

# 4. AGRITOURISM - Contributions by Carla Barbieri

My maternal grandparents bought a small farm to change their lifestyle after retirement. They raised a few animals and grew forage grasses, vegetables, and fruit trees. Although originally envisioned as a self-sustained hobby (in fact, they never sold anything), the farm became the family playground. I still am fond of the weekends with my cousins playing in the fields, petting the bunnies, and escaping from the voracious goats! Sadly, changes in the practice of agriculture, in market and political frameworks, and in the human population behaviors and distribution have been—and still are—challenging the survival of small and medium-size family farms throughout the globe. Before embarking on my doctoral studies, I was convinced that tourism could provide farmers an additional source of revenue to keep them in business. Several years and many projects after defending my dissertation on farm enterprise diversification, I still believe [now supported by evidence] that tourism is making a difference for farmers, visitors, and society overall. Below is a summary of the major contributions of my research team to the agritourism scholarship, organized by key topics (visit <http://go.ncsu.edu/agritourism> for a full list of our projects).

## **Agritourism at its Core**

Early confusion existed about the definition of agritourism, which is not surprising given the variations in agricultural settings, visitors' preferences, and geopolitical and economic contexts worldwide (Barbieri & Streifeneder, 2019). Besides being positioned as one form of farm enterprise in the early 1990s (e.g., Ilbery, 1991), much disagreement existed concerning the travel requirements (e.g., day trip or overnight), the purpose of the visit (e.g., education vs. recreation), and the type of experience (e.g., authentic or staged). Our study conducted among key stakeholders yielded an agritourism definition encompassing any type of educational, leisure, or recreational activity offered in working agricultural settings (Gil Arroyo, Barbieri & Rozier Rich, 2013). The emphasis on working agricultural facilities along the insignificance of distance travelled and activity type provided support for policies and initiatives encouraging agritourism development as a strategy to increase farm revenues and reconnect local residents with local food and fiber producers. The evaluation of the multiple names used interchangeably to refer to agritourism (e.g., agro-tourism, farm tourism) also provided branding intelligence to increase marketing effectiveness and stakeholders' collaboration (Barbieri, Xu, Gil Arroyo & Rozier Rich, 2016).

## **The Benefits of Agritourism**

Taking agritourism as a form of entrepreneurial diversification, much of its early scholarship focused on the economic gains this farm enterprise could produce (Barbieri, 2022 – forthcoming). The prevalent use of direct revenues (e.g., entrance fees) as the sole predictor of performance resulted in contradictory results ranging from negative to positive financial returns. By expanding such a traditional economic lens, our team found that agritourism fulfils a mix of economic (e.g., profits) and non-economic (e.g., maintaining the family land) entrepreneurial motivations (Barbieri, 2010). Specifically, we found that agritourism has a major marketing impact in terms of increasing the farm's customer base, brand recognition, and direct sales of products (Tew & Barbieri, 2012) and in the preservation of tangible agricultural heritage (LaPan & Barbieri, 2014). Although agritourism, especially when embedded in experiential activities, is also pivotal to conserve and recover intangible heritage, we concluded that providers should negotiate the coexistence of modernity and traditions since acculturation, syncretism, and re-authentication often occurs (Sotomayor, Gil Arroyo & Barbieri, 2019).

Despite the vast evidence of the agritourism benefits from the supply perspective, information on the demand side is less available, especially in terms of the impacts on surrounding communities and greater society (Santeramo & Barbieri, 2017). Our lab's projects have sought to fill that gap in various ways. First, we have sought to understand agritourists' psychological profile by contrasting the motivations to visit different types of recreational lands (Sotomayor, Barbieri, Wilhelm Stanis, Aguilar & Smith, 2014) as well as their perceptions of the socio-cultural, environmental, and economic services that farms and managed forests involved in agritourism provide (Barbieri, Sotomayor & Aguilar, 2019). Secondly, we have evaluated the impact of agritourism development, namely wine tourism, in terms of personal benefits and community impacts from the residents' perspectives (Xu, Barbieri, Leung, Anderson, & Rich, 2016; Xu, Barbieri & Seekamp, 2020). More recently, we have started researching the synergies between agritourism and local food systems, finding that visiting a farm for recreation, leisure or education increases visitors' intentions to purchase local foods (Brune, Knollenberg, Stevenson & Barbieri, 2020; Brune, Knollenberg, Stevenson, Barbieri & Schroeder-Moreno, 2021).

