

ECO-FARMS - A NEW FORMAT OF TOURIST LOCATIONS IN THE HOSPITALITY SYSTEM

**Oleg GLUSHKOV, PhD (Candidate of Technical Sciences),
Associate Professor,
Director of Separated Structural Subdivision
"Professional College of Oil and Gas Technologies,
Engineering and Service Infrastructure of
Odesa National University of Technology", Ukraine
E-mail: glushkovuk99@gmail.com
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-5954-5541>**

**Olha SAHDIEIEVA, PhD in Technical Sciences,
Odesa National University of Technology, Ukraine
E-mail: sagolanis@ukr.net
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3035-7513>**

**Lilia KRAYZ, Master's Degree in Economics,
Deputy director for educational, pedagogical and methodical work of
"Professional College of Oil and Gas Technologies,
Engineering and Service Infrastructure of
Odesa National University of Technology", Ukraine
E-mail: staskraiz9@gmail.com
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-6482-1290>**

**Svitlana SHEKERA, Candidate of Economic Sciences,
Odesa National University of Technology, Ukraine
E-mail: shekera.sveta@gmail.com
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1099-3953>**

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***Abstract.** Agrotourism is a promising direction of rural tourism development, which combines agriculture with tourism, giving tourists the opportunity to immerse themselves in authentic rural life. It contributes not only to the economic growth of rural areas, but also to the preservation of cultural and natural resources. One of the new and innovative formats of tourist locations in agritourism is eco-farms, which combine agricultural activities with the principles of sustainable development and environmental safety to create unique and in-depth experiences for travelers. In recent years, many eco-farms have appeared in Ukraine, which are aimed at the production of natural products with a high-quality standard, which limits the use of chemicals. On such farms, you can not only enjoy organic food, but also have a good rest with the whole family. Eco-farms tend to operate in an environmentally friendly manner, focusing on organic farming methods, renewable energy sources and responsible water use. This is consistent*

with the principles of sustainable development, attracting tourists looking for eco-friendly destinations and activities. If earlier visiting eco-farms was initially limited to the purchase of already harvested agricultural products, now with the growing interest in consuming quality food, tourists are offered not only excursion programs, but also master classes on harvesting, seminars and interactive events that teach tourists about sustainable agriculture economy, wildlife conservation and ecological principles.

Keywords: rural tourism, eco-farms, agritourism, tourist locations, sustainable development, destinations

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Introduction. Rural tourism is indeed becoming an important alternative to traditional city vacations, especially in the context of changed priorities after the COVID-19 pandemic. Millennials and representatives of generation Z strive for authenticity and closeness to nature, which makes the countryside more attractive for recreation. Such destinations often offer more opportunities for active recreation than just lying on the beach. Hiking in the mountains, cycling tours, participating in agricultural work on farms, tasting local cuisine - all this helps not only to relax, but also to feel part of the community and learn more about the culture of the region. Countries that actively develop rural tourism rely on the well-being of local communities, because the development of infrastructure (roads, hotels, services) brings economic benefits and also creates new jobs. This, in turn, supports the preservation of traditions and culture, as local residents become active participants in the tourism process. The demand for rural tourism also highlights the importance of eco-tourism as many people become more aware of the impact of their travels on the environment. In this context, rural tourism can become an important tool for supporting the sustainable development of regions (Global rural tourism market, 2024).

Although much of today's tourism takes place in natural areas or near small villages and towns, not all tourism in rural areas is automatically considered "rural" tourism. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) definition, rural tourism is a type of tourism activity in which the visitor's experience is related to a wide range of products generally linked to nature-based activities, agriculture, rural lifestyle, culture, angling and sightseeing. According to another well-accepted definition, by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), rural tourism is:

- located in rural areas;
- functionally rural;
- rural in scale;
- traditional in character;
- sustainable;
- of many different kinds, representing the complex pattern of rural environment, economy, and history (European Parliament, 2023).

However, it is not always easy to know where to draw a line, mainly because it is difficult to define what is 'rural'. The OECD notes that few areas will have all these characteristics and that rural tourism exists on a continuum – and that often it will also display some urban characteristics. Based on these definitions, it is nevertheless considered that rural tourism is typically built on experiences that are specific to the countryside, such as open spaces, and contact with nature and with local people. It often includes physical activities connected with nature, such as walking, hiking and cycling. It is usually small in scale and takes place in smaller villages and towns (the OECD study mentions settlements under 10 000 inhabitants) and involves a large number of private, often family-owned, micro-enterprises that are frequently run as part-time or side jobs. Rural tourism destinations are most often not created in a planned manner, but grow slowly and organically. This means that services are not standardized and that the quality can greatly vary, but also that numerous products evolve continuously. This has resulted in different niche types of rural tourism, such as wellness tourism, activity tourism (including adventure and sports tourism – cycling, walking, climbing, skiing) and cultural and heritage tourism (including food and wine tourism). Rural tourism is also often described as closely aligned with the concept of sustainable tourism, given that it is inherently linked to environmentally-friendly forms of tourism (European Parliament, 2023) (OECD, 2024).

