone interested in exploring the rural landscape,
- someone who is probably middle/aged or young and physically fit,
- groups, such as extended family, school children and so on.

If the farm location corresponds to tourist requirements, other critical factors get much attention, then agritourism has potential to prosper, independently from the basic activity of agricultural holding.

The success of agritourism is determined by numerous factors from which the most significant are (Comen & Foster, 2006; Veselinović, 2013):

- the ability of farmers to study and apply knowledge,
- attractive location (nature),
- finance,
- normative regulation of the activities of providing services,
- support of local community (financial incentives, tax cuts),
- marketing/understanding the clients' needs and their expectations,
- social skills, acting and stage skills,
- creativity,
- the ability to manage the experience of visitors.

Education, as a way to learn about legal possibilities, to start activities in agritourism area, presents the prerequisite for tourism development in the Republic of Serbia (Veselinović, 2013). In order to use full potential of agritourism and create sustainable, competitive tourism product, it is necessary to conduct market research, as the research of needs, motives and desires of consumers (tourists) (Đenadić et al., 2016).

Small and fragmented properties, orientation to other forms of tourism, underdeveloped awareness of the environmental value are some of the factors, which influenced on weak tourism development in rural areas (Todorović & Bjeljic, 2007). Seasonal character of agriculture and weather are significant problems that agritourism activity is faced to (Ryn et al., 2006).

For agritourism development, information about agritourism offer is very significant. It is often difficult to obtain the information, and there is lack of specialized portal for promotion of agritourism capacities. Seeking for information about agritourism offer often looks like looking for a needle in a haystack (Havlicek et al., 2009). The solution could be focusing on connecting the information about agritourism supply, on different levels- from the service provider (personal web site) to a national platform for agritourism support, where every farmer could have possibility to add information about their own supply.

The success of agritourism is determined by (Chase et al., 2007):

- providing the authenticity of the farm and experience;
- educating tourists and interaction with them (possibility for obtaining the recommendation) People, who decide to visit farm, seek authentic experience and they are interested in learning about it;



- providing service quality;
- providing sufficient capacity (staff and infrastructure);
- safe and accessible environment.
- joining with other similar organizations due to exchange information and experiences, promotions etc.;
- creating good relations in community (favorable public image) and
- flexible planning business and risk management.

### **The Attitudes of Farmers about Agritourism**

Results of the research about possibilities for agritourism development of agricultural holdings are not optimistic. The farmers find numerous reasons because of which they are not able to devote themselves to services provided to tourists. Very small number of them is already included in agritourism activity or they are in the initial stage of developing capacity. The farmers are not interested in providing services to tourists (80.5%), and significant number of them, especially small producers, do not believe that there is an agritourism demand in our conditions.

Most of respondents are men, mean age 53 years, whose farm is less than 10 ha of land, which implies that they have lower income, which leaves space to increase it by the additional activities on the farm. It is interesting to remark that significant number of them acquire additional source of income from other sources (25.6%), and negligible number are those who are occupied with agritourism services (only 7.4% of them). Only 4.7% of them state that they completed agricultural education, while others attended seminars and workshops, and expert knowledge are mostly acquired from older generation.

The research covered readiness of farmers that in perspective offer some services from the area of agritourism, and by Likert scale, the answer is reached:

1. Visit the holding with aim of sightseeing - 4.1
2. Educating for agricultural activities- 3.4
3. Operation at the holding- 2.6
4. Product sale to tourists- 4.7

The farmers mostly express readiness for services of visiting agricultural holding, sale of their products, while for educating the tourists and their possible involvement in some activities on the farm, they are not ready.

They point out that working involvement on the farm could be risky for them, as well as for the owners' of holding (injury, crops damage, harassment of animals and other adverse events).

