

Editorial

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Agritourism Advances around the Globe: A Commentary from the Editors

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1 Introduction

Over the last four decades, changes in the agricultural production system (e.g., enhanced technologies, vertical and horizontal corporate integration), macro political contexts (e.g., selected subsidies, trade agreements), and overall society (e.g., globalized markets, urban sprawl) have been shaping the world agricultural context (Wilson 2008). Although those changes have impacted—and keeps impacting—world regions at different pace, farmers who are not willing or not able to jump into the new agricultural production mode are the most affected globally. As a result, many farmers have steadily moved away from farming or sought alternative ways of income diversification to keep their farm business afloat. Among the latter, agritourism—broadly defined as leisure, educational and recreational activities offered on working farms (Gil Arroyo et al. 2013)—is a salient diversification strategy. For example, just in the Northern Italian Region of South Tyrol around, 15% of the existing farms offer tourist services (Astat 2019). Furthermore, this form of farm enterprise has steadily grown over the years as more people seek rural experiences.

As any type of entrepreneurial development, agritourism has evolved to maximize farmer's economic and non-economic gains while responding to specific clientele interests and needs (Tew & Barbieri 2012). Such a supply-demand interaction has created a wide range of agritourism opportunities worldwide, ranging from emerging destinations (e.g., Maharashtra in India) to very sophisticated and popular ones (e.g., Napa Valley in the USA). Global agritourism experiences also have different tones

as its development depends on the farm's agricultural resources and the cultural and natural landscapes of the surrounding communities (Gao et al. 2014). Such localized resource dependence has allowed Italy to become a staple of wine tourism, Spain to insert historic *casas rurales* within their farmscapes, and Peru to turn the *cultura viva* of indigenous communities into experiential offerings. Finally, geopolitical and economic contexts have also influenced the development of agritourism. Public initiatives in China, for instance, are supporting the transformation of entire agricultural villages into large agritourism destinations in which farmers become tourism providers of large numbers of urban dwellers seeking to escape from their daily lives (Han 2013; People 2010).

The complexity and diversity of agritourism offerings has encouraged farmers, scientists, and private and public development agencies to support this industry by stimulating good practices and overcoming barriers. On-the-ground evidence indicates that agritourism can deliver many economic and non-economic benefits to farmers (e.g., increased profits, maintaining a desired lifestyle), their families (e.g., ease farm succession, reduction of undesired off-farm employment), and overall society (e.g., maintenance of biological corridors, stimulation of local economies; Barbieri 2013). Yet, evidence also indicates that farmers have many personal (e.g., limited business networks) and structural (e.g., gendered bias) barriers reducing chances of success (Yang 2012). The capacity of agritourism to foster sustainable development in agrarian settings by allowing visitors to experience genuine agricultural products and lifestyles has also stimulated the development of a robust scholarship line that has evolved over the years. Agritourism research has moved away from mere descriptions of the supply (e.g., farmers' motivations and goals) and demand (e.g., visitors' preferences) to unveil nuances that can help to expand its positive impacts (Barbieri 2019).

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2 The Need for a Joined Vision: The First World Congress on Agritourism

The practical and scholarly intelligence on agritourism produced over the last years, although vast and valuable, has two main problems. First, it is geopolitically constrained. The information gathered tends to be local, regional, or national at most, which cautions the generalization of its implications. Secondly, it tends to emerge from specific constituents, with few bridging opportunities among farmers, supporting agencies (public and private), and scientists. Additionally, it is worth noting a recent on-the-ground burden that is exacerbating the practice—and maybe the future—of agritourism. The suitability of agritourism to stimulate the economic vibrancy of farmers and their surrounding rural communities sustainably along with the exponential growth of its supply and demand have incited entrepreneurs to mimic similar offerings in farmscapes that have little or nothing to do with the authentic farm lifestyle (Streifeneder 2016). The aforementioned issues called for the urgency to create a global and welcoming space where key stakeholders, namely farmers, scientists and supporting agencies, could share ideas and learn from each other to find a common ground.

The Institute for Regional Development of Eurac Research in partnership with the Farmers' Association and the Red Rooster from South Tyrol responded to the need to create a global discussion space by organizing the first World Agritourism Congress on November 2018. During three days, scientists, stakeholders, and practitioners from over 40 countries met to learn, share, and discuss ideas to consolidate agritourism worldwide as an enterprise emerged from farmers to benefit farmers. Keynote speakers featured farmers from India and South Africa, who triggered dialogues to seek ways to protect the interest of farmers engaged in agritourism and those seeking authentic farm lifestyle experiences given its impact on peripheral regions of developing regions. Additional keynote speakers representing the academia, the European Parliament and a farmers' marketing association acknowledged the value of agritourism to bring the rural culture and farm products closer to visitors and reduce the rural-urban gap.

Farmers, scientists and representatives of public and private supporting agencies participating in the Congress concurred on the positive impacts that agritourism

can bring to farmers and their surrounding communities. Yet, they also agreed that sustaining such impact requires working together—across stakeholders and world regions—to uphold the farmer as they are the central role of agritourism. As such, participants called for building an international platform that could foster regular cross-national exchanges on agritourism best practices and could develop a collective clarification of basic characteristics and goals of agritourism. In response, a group of experts of the Congress orchestrated a position paper that seeks to lay the foundations of a uniform regulation of the sector worldwide (<https://agritourism.eurac.edu/>). The paper reaffirms that agritourism is a complementary and diversified activity, run by family-run operations to generate additional agricultural income and allows an authentic direct and close interaction between the farmer and the guest. Those attributes enable cultural in-situ experiences that can foster a better understanding of agricultural practices, traditions and knowledge.

3 Moving Forward: About this Issue

The Congress also hosted over 70 scholarly presentations, which altogether depicted the state of agritourism research throughout the world. These presentations merited the publication of two refereed special issues and one book of proceedings. This special issue comprises seven full extent papers that report on several issues of agritourism in countries with developed (Austria, Italy and New Zealand) and developing (China, Nepal and Sri Lanka) economies as defined by the United Nations (2014). Core topics centered on motivations to develop agritourism in less developed regions (Bhatta, Itagaki, & Ohe), the mapping of agritourism complete sectoral interlinkage (Fischer), and the examination of the sustainability of farm holidays as compared to other types of accommodations (Quendler). Articles on this issue also move forward the utilitarian value of agritourism by assessing its suitability to extend the tourism season of a destination (Chen, Dax & Zhang), promote the consumption of functional foods among the elderly (Chiara, Salvatore, Colantuono & Fiore), mitigate the negative impacts of climate change (Mahaliyanaarachchi, Elapata, Esham, Madhuwanthi), and stimulate the adaptive re-use of historic farm buildings (Mackay, Nelson, & Perkins).

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