



# Generating public and private benefits through understanding what drives different types of agritourism



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## ABSTRACT

The capacity of agritourism to generate private economic benefits for farmers has been established in a range of international contexts. We also find that agritourism in its predominant form is a financially important opportunity for diversifying farmers in Scotland. However, by exploring motivations associated with the supply and demand of different 'types' of agritourism, two additional niche markets that incorporate direct interaction between visitors and agriculture have been identified, which may have significant implications in the context of future policy and practice. It is proposed that these types of agritourism have significant potential to generate public as well as private benefits; including increased public awareness of food and farming, promotion and sale of locally produced farm foods, and through supporting the implementation of agri-environmental and conservation measures. We also discuss the importance of underpinning agritourism studies with a solid conceptual foundation, which not only provides for greater understanding of the products and services being studied, but also provides for greater comparability between agritourism studies and allows the research to be positioned in the context of the agritourism literature as a whole.

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## 1. Introduction

In the context of agricultural restructuring, the emergence of concepts such as post-productivism, multifunctional agriculture, and farm diversification have drawn increasing attention to alternative ways to use farms. The conceptual and political importance of rural development has encouraged broader thinking about the way(s) that the countryside is used, while still acknowledging the role and importance of farmers (Marsden et al., 2002). Alternative use of farm-based 'countryside capital' (Garrod et al., 2006) to provide tourism is an important example of how farmers can build on their existing resources, and numerous international studies point to the economic potential of 'agritourism' as a farm diversification strategy (e.g. Evans and Ilbery, 1992; Ilbery et al., 1998; Nickerson et al., 2001; McGehee and Kim, 2004; Che et al., 2005; Sharpley and Vass, 2006; Veeck et al., 2006; Ollenburg and Buckley, 2007). The agritourism literature also reveals that the benefits of agritourism are not restricted to private economic gain, but can also potentially extend to wider public benefits such as

public education about food and farming (Wilson, 2007) and sustainable development of rural areas (Sonnino, 2004).

The agritourism literature is broad and varied, from studies relating to issues of agricultural restructuring and farm diversification (e.g. Evans and Ilbery, 1992; Ilbery et al., 1998; Nickerson et al., 2001; Che et al., 2005; Sharpley and Vass, 2006; Veeck et al., 2006) to more tourism-oriented studies relating to aspects of visitor experience (e.g. Clarke, 1999; McIntosh and Bonnemann, 2006). However, the literature has a number of important limitations in terms of understanding the range of agritourism types available, the motivations underpinning those types, and the different ways they can contribute in the context of rural areas. Until recently, there has been a lack of conceptual clarity in terms of identifying the key features that characterise and define agritourism. Phillip et al. (2010) and Flanigan et al. (2014) responded to this complex picture and lack of consensus in terms of what 'agritourism' actually entails by providing an agritourism typology. This paper uses the agritourism typology as a research tool, which recognises heterogeneity in agritourism, and provides a clear and transparent framework to support data collection and analysis.

Holistic consideration of agritourism as an inseparable supply and demand-side phenomenon (Smith, 1994; Cooper and Hall,

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2008) has been missing from the literature. Past studies of agritourism have commonly focussed on agritourism supply (e.g. Evans and Ilbery, 1992; Bowler et al., 1996; Ilbery et al., 1998; Nickerson et al., 2001; McGehee and Kim, 2004; Sharpley and Vass, 2006; McGehee, 2007; McGehee et al., 2007; Ollenburger and Buckley, 2007), and in some cases have focussed on demand (Fleischer and Tchetchik, 2005; McIntosh and Bonnemann, 2006). However, we argue that holistic understanding of agritourism depends on concurrent consideration of both supply and demand-side perspectives. This paper contributes to a gap in the agritourism literature regarding a holistic and conceptually coherent investigation of the motivations that drive agritourism demand and supply and the benefits that agritourism provides for farmers, tourists, rural areas and society more generally.

This paper presents an exploratory study of the drivers of agritourism supply and demand in twenty-five examples across Scotland. It is based on a complementary investigation of providers' and visitors' perspectives. The paper has three objectives: 1) to explore the main drivers of agritourism supply and demand in our study; 2) to evaluate how agritourism supply corresponds with demand in our study; and 3) to consider the implications of these relationships and the benefits provided for agritourism policy and practice. The agritourism typology is used to consider whether these motivations, relationships or benefits vary by type. A brief review of relevant literature is presented in the next section, followed by a description of the research methodology. The results and discussion sections describe the main findings from the investigation and how they address the paper's objectives, followed by a final section that presents the main conclusions from the study.

## 2. Agritourism supply and demand

Supply-side discussions of agritourism are a common feature of the agritourism literature, whereby a number of key drivers and characteristics of agritourism providers are suggested in a range of international contexts. Studies provide examples where tourism is implemented with the specific intention of retaining agricultural production activities and improving the performance of farm businesses (Ilbery et al., 1998; Ollenburger and Buckley, 2007; Barbieri and Mshenga, 2008). Others illustrate where demand for tourism is the driving factor (Iakovidou, 1997; Sharpley, 2002; Wall and Mathieson, 2006; Kizos and Iosifides, 2007). On the whole, this 'push–pull' dynamic is reflected in the context of agritourism development (Edmond and Crabtree, 1994).