## **Women in Agritourism**

The literature has well documented the active role of women in agricultural entrepreneurship (Gasson & Winter, 1992) and especially in agritourism (McGehee, Kim & Jennings, 2007) as developers, managers, and innovators. Yet, Barbieri & Mshenga (2008) found that women in agritourism have less economic returns than their counterparts, which deserved further attention to identify the nuances behind such disparity. Our team combined feminist and emic approaches to unpack the meaning of success from the view of women in agritourism, finding that they feel accomplished in a comprehensive and distinctive sense beyond economic earnings (Halim, Barbieri, Morais, Jakes & Seekamp, 2020). Building upon such a holistic meaning of success, Savage, Barbieri and Jakes (2020) concluded that although women in agritourism feel very successful in several aspects of their life (e.g., self-fulfilment), they feel less successful as farmers and entrepreneurs given the mix of personal, family, and societal constraints they face in still prevailing patriarchal structures. Nevertheless, agritourism appears to contribute to the psychological, social, political, and economic empowerment of women (Gil Arroyo, Barbieri, Sotomayor & Knollenberg, 2019).

## **The Frameworks behind the Agritourism Scholarship**

Much of the early literature—including ours—of agritourism was foundational, exploring a few constructs (e.g., visit motivations) or testing simplistic relationships especially concerning the agricultural-and-tourism intersectionality (Barbieri, 2020). Yet, the sophistication of the practice and scholarship of agritourism called for adopting or developing holistic analytical frameworks that could capture the complexity of agritourism. A baby step was to integrate the sustainable development and agriculture multifunctionality frameworks to compare the socio-cultural, environmental, and economic benefits that agritourism and other types of farm enterprises deliver to farmers and society (Barbieri, 2013). To capture the farm-family-community interrelatedness and the mix of internal and external factors influencing the agriculture-tourism intersectionality, we developed the Agritourism System's Approach (Figure 1) to facilitate holistic evaluations of agritourism (Barbieri, 2017). The system accounts for the economic, socio-cultural and environmental factors affecting (positively and negatively) the performance of agritourism at three levels of analysis—farmer, farm household (family dynamics and business), and society.