The experience of many countries, in particular Greece, Spain and Italy, demonstrates the positive impact of rural tourism on the economic development of rural regions (Mylonopoulos & Moira, 2017) (Dionysopoulou, 2020) (Belliggiano et al., 2020). Agro-gastronomic farms become an important mechanism for increasing the attractiveness of these territories. Growing interest in rural vacation spots is driving demand for agro-homesteads, as today's urban-dwelling tourists seek opportunities to relax and rejuvenate in an environmentally friendly environment. In addition, tourists seek to gain cultural experiences through tasting local foods and drinks, as well as participating in events that reflect the history of the countryside. These can be festivals, farmers' markets, fairs, petting zoos, eco-farms, camping, glamping, exhibitions of agricultural machinery, corn or wine mazes and quest games.

Literature review. In the scientific literature, considerable attention is paid to the study of the impact of rural tourism on the economy of the country as a whole. Thus, Panagiota Dionysopoulou (2020) believes that agritourism belongs to alternative forms of tourism that are rapidly developing and is one of the most competitive and high-quality sectors of the Greek economy (Dionysopoulou, 2020). Angelo Belliggiano, Marilena Labianca, Eugenio Cejudo, Francisco Antonio Navarro, Stefano De Rubertis (2020) investigated the level of diversification of agriculture through tourism (Belliggiano et al., 2020). Nikolina Sain and Finer Karin (2023) emphasized in their report that the European Parliament supports rural tourism, as a large share of tourism takes place in rural areas, which contributes to the economic, social and environmental sustainability of rural areas, in particular, makes a positive contribution to the protection of small

and diverse farms, overcoming social inequality and creating employment opportunities for women. Internet sources and statistical data emphasize the importance of the development of rural areas (European Parliament, 2023) (Future Market Insights, 2024) (WorldPackers, 2024).

Research methodology. The methods used in this study - logical generalization and scientific abstraction - to clarify the conceptual apparatus of the study; system analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction; the method of analogies and comparisons – for researching trends in the development of eco-farms; economic and statistical - for processing statistical data during the analysis of the impact of the development of rural tourism on the economy of countries.

Main results. Rural tourism is particularly actively developing in developing countries. In these regions, due to the growth of the local population, the fragmentation of agricultural land continues, which creates an economic imbalance. At the same time, rural tourism is becoming an effective means of ensuring a decent income for low-income segments of the population. In developed economies, rural tourism is more about rest and relaxation than getting to know the local culture. According to Future Market Insights (FMI), the coming years will be fruitful for the rural tourism market. Between 2023 and 2033, a steady CAGR of 6.8% should support market acceleration. The global rural tourism market will reach up to 198.3 billion US dollars in 2033 (Future Market Insights, 2024).

In 2021, rural areas accounted for 43.8% of beds in tourism accommodation in the EU (the remaining 33.8% of beds were in towns and suburbs and 21.4% in cities). Rural areas also saw 37% of all nights spent at tourist accommodation, compared to towns and suburbs, which accounted for the remaining 35 % and cities for 28 % (European Parliament, 2023). One of the varieties of rural tourism is agrotourism, which involves the organization of tourist activities on the basis of agricultural enterprises or farms. It offers tourists the opportunity to get to know the rural way of life, traditions, culture and production, including participation in agricultural work, tasting local products, staying on a farm or in an agro-homestead.

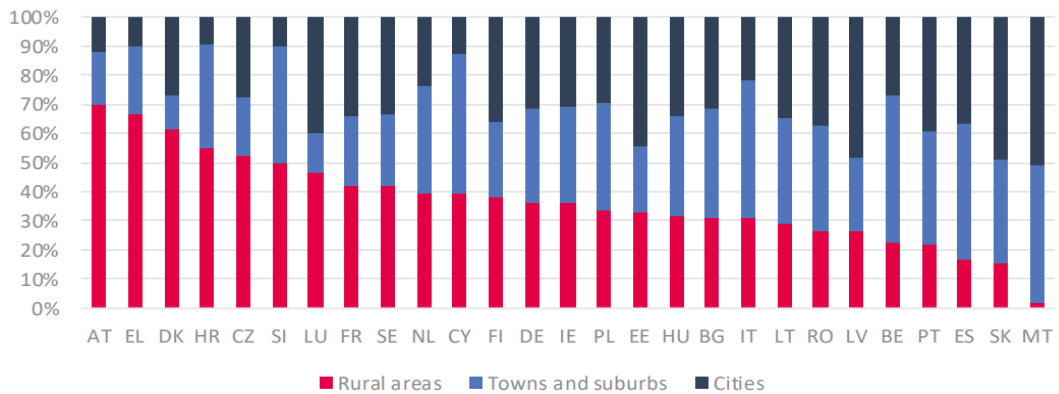


Figure 1. Share of nights spent at tourist accommodation in 2021

Source: (European Parliament, 2023)