Table 1: *Agritourism in Agricultural Holdings (n/87)*

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS	%
Age of farms holders	
- to 40 years	36.4
- 40-50 years	16.2
- above 50 years	47.4
Eudcation	
- formal	4.7
- informal	95.3
Annual income	
- under 5000 euros	5.1
- 5000 -10000 euros	21.7
- above 10 000 euros	73.2
Work experience	
- only on the farm	74.4
- work on farm and off farm	25.6
Offer services to tourists	
- yes	7.4
- no	92.6
Interest for providing services to tourists	
- yes	19.5
- no	80.5
The existence of a minimum prerequisite for providing services to tourists	
- yes	63.5
- no	36.5

Source: *Authors' research*

According to the survey on the attitudes of farmers about their readiness to develop agritourism capacities, we can conclude:

- education of our farmers is mostly informal (95.3%), which can be the reason for non-accepting the possibility of diversification of income sources (development of agritourism capacities). It is necessary to educate the farmers about possibilities which are provided to them through additional activities on the farm;
- $\frac{3}{4}$  of agricultural holdings generate income in self-direction;

- small number of farmers is included in providing services to tourists;
- farmers are not interested in providing services to potential tourists (80.5%), although the majority of them dispose with minimal prerequisites for these services (36.5%);
- incentives are necessary, both for farmers and for visitors due to agritourism development;
- it is necessary to develop multifunctional strategy of rural development in which agritourism would gain in importance;
- integral marketing efforts are needed (agritourism promotion).

### **Valorization Possibilities of Rural Areas through Agritourism Development**

In the Republic of Serbia, where small and fragmented agricultural holdings dominate, the search for additional income is surely necessary, thus, training for providing service to potential tourists is offered as possibility. Wine tourism routes and festivals, wine cellars, organic food, farms visit, farm work demonstration, horse riding are just some of the options for generating additional income.

Given that consumers of organic food greatly value positive impact on health, consider it as richer in vitamins and minerals, specifically value locally grown products (Prodanović et al., 2017), agritourism supply should have it in mind.

By supply of additional contents in wineries (locally produced food, stories and anecdotes, guest accommodation, wine manifestation), development of both wine and agritourism is enabled. Numerous tourists have as travelling motive wine tasting within the rest and recreation in rural areas (Jovanović et al., 2015). The incentives for viticulture development, cultivation of indigenous and high-quality sorts, branding and protection of geographical indications are the condition of wine roads development, respectively, agritourism.

Hundreds of thousands of abandoned houses, which will be difficult to put in function of agricultural production, can be the basis of agritourism development. In many EU countries, agritourism is included in rural development strategies, by which the intention is to prevent the migration of rural population, to create new work places and to contribute to social-economic progress of less developed and underdeveloped areas (Veselinović, 2013).

On the territory of Vojvodina, there are conditions for the agritourism development, respectively, grange tourism. Granges present the record of a former way of life and work of farmers in Vojvodina, which include house for habitation, economic yard, surrounded by arable agricultural land. Currently, there is trend of reconstruction of former granges and their adaptation for providing agritourism services. Grange tourism is financially supported by grants from the provincial budget (Njegovan et al., 2015).

Almost half of population of the Republic of Serbia inhabits rural areas, where exist natural and human resources for multifunctional development, where agritourism would be just one of the possibilities. It is possible to put mentioned resources in function by empowering the capacity and support of state for rural areas. The Law on Tourism tends to stimulate this potentially important industry in the Republic of Serbia by enabling private individuals (employees, retirees, older juveniles) to be engaged lawfully in agritourism. Provider of agritourism service must certainly meet some requirements (health status, technical and sanitary hygienic conditions, record keeping, categorization). Individual provides agritourism service through local tourist organization, agency or other legal entity, and on the basis of the signed contract (Veselinović, 2013).

High participation of population in rural areas and availability should be the backbone of advancement of agricultural sector, and withal increasing the current share of agriculture and agritourism in the gross domestic product (Kuzman & Prodanović, 2017).

In order to promote rural and other forms of tourism in EU countries, a number of programs are developed (Nitescu, 2015):

- Program “EXPERT” is based on innovation principles, transferability, sustainability, sustainable development and profitability;
- Program “THE VILLAGE I LOVE” in organization EUROTER has 51 project model (organizing the competitions);
- Program “DATA BASE ON RURAL TOURISM SERVICES”- software for collecting information about services of rural tourism indicates to provider tourist services;
- Program “EUROPEAN RURAL TOURISAM NETWORK” in organization of EUROGITES in cooperation with organizers of rural tourism in 9 European countries and EUROTER. This project covers technical help for development of tourist accommodation, knowledge

about European market of rural tourism and helps in creation of exchange information program and promotion of accommodation.