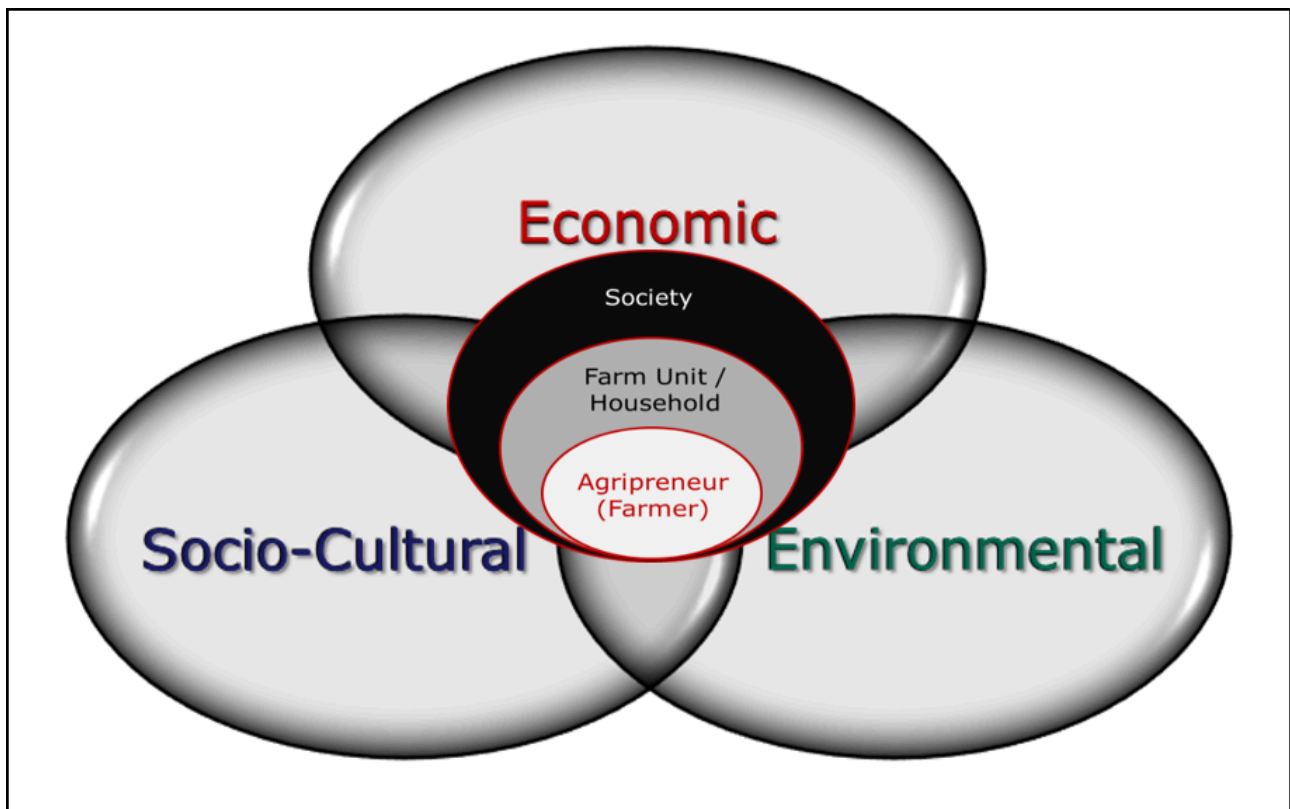


Figure 1. The Agritourism System's Approach (Barbieri, 2017).

## The Interdisciplinarity of Agritourism

The intersectionality of agritourism encourages interdisciplinary efforts, which outcomes might have advanced the scholarship of tourism and other fields of study. The most evident interdisciplinary efforts emerge from investigating agritourism within the agricultural and rural contexts. By positioning agritourism at par with other types of farm enterprises (e.g., value added processes), we identified interactions among them (Barbieri, Mahoney & Butler, 2008; Barbieri & Mahoney, 2009). Also, placing agritourism as the recreational function that agriculture provides to society (Barbieri & Valdivia, 2010a) helped to find synergies with sustainable forms of agriculture, namely agroforestry (Barbieri & Valdivia, 2010b), which in turn served to isolate agricultural landscape features that enhance the aesthetic appeal of farms (Gao, Barbieri & Valdivia, 2014). Another interdisciplinary example occurs with education. Although farmers and visitors see agritourism as a means to increase agricultural literacy, the actual evaluation of such outcome required a methodological shift from assessing actors' perceptions to measuring actual change (Barbieri, Stevenson & Knollenberg, 2019). Seeking to measure the impact of agritourism in children's agricultural literacy (in progress), we have developed a children's agricultural literacy instrument for local foods specifically designed for informal learning contexts (e.g., farm visits), thus contributing the field of agricultural education (Brune, Stevenson, Knollenberg & Barbieri, 2020).

## A Final Reflection

My fond for my grandparents' farm during my childhood along the struggles that small and medium size farms around the globe are experiencing to remain in business have sustained my research on agritourism. I have tried to summarize some key findings of my research team. Although spanning a mix of topics (e.g., gender, entrepreneurship), epistemologies (e.g., providers, tourists), and methodologies (e.g., quantitative,

geospatial), all our research share two principles. First, we seek to move the needle by either innovating the current knowledge (e.g., agritourism definition, holistic meaning of success), frameworks (e.g., Agritourism System's Approach, recreational multifunctionality), or methods (e.g., using quasi-experimental designs to measure children's agricultural knowledge before and after visiting a farm). Secondly, our research is translational as it nurtures from and contributes to the practice of agritourism. For example, our interactions with farmers offering agritourism informed the adoption of a system's approach to uncover the nuances behind the success of women in agritourism. Towards the end of the project, we developed a series of outputs (e.g., videos, workshops) to increase the public awareness of the women's role in agriculture as well as to support the success of those in agritourism.

Following both principles, we are looking forward to untap our next agritourism investigation!

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*Written by Carla Barbieri, North Carolina State University, United States*

[Read Carla's letter to future generations of tourism researchers](#)

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