

Keynote speaker lecture paper

Simon Kerma¹: POTENTIALS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF CULINARY OFFER ON TOURIST FARMS IN SLOVENIA

DOI: 10.35666/25662880.2022.8.06

UDC: 338.48-6:641(497.4)

Abstract: Farm tourism is among the most important supplementary activities on farms in Slovenia, but its role within tourism sector is still relatively modest. However, in the last decade we can observe a gradual increase in the number of tourist farms, especially those offering accommodation. The emergence of covid-19 even benefited the popularisation of tourist farms, especially among domestic tourists. Slovenia also gained the status of the European region of gastronomy 2021, but this has not been properly utilised for the promotion and further development of culinary offer on tourist farms in the country, which could build its gastronomic visibility through the best tourist farms as well. The potential of culinary offer on Slovenian tourist farms has not yet been thoroughly researched, although this potential is recognised in several strategic development plans. According to the latest data, the supplementary activities of farm tourism are carried out on 1,215 agricultural holdings. Majority of these agricultural holdings (78.8%) offer accommodation, food and drink, which is particularly important for the development of culinary tourism in Slovenian rural areas.

In our nationwide research project, one of the main activities was a survey among the holders of supplementary activities on tourist farms. The survey was conducted from November 2021 to February 2022 on a representative sample of 300 tourist farms from all Slovenian regions. We managed to survey 128 tourist farms in total, and most of them were conducted directly in the field. The rather long and complex questionnaire contained various aspects of the operation and supply, as well as the needs and potentials of tourist farms. We paid special attention to the culinary offer and related services on tourist farms. The surveyed Slovenian farmers undoubtedly see the offer of local food and drinks as the biggest opportunity for further development of farm tourism.

Keywords: farm tourism, supplementary activities on tourist farms, culinary (food and drink) offer, Slovenia

INTRODUCTION

Food along with culinary activities has become an important component of tourism experience and can also influence the choice of destination (see Hall et al., 2003; Hall and Gössling, 2013; Long, 2003; López-Guzmán et al., 2017).

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This has been quite obviously expressed in the increasing academic interest in food/culinary/gastronomy tourism, which has become the subject of many recent studies (Andersson and Mossberg, 2017; Berbel-Pineda et al., 2019; Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2014; de Jong et al., 2018, World Tourism Organization, 2012; etc.). On the other hand, however, not very much attention has been paid to food (and wine) tourism on tourist farms, even though culinary offer on farms is of considerable importance (i.e., Brune et al., 2021; Cigale et al., 2013; Jurinčič et al., 2015).

Tourist farms can be carriers of knowledge about food heritage and food culture, its agricultural and culinary specialties and a key-link between agriculture and tourism. The emergence of tourist farms in Slovenia is primarily the result of the needs and opportunities of the agricultural economy and only secondarily of the expressed tourism demand. All supplementary activities on the farm in Slovenia, including farm tourism, are regulated in such a way that they are secondary to the basic agricultural activity, and the annual income from supplementary activity is limited. When directing the development of tourist farms, we must be aware of the fact that farmers usually do not have experience in similar work or in communicating with visitors, etc. Therefore, the lack of experience, knowledge and skills may negatively affect their ability to adapt to tourism demand (Cigale et al., 2013; Potočnik Slavič et al., 2016).

Farm tourism is an important complement to the agricultural sector, allowing farmers to easily sell their own products, part- or full-time employment of household members, an additional source of income, and a more rational use of available farm resources. It contributes to the vitality of farms and rural communities, preserving the cultural landscape, maintaining settlement, and giving added value to agricultural products and services. For the successful development of farm tourism, it is necessary to observe the needs and requirements of the modern visitor. Consequently, farmers provide increasingly wide range of tourist farms offer. Among the tourists' motives for staying on tourist farms are "good, healthy, home-made food and drinks" and "spending time in a quiet rural environment". Two other factors are of above average importance: "a more personal attitude towards the guest" and "lower prices" (Cigale, 2014; Cigale et al., 2013). Such findings also point to the considerable and untapped potential of the culinary offer on tourist farms, which is insufficiently exploited during the times of mass "hysteria" about top chefs and top restaurants. Although culinary is one of the most important tourism products according to Slovenia's tourism development strategies, its importance is not recognized, emphasized, and valorised on tourist farms.

