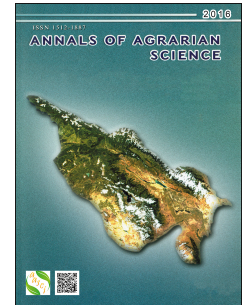


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Linking agricultural food production and rural tourism in the Kazbegi district – A qualitative study

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Abstract

As in many transition countries, also in Georgia rural urban migration as well as migration from the agricultural sector takes place. This also applies to the Kazbegi district, a mountainous region in the Greater Caucasus of Georgia. The main activity in the district is subsistence farming, while only a few agricultural producers are commercially active. As the region offers beautiful nature, during the last decade tourism has been on the rise, while a dwindling interest in the agricultural sector can be observed. However, the growth in tourism also provides opportunities for small-scale agricultural producers to increase their income by marketing their surplus production to the local tourism sector and thereby improving their livelihoods. In turn, an increase in local agri-food products offered might have a positive effect on the tourism sector. Thus, establishing linkages of agricultural food production and rural tourism might contribute to the economic development of the district and even counteract migration to the capital and from the agricultural sector. Through a qualitative study, we aim at identifying local agri-food products suitable for being marketed to the tourism sector and efficient marketing options. In order to do so, we analyze local agri-food chains. Exploratory interviews, focus group discussions and expert interviews provide data for a qualitative content analysis. First results show that food products which require little technological equipment for processing and do not underlie strict food safety standards, like for example honey, seem to be adequate to tap marketing potentials with regard to rural tourism.

Keywords: Local agri-food products, tourism, marketing, qualitative research, Greater Caucasus/Georgia

1 Introduction

The study area is located in the mountainous Kazbegi district, a part of the administrative region of Mtskheta Mtianeti in the Greater Caucasus of Georgia, which is bordering Russia in the North. Due to its geographic situation, the climate in the district is relatively harsh [1]. Although the Georgian Military Road is passing through the district, the general infrastructure is not well developed, in particular when it comes to reaching smaller villages. According to the General Population Census of Georgia of 2014 [2] there are 3795 people living in the Kazbegi district. However, due to the climatic and road conditions a high percentage of the population leaves the district during the winter season. The main town is Stepantsminda (1700 m a.s.l.), accounting for around one third of the total local population.

The main economic activity in the Kazbegi district is agriculture [3] which is characterized by small-scale production and low income generation [4] due to the fact that more than 80%

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