European Federation for farm (agritourism) and rural tourism (EuroGites) has established unique standards for assessment of the accommodation quality. Standards refer to equipment, environment, services, attendance to guest, privacy, surroundings and security (Petrović et al., 2015a). The main aim of standard in agritourism is to network the providers of services and to improve service quality. Since the Republic of Serbia is a member of mentioned federation, it must comply with Euro Gites standards in agritourism development.

Petrović et al. (2015b), state that, in territory of the Republic of Serbia, there are 866 units with a total of 8.225 beds, which presents official number of units in agritourism supply of the Republic of Serbia. Domestic visitors are mainly consumers of agritourism services. The most agritourism units of accommodation are in the region of Western Serbia, because it is mountainous region, which has the longest tradition in rural tourism, as well as natural and cultural resources relevant for this type of tourism.

The state of agritourism development in the Republic of Serbia is not satisfactory, and it is characterized by (Đenadić et al., 2016):

- insufficient usage of already modest accommodation capacities,
- lack of apartments and other accommodation capacities at higher level, which leads to lower prices and income,
- low price of accommodation and food, combined with small volume of service results in low total income,
- lack of food supply (almost 40% of providers of services do not offer food)
- inadequate and underdeveloped promotional activities,
- limited use of the Internet,
- insufficient engagement of local tourism organizations,
- poor supply of additional services in rural holdings (sport and recreation, commerce, transportation, manufacture et.)

### **Development Effects of Agritourism**

Agritourism connects tourist industry with agricultural production. The success of agritourism will provide incentive for farmers to expand their producing capacities in order to satisfy requirements of tourist for food

and specific products (interesting stories and anecdotes, traditional products organic food et.)

The impact of agritourism on regional development is not sufficiently studied, nor methods are established for successfully quantify that impact. Therefore, total results of agritourism on development of particular region can not be determined easily. Although agritourism activates other branches and industries in creating the most quality rural tourism product, it contributes to the development of rural areas. Also, it creates new work places and increases income, stops the migration from village to towns, stimulates birthrate, keeps the tradition, culture and identity of rural communities, raises the image of tourist destinations (Pejanović & Vujović, 2008).

For agritourism farmer, the efficiency presents the highest return of investments that invested in the form of capital and labor force or the biggest possible benefit from available resources (Kuzman & Prodanović, 2017).

Agritourism raises the aesthetic look of farms, by which their capacity for increasing the number of potential visitors is increased and it is better meeting the needs of current customers. For instance, attracting the wild ones with feeders, the propagation of native plants and like (Huffman & Kahn, 1998).

Business organization, which will maximize the current value of holdings in the long term is the objective, respectively, enabling the farm business, which is focused on maintenance of productivity and quality of resource, product and services over time, by generating the profit (Kuzman & Prodanović, 2017).

Positive implications of investing in providing the agritourism services are numerous (Nătescu, 2015):

- creating new work places (especially for vulnerable groups as women and the youth),
- development of activities which are aimed to prevent the seasonal character of agriculture, although often there is matching the high season of agriculture with providing services to tourists,
- additional income for local budget,
- stops the migration from village to town,

- improves services related to tourism (trade, transport, telecommunications, etc);
- restoration and conservation of heritage;
- the preservation and promotion of local customs and traditions;
- attracting new original or foreign private investors and so on.

### **Conclusion**

In the Republic of Serbia, contribution of agritourism to the general tourism market is still quite modest. Agritourism has a potential to advance business of agricultural holdings, but huge number of them, although do not possess certain conditions, do not express the desire to be engaged in this activity. Agritourism has a potential to provide additional funds (product sales of benefit), in order to improve economy of agricultural holdings. Agritourism enables exploring different cultural forms, tradition and customs, which is positively reflected in social relations. Agritourism is a guarantor of stability and vitality of rural areas, an alternative for farmers and development factor of local communities.

In the Republic of Serbia, significant progress in the development and promotion of agritourism activities is made. The status is not encouraging and it is necessary to make an extra effort in order to interest farmers for providing services to potential tourists and to focus tourists, respectively, to get interested for services of agricultural holdings.

For development of agritourism in the Republic of Serbia, it is necessary to develop adequate strategy, to invest in infrastructure, to educate farmers and potential tourists, promotion, financial incentives, legal framework and application of standards. With enough thinking, ingenuity, determination and the capital, almost every farm could be adapted for agro-entertainment, providing agritourist services, respectively.

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