The connection of farm tourism and processing of primary agricultural products represents an added value for rural supply due to the quality (fresh, local) and diversity (different forms of processing of agricultural products expand the range of farm products). In identifying the predominant marketing channels for agricultural products, we found that, on average, surveyed farmers sell 40% of their agricultural production through farm tourism, and 26% of respondents sell more than 50%. The spatial distribution of farms combining both activities – tourism and processing also shows that this is an advantage for farmers in general throughout the country, and even more for farms in wine-growing areas. It is also useful to combine the potentials of wine-growing areas for gastronomic tourism. Viticulture, wine production and wine tourism play a special role in gastronomic tourism. We note that in wine-growing regions (in Slovenia we are talking about three wine-growing regions and nine wine-growing districts) farmers more often decide to diversify into additional activities related to gastronomy and wine offer (excursion farms and wineries).

Although there are excursion farms all over the Slovenian territory, the offer of food and beverages supplemented by wineries and osmicas is the largest in wine-growing regions. At the same time, the wine-growing regions are the only ones where in many cases we find two or even more supplementary tourism activities on the same farm. A frequent combination is the excursion farm and the osmica, which is also related to the seasonal nature of the osmica business, and in two cases all three complementary activities (excursion farm, winery and osmica) are present on the same farm. This indicates sufficient demand as well as the production capacity of each farm.

THE ANALYSIS OF CULINARY OFFER ON SLOVENIAN TOURIST FARMS

The analysis included all available data on farms that have a registered supplementary activity farm tourism. The data are available in the Register of Agricultural Holdings of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food, and refer to 31 December 2020. We used data on the location of the farm, area and structure of agricultural land, volume of grape and wine production, cultivation of indigenous crops, number of livestock, age, sex and education of the holder of the supplementary activity, number of household members, etc. In addition, we conducted an extensive survey that focused on agricultural holdings that offer farm tourism as a supplementary activity, i.e., accommodation or just food and beverages. At the end of 2020, there were a total of 957 of them, and the survey was conducted on a random sample of farms with this supplementary activity. The sample consisted of 300 agricultural holdings. In the end, we managed to get responses from 138 farms, which represents response rate of 46.0%. The survey was conducted live in the field, and some surveys were conducted by telephone. As a rule, we surveyed the holders of

supplementary activities or close family members, but often a larger number of family members joined the conversation.

The complex survey among holders of supplementary activities on tourism farms included several content sets. Special attention was given to the culinary offer and related services, which is in the focus of this research. Firstly, we were interested in the respondents' self-assessment of the supply of food and beverages on their tourist farms, especially the relationship between the offer of traditional or local dishes on the one hand and modern dishes on the other. The respondents rated their offer on a scale from 1 (insufficient) to 5 (excellent). As expected, the vast majority are convinced of a very good or excellent (score 4 or 5) offer of traditional/local dishes on their tourist farms (84% in total). Almost the same share (85%) assessed the house offer of local (homemade) drinks as very good or excellent – indicating once again a close connection between the basic agricultural activity, i.e., production, and complementary tourist offer, which in Slovenia depends on the volume of food production and processing on the farm. As expected, the respondents are slightly more reserved towards the inclusion of modern dishes into their offer; 38% of them rate this type of food offer as very good or excellent. The analysis of dishes and drinks on offer on the tourist farms in question proved the respondents' self-assessment as credible.

The offer of food and beverages

The following characteristics can be highlighted in the culinary offer on tourist farms:

- 1 – marked predominance of traditional dishes over modern ones,
- 2 – preservation and revival of old and forgotten dishes,
- 3 – preservation of house recipes (based on regional culinary heritage),
- 4 – seasonality of ingredients and dishes,
- 5 – a reflection of primary agricultural activities (e.g., cattle breeding, pig breeding) in culinary offer.

Local and especially house specialities of all gastronomic regions, among cold or hot appetizers, as well as main dishes, side dishes and desserts, are stressed as especially valuable in the culinary offer.

Breakfast offered on farms with accommodation is mainly based on dairy products, meat products, seasonal vegetables, and processed products (various spreads, jams, homemade bread, etc.). Among cold dishes, homemade cold cuts with vegetables predominate. Meat dishes are dominated by pork, veal, beef, chicken, and in some places venison. The most common desserts are gibanica (layered cake), štruklji (with cottage cheese, walnuts...), apple strudel, (sour cherry) cakes, potica, and to a lesser extent cheese plate. The food

offered at tourist farms typically includes traditional seasonal dishes; in wintertime, these would normally include various specialities from pork, sauerkraut, sour turnip, potatoes etc. Culinary classics on Slovenian tourist farms are mushroom soup (with buckwheat spoonbread), pumpkin soup, beef soup, goulash (veal, potato), various stews, sour soup, veal and pork roasts, breaded chicken, sautéed potatoes, and mixed seasonal salad. Interestingly, grilled meat typical for Balkan cuisine is relatively rare (but otherwise very popular in restaurants in Slovenia). Most tourist farms do not have a menu, as their offer adapts to the available seasonal ingredients.