A number of studies confirm the suggestion that agritourism is a farm-level response to financial pressures associated with agricultural restructuring (Evans and Ilbery, 1992; Ilbery et al., 1998; Nickerson et al., 2001; Che et al., 2005; Sharpley and Vass, 2006; Veeck et al., 2006) and others also discuss the importance of financial motivations in the context of agritourism supply (e.g. McGehee and Kim, 2004; Ollenburger and Buckley, 2007). Busby and Rendle (2000) suggest that agritourism has been primarily developed for areas where neither industry can be independently justified. However, it can be argued that this is not always the case. For example, it has been suggested that agritourism is a potential 'accumulation' strategy (Bowler et al., 1996), which is also pursued by farmers in areas where agriculture is financially profitable, to boost overall farm incomes as opposed to being a means of ensuring the economic viability of the farm.

Several key themes characterise discussions of agritourism supply, including a significant focus on family farms (Iakovidou, 1997; Ilbery et al., 1998; Roberts, 2002; McGehee and Kim, 2004; Jaworski and Lawson, 2005; Sharpley and Vass, 2006; McGehee et al., 2007; Ollenburger and Buckley, 2007; Wilson, 2007) and the identification of farm women as an important influence underlying

agritourism development. In this context, women are important both in terms of the availability of labour (Ilbery et al., 1998; Loureiro and Jervell, 2005) and also entrepreneurial capacity (Sharpley and Vass, 2006; McGehee et al., 2007). Farm women in agritourism are linked to the dominance of accommodation and food-related agritourism products (Ilbery et al., 1998; Loureiro and Jervell, 2005), retention of farmer identity in the context of defined roles for each spouse in terms of distinct agriculture and tourism components on the farm (Sharpley and Vass, 2006), and in the context of complex representations of rural life for tourism consumption (Wright and Annes, 2014). Like the agriculture sector, family-owned farms have been found to dominate the agritourism sector (Roberts, 2002), which has been shown to manifest itself in positive and negative ways. For example, in Jaworski and Lawson (2005), farm families have been found to be a strong component of the agritourism product, but equally family-ownership has also been discussed as a potentially limiting factor in terms of resource-optimisation (Roberts, 2002). Entrepreneurial skills and competencies of farmers diversifying into tourism have also been explored in relation to the transition, viability, and success of agritourism enterprises (Phelan and Sharpley, 2011, 2012).

Other forms of farm-based capital and agriculture-related characteristics are also identified in the context of supply-side motivations and influences (Evans and Ilbery, 1992; Ilbery et al., 1998; McGehee and Kim, 2004; Loureiro and Jervell, 2005). For example, Loureiro and Jervell (2005) suggest that labour intensive production systems such as dairy negatively influence farmers' decision to diversify into agritourism. In terms of farm size, Evans and Ilbery (1992) suggest that the ability of large farms in England (>120 ha) to invest relatively more financial capital into agritourism influences the scale of products supplied, and also their potential to accumulate income. Conversely, agritourism is unlikely to influence the prosperity of small (8–40 ha) and marginal farms in the same way. McGehee and Kim (2004) suggest that farm size is significant in the USA context. Also in the USA, Barbieri (2012) compares agritourism with other farm entrepreneurial ventures, finding that agritourism is more sustainable from an economic, socio-cultural, and environmental perspective.

In terms of the people providing agritourism, there have been suggestions which indicate a move away from farmers towards 'tourism providers' (Busby and Rendle, 2000; Jaworski and Lawson, 2005). According to these commentators, this is happening in two different ways; 1) farmers are converting to tourism due to its income overshadowing agricultural revenues, and 2), opportunist rural in-migrants are establishing 'agritourism' businesses. However, it is predominately suggested that agriculture provides a baseline for agritourism supply (Gladstone and Morris, 2000; Jaworski and Lawson, 2005; Roberts, 2002).

A recent study suggests that both economic and non-economic benefits are achieved by agritourism providers, whereby public education about agriculture is identified as a key non-economic benefit perceived by providers (Tew and Barbieri, 2012). However, economic benefits associated with generating income from the agritourism market were found to be most important. There is also a suggestion in the literature that agriculture can benefit from tourism in terms of improved production efficiencies in the way that labour is used on the farm (Fleischer and Tchetchik, 2005). This suggestion is in keeping with recurring support for a more cross-sectoral view to be taken of farm businesses as a single entity (Roberts, 2002; Fleischer and Tchetchik, 2005). Indeed, Roberts (2002:206) suggests that holistic 'farm development' is now a more appropriate notion than 'agricultural development', which is in keeping with the type of spatially-defined principles associated with the concept of rural development (Moseley, 2003; Murdoch et al., 2003; Woods, 2005; Keating and Stevenson, 2006; Lowe,

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