Among such European countries as Greece, Italy, Spain, agritourism has gained the greatest development. Greece meets the conditions for the development of several Agritourism Forms for Local Development, due to the many and varied natural and anthropogenic comparative advantages, such as: the large residential dispersion of “traditional” mountainous and semimountainous settlements, which have important architectural, historical and cultural interest. Thus, there is agritourism: Inmountain villages, traditional settlements, settlements in areas of special natural beauty, fishing villages, villages and farms (Delitheou & Karagianni, 2020).

Agritourism in Italy has become a dynamic sector that goes beyond traditional farming methods. It includes a variety of activities such as farm stays, vineyard tours, olive oil tastings and hands-on experience in artisanal food production. Agritourism makes a significant contribution to the Italian economy, diversifying farmers' incomes and contributing to rural development. Although agritourism is widespread throughout Italy, some regions have become hotspots for enthusiasts. Tuscany, Umbria and Sicily continue to lead the way, offering picturesque landscapes, historic farms and renowned culinary experiences. In addition, lesser-known regions such as Apulia, Piedmont and Emilia-Romagna are gaining popularity, offering visitors unique and unusual experiences (ILF, 2024).

Spain's official tourism site offers agritourism holidays in country houses, country apartments, country hotels, hostels, holiday villas, countryside campsites and educational farms for children. The spectrum of entertainment during a vacation in the Spanish countryside is quite wide, from feeding animals and harvesting crops to visiting themed festivals. The most common regions of agritourism in Spain: Navarra, Malaga, Asturias, the Basque Country, Galicia (Spain's official tourism website, 2024).

Agritourism in Spain contributes to the spread of economic activity throughout the year, as the seasonal structure of rural tourism does not coincide with agricultural production, as can be seen in the diagram. lower. Although agritourism is highly seasonal, with 43.8% of its spending concentrated between

June and September and a peak of 16% in August, the fact that it is relatively stronger in the winter months makes it less seasonal than seaside tourism (Fig. 2, Fig. 3) (Caixa Bank, 2024).

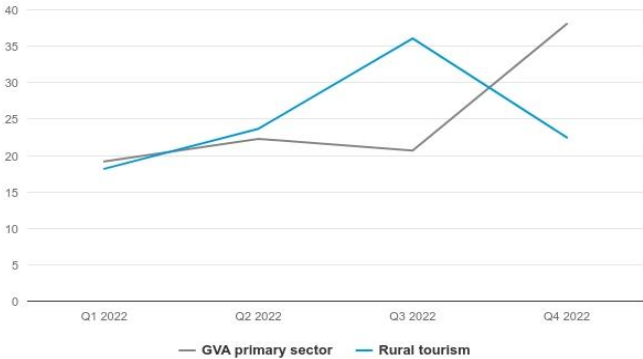


Figure 2. The seasonality of rural tourism and GVA of the primary sector
 (% of tourism expenditure and GVA in each quarter)
Source: (Caixa Bank, 2024)

The above indicators testify to the demand among tourists for recreation in rural areas. But the portrait of a modern tourist characterizes him as inquisitive and demanding, even while resting in an ecologically clean and comfortable environment. Therefore, today the spectrum of tourist entertainment in rural areas is constantly expanding. It is increasingly possible to observe the emergence of such locations as eco-farms. Despite the crisis phenomena that are now negatively affecting the development of the economy in Ukraine, most Ukrainians express their desire to restore their psycho-emotional state precisely through tourist trips to rural areas. The demand for recreation in eco-farms is growing. The most popular regions for recreation on eco-farms in Ukraine are: Odesa, Mykolaiv, Kyiv, Lviv and Zakarpattia regions.