The offer of non-alcoholic beverages on tourist farms includes a variety of juices (apple, elderberry, lemon balm, grape, strawberry, chokeberry, currant), various syrups (grape, elderberry) and lemonade. Herbal teas typically include briar rose, mint, elderberry, etc. Alcoholic beverages are mostly white and red wines of various qualities, both indigenous and domesticated, as well as internationally recognized grape varieties, while in fruit-growing regions, cider is usually offered. Spirits are predominantly fruit brandies (apple, pear), plum brandy, homemade wormwood liqueur and similar bitters, as well as some local specialities. Alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages purchased in stores usually comprise beers, mineral waters, sodas, and coke.

Culinary souvenirs, catering and participating in events and festivals

Almost half of the respondents offer various culinary souvenirs, among which the most typical are jams (plum, grape, strawberry, blackberry, raspberry, peach, apricot), various spreads, dry meat products, dairy products and various types of honey, juices, wines, spirits, flour, oils, and less often herbal tea blends. Less typical culinary souvenirs include ecologically certified cosmetics (creams, ointments, hydrolats, essential oils), chocolate and even magnets. Only a small share of tourist farms (14%) offers catering, which shows the traditional orientation of tourist farms in offering food and beverages on their premises. Demand for catering is quite scattered, from friendly and family gatherings, closed circle events, to societies and even companies. Cold snacks or cold cuts plates predominate, also due to the special equipment needed for such type of food delivery. The minimum number is not limited, even if it is mainly from 5 to 10 people. Four of the providers offer catering for a minimum of 20 to 50 people. The maximum number of guests reaches up to 150–200 people, which significantly exceeds the legally determined quotas for the supply of food on tourist farms. In most cases, the maximum number of people is between 15 and 50 people. The offer of tourist farms also reflects their involvement in local, municipal and parish celebrations and events, such as local evaluations of wine, sausages, salami, stews, open wine cellars, vineyard hikes, local wine celebrations, parish celebrations etc. Regional events and festivals include those celebrating one dish, selected fruit or wine variety,

including various regional evaluations of wines and dry meats.

Holders of supplementary activity – winemakers – take part in national culinary events and festivals, such as Slovenian Wine Festival in Ljubljana, Wine Universe, Ljubljana Wine Route, VinDel (International Wine and Culinary Fair) and Pubec (Young Wine Festival) in Maribor, Pop up festival in Novo mesto, PortoRose (Rose and Rose Wine Festival) and Sparkling Wine Festival in Portorož, Ljubljana, etc. The biggest culinary event that includes the evaluation and the exhibition of the awarded products from all possible groups of agricultural produce and food is undoubtedly the exhibition Delicacies of Slovenian Farms, held in Ptuj since 1990, with the support of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food and the Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry of Slovenia. Slovenian tourist farms are included in the evaluations and offer of the international agricultural fair AGRA in Gornja Radgona and the Alpe-Adria fair in Celovec/Klagenfurt, olive growers participate in various evaluations in Italy and Croatia, however, most active at international fairs and evaluations (in United Kingdom, Italy, Czech Republic, Austria, Germany, Croatia, Serbia, China ...) are the winemakers.

Indigenous, traditional, and domesticated plant varieties and animal breeds in farm tourism offer

In Slovenia, the abandonment of older plant varieties and animal breeds led to the loss of genetic diversity, and at the national level, a fairly extensive list of indigenous and traditional varieties of agricultural plants at risk of genetic erosion has been formed. The results of the survey show that a significant proportion of farms, 64%, are engaged in the cultivation of fruit plants, vines, field crops or garden vegetables that are considered local, traditional or indigenous. Farms are therefore aware of the importance of conserving plant genetic resources in agriculture, which is crucial for the sustainable conservation of genetic resources for future generations.

Just under half of the farms (48%) engaged in the cultivation of local, traditional, or indigenous plant species present these to their guests, stating that they emphasize the importance of preserving indigenous varieties, present the origins, characteristics and history of old (forgotten) varieties and the importance of preserving varieties from generation to generation. They place great emphasis on traditional and local production. In some cases, guests can visit the nearby garden or orchard and pick herbs, fruit, and vegetables. In addition, farms also include plant species in their culinary offer and try to present plants through dishes, so each dish has its own story. Many present the varieties at guided tastings, especially grape varieties, or organize a tasting of local delicacies. Plants

