

Chapter 13

Combining Organic Agriculture and Recreation: Evidence from Italy

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this chapter is to understand the dynamic of agritourism in Italy to evaluate the possible local impacts. The realization of synergies between tourism and agriculture is actually looking at the impacts of rural restructuring, and new geographies of consumption, production, service, and rural culture. Organic agriculture is the reflection of a high demand for healthy foods, which presume the existence of high quality standards and a limitation of chemical substance usage. At the same time, it is proof that organic agriculture is tightly connected to the agritourism and tourism activities. Much of the discussion is focused on the manner in which creating linkages between organic agricultural production and tourism consumption, of both food and rural place, can create interest for farmers and the agricultural sector as a whole.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Agriculture is one of the oldest and basic sector of the global economy while tourism is one of the newest and most rapidly spreading. In the face of current problems of rising food prices, global financial crisis, linkages between agriculture and tourism may provide the basis for new solutions in many countries. At the same time, rural economies are no longer agriculturally centered but are, to varying degrees, in transition to diversified, service based economies. Today the majority

of rural areas do not host agricultural activities alone, but also provide locations for other activities which can integrate with agriculture. Usually, the concept of tourism in agriculture refers to rural tourism but it is multidimensional and there are several different definitions about agritourism and rural tourism (Roberts, Hall, 2004). Agritourism is becoming more and more popular among the consumers, both in terms of demand, being an attractive form of leisure activities, as well as supply, being an alternative form of agriculture, including accommodation on a farm, as well as

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various forms of recreation based on the several qualities and environmental services of rural areas.

The term agritourism is variously understood and interpreted, both in literature and business practice. Agritourism is often identified with rural tourism but it must not be confused with rural tourism. Agritourism is just a part of rural tourism (Sznajder et al., 2009). Rural tourism is a subset of tourism. It should not, however, be considered as an exclusive segment of tourism or in opposition to other tourism market segments (e.g. cultural tourism, food tourism, spa tourism).

Rural tourism, which brings a great number of tourists out into countryside, attracted above all else by the distinctive character of the regional landscape and not alone. Other attractive elements regards those local resources which constitute recreational features and offer potential for spiritual, environmental and cultural growth. The tourist is interested in visiting the sites of production which are typical of a given area in order to learn about food products, production systems, material testimony (old machinery, buildings, etc.), local culture (popular art, crafts, etc.). These resources are for the most part owned by agricultural entrepreneurs and they define also the concept of territorial identity.

Rural tourism constitutes an opportunity for encouraging reciprocal contact between resident populations and visitors, thus generating a rich cultural exchange and significant financial flows in rural areas (Leco et al. 2013; Garrod et al., 2005). Welcoming tourists on the farm is a solution, a secondary activity with roots in agricultural activities (Butler, 1998; Wilson et al., 2006; Philips et al., 2010; Tew, Barbieri, 2012). Recently, increasing the diversification of agricultural activities, agritourism is increasingly inter-related to tourist supply (Saxena, Ilbery, 2010). Actually, agritourism is more often an alternative activity than a complementary activity to agriculture (Roberts, Hall, 2001; Yang et al., 2010; Forbord et al., 2012). Instead of tourist demand permit to offer new opportunity for many inland

areas. The presence of a varied and significant natural and cultural heritage is not enough to make these areas attractive (Sanchez-Zamora et al., 2014). Rural areas are now multifunctional as agriculture improved its role in developing rural community's perspectives in a changing business environment (Jean-Vasile, 2013). The agriculture as primary function of production of necessities has today new purposes such as environmental, cultural, landscape ones, sustained by the community politics. This new functions are known as the multifunctionality of agricultural holdings (Ginaldi, Iseppi, 2011).

Phillip et al. (2010) identified three key relate to the ways that agritourism has been defined: whether or not the product is based on a working farm; the nature of contact that visitors have with agriculture; and the authenticity of visitors' agricultural experience. The agritourism typology proposed is not universal, but rather restricted to a specific geographical/contextual locality. Furthermore, variation in how agritourism is perceived became more visible when using the typology approach to data collection and analysis. In fact also gradually, the term rural tourism has taken over, with agritourism becoming just one sub-sector of a more holistic rural tourism. There are a number of reasons for this (Lane et al., 2013). As tourism developed in rural areas, it is clear that visitors might stay overnight in farms, but much of their time was spent exploring the countryside in general. Even the role of agriculturists as guardians of the landscape has declined: farmers must now often ask planners and conservation agencies for advice and finance to carry out their landscape and nature conservation work. And many smaller farms are opting out of agriculture, and becoming full time tourism enterprises. The large farms that remain tend not to need tourism income. Meanwhile, there has been a surge in accommodation and attraction development in villages and small country towns. It seems normal nowadays to refer to rural tourism, of which agritourism is a part, rather than just to agritourism.

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