are also included and promoted in various local products, e.g., homemade buckwheat bread, homemade juices, lard with Ptuj onions, jams etc. Significantly fewer farms, namely 29%, are involved in the breeding of indigenous or traditional animal breeds. This is in line with the fact that in Slovenia fewer and fewer indigenous and traditional breeds are included in domestic animal breeding. As a result, certain breeds are already lost, while others are rarely present and, in most cases, already threatened with extinction. All farms engaged in the breeding of indigenous or traditional animal breeds include these in the tourist offer. On most farms, animals are the main attraction for the children. Some farms present the animals, organize a tour of the barn and the feeding of the animals, demonstrate milking, show a chicken coop and collecting of the eggs. Some even offer visitors a walk around the barn or farm on their own. In many cases, pastures are in the immediate vicinity of the farmhouse, so the guests can walk there and observe animals grazing. Farms with horses offer horseback riding, cleaning the horses and taking photographs with the horses. Bee farms organize tours of beehives and present their work with bees. At one of the farms, visitors can take part in haymaking.

Farmers were also asked how they assess the potentials for further development of tourism on farms. Almost three quarters of respondents rated the local drinks (73%) and food (71%) the highest. This clearly shows that, according to the respondents, wine and culinary tourism will continue to present the main comparative advantage of Slovenian tourist farms. This was followed by respect for local heritage and culture (64%), thematic trails, with special emphasis on wine roads (60%), accommodation infrastructure (55%), indigenous plant varieties (42%) and knowledge of global trends in rural gastronomy (40%). The respondents see less potential than expected in organic production (36%) and branding (29%), local supply networks (35%), indigenous animal breeds and the development of territorial and collective brands (32%), protection of agricultural products and food within European (28%) and national (26%) quality schemes, which might be linked to excessive administration and certification costs and the fact that higher prices of organic products are not recognized or properly evaluated on the market. Therefore, the farmers prefer to offer food from their own gardens and orchards, where tourists and visitors can see for themselves that it is produced in an environmentally friendly way. Only a small percentage of respondents (13%) recognize a very high potential of brands such as Gault Millau, Michelin, The Slovenia Restaurant Award, Gostilna Slovenija and others.

CONCLUSION

Over the last two decades, farm tourism has been relatively frequently discussed in the professional literature, however, the aspect of gastronomy (food and beverage offer) has been rather neglected. The present article aims to fill this gap. Using long-term monitoring of the role of supplementary activities on farm for Slovenian farmers and rural areas, the latest available data, spatial analyses, and extensive survey among holders of supplementary activity of tourism on the farm, the role of culinary offer on the farm is evaluated in the context of sustainable rural development. Data on supplementary activity “tourism on farm” in Slovenia, collected over a longer period, show great flexibility and resilience of tourist farms to negative external influences (economic crisis, pandemic...), as their number is constantly growing. This research aimed to shed light on the role of the provider – the farmer. The key finding of the survey is that most Slovenian farmers (providers of supplementary activity tourism on farm) is satisfied and convinced of the very good or excellent representation of traditional / local dishes and drinks in their house offer.

From the perspective of international recognition of Slovenian culinary tourism, its offer of food and beverages on tourist farms has not yet been properly valorised and exploited, neither from the tourist nor agricultural point of view. Tourist farms are the main driver of sustainable rural tourism development, its visibility and competitiveness. Their future, which must be based on knowledge of local heritage and culture as well as natural values, depends on the holistic, multidisciplinary and multisectoral understanding of their mission and potential. Tourist farms are the bearers of historical and modern knowledge about agriculture and food heritage, as a basis for the development of modern forms of culinary tourism in rural areas. In the age of globalization (also in the field of gastronomy and tourism), tourist farms turn our attention back to local specialities, as a basis for creating a modern culinary tourist offer and services on farms. Innovative agricultural products and food, as well as quality culinary offer on tourist farms, may well become one of the main culinary and tourist attractions of Slovenia, with increasing international recognition, competitiveness, and economic efficiency.

Farm tourism is closely integrated into the local community and the local economy, as most of the food and drink comes from the tourist farm itself or neighbouring farms. This brings increasing positive economic effects to the local environment. Due to its limited scope, such tourist offer does not generate negative effects, often associated with mass tourism. For rural Slovenia, the “coexistence” of farm tourism and farming is crucial: the tourist offer on the farm strengthens the economic activity of farms and thus contributes to the preservation and development of Slovenian countryside, as it also contributes to

employment opportunities for younger generations. Therefore, farm tourism can make an important contribution to sustainable rural development. At the same time, we must be aware of the real limitations of farm tourism, related to basic agricultural activities. We must draw attention to the process of increasing specialization and the high quality of food and beverages offer in connection with the development of other supplementary offers, which in the future may lead to the gradual abandonment of farming as a primary economic activity. These tendencies have already been recognized in some Slovenian regions and are reflected in the offer, which is no longer directly linked to agricultural activity.

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