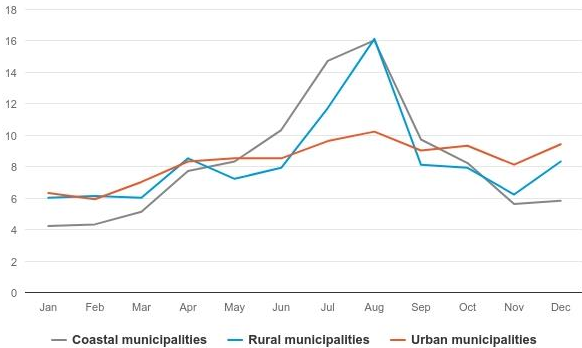


Figure 3. The seasonality of tourism expenditure: urban, rural and coastal
 (% of tourism expenditure in each month)
Source: (Caixa Bank, 2024)

An eco-farm (or ecological farm) is an agricultural enterprise that operates in accordance with the principles of sustainability and environmental responsibility. The main features of which are organic production. Many farmers, in addition to the usual agricultural activities, actively implement agritourism in their territories, which serves as an additional source of income and helps to expand opportunities. As the experience of European countries has shown, eco-farms are actively used in the development of agritourism, which has numerous advantages - the creation of jobs, business development, the growth of the economic potential of rural areas, the development of certification programs, the preservation of the rural lifestyle and cultural heritage of the territory, the promotion of sustainable development programs and preservation of landscapes and the environment. Emphasis on local products, which are grown on eco-farms due to their organicity and environmental friendliness, increases the interest of the population in visiting such locations, especially at the present time. When the rapid pace of urbanization motivates tourists to rest in the countryside to improve not only their emotional but also their physical condition. Now, during the period of martial law, the issues of environmental friendliness and organicity, as well as a healthy lifestyle, are very relevant for the Ukrainian population.

Eco-farms tend to operate in an environmentally friendly manner, focusing on organic farming methods, renewable energy sources and responsible water use. This is in line with the principles of sustainable tourism, attracting tourists looking for eco-friendly destinations and activities.

If earlier visiting eco-farms was initially limited to the purchase of already harvested agricultural products, now with the growing interest in consuming quality food, tourists are offered not only excursion programs, but also master classes on harvesting, seminars and interactive events that teach tourists about sustainable agriculture economy, wildlife conservation and ecological principles.

With the expansion of the range of services at eco-farms and the growth of tourist flows, there is a need for qualified personnel - guides, leisure organizers, tourism specialists, who will be able to organize rest and visits to the eco-farm with unforgettable positive memories. This can lead to increased employment opportunities and economic growth in the region.

For example, in the Odesa region before the start of the military invasion, the eco-farm "Goats and Sailors" was actively popularized, on the territory of which you could visit an excursion, receive a session of "goat therapy" and harvest vegetables for home. Also, eco-farms often offer farm-to-table meals, allowing tourists to enjoy fresh, local and organic produce. These experiences are popular among food lovers and contribute to the popularization of regional cuisine.

Typically, eco-farms are located in scenic countryside or nature, providing opportunities for outdoor activities such as hiking, bird and wildlife watching, and quad biking. Horseback riding. These activities appeal to nature lovers and adventure seekers, enhancing the overall tourism experience. Many eco-farms offer tourists the opportunity to interact with local producers during tours of local products, learn about traditional farming methods and participate in cultural events.

This cultural exchange can foster a deeper connection between visitors and the host community.

Eco-farms often prioritize biodiversity conservation and habitat restoration. Tourists can have the chance to support these efforts through volunteer programs or donations, helping to protect local ecosystems. For those looking for an opportunity to disconnect from technology and reconnect with nature, as well as digital detox and a more authentic, rural experience, eco-farms offer a disconnection or limitation in the means of modern information and communication technologies and social networks.

Sports and health tours, which are very relevant in European countries, are now being actively popularized: yoga, meditation master classes and spa services in peaceful natural conditions. These retreats give tourists the opportunity to rest and rejuvenate during eco-farm tours. For lovers of live music, festivals and concert events, eco-farms also offer a wide range of opportunities, for example, eco-farm, eco-glamping park Hyggevalley, Pan Bilan farm, Lavandia eco-farm, Oysterville oyster farm that are located in Odesa region. All the above-mentioned activities are accompanied by various photo sessions to remind tourists of a pleasant time.

There is also an interesting tourist location in the Kyiv region - the Maxi Snail farm. Its owner, Anton Avramenko, was a programmer in the past and engaged in the cultivation of an unusual product for Ukrainian cuisine - molluscs. This direction is not only interesting, but also profitable. After mastering the technology in Spain, he decided to open a farm. Yes, the programmer became a farmer, and as it turned out, a successful one. In addition to the direct cultivation of snails, the farm conducts tours for those interested, because this is also a profit. The Maxi Snail farm focuses on exports, in particular, Spain, and plans to expand the product sales market. Agrotourism is a promising direction, but all parties should be interested in it: tourists, farmers, tour guides. If farmers plan to host guests, they need to create conditions for them.

In the Lviv Region, in the village of Tukhlya, an eco-farm "Goat Farm of Two Kateryns" was organized, where not only goats are raised, cheese is produced, but also guests are invited to visit the farm (Agravery, 2021).

On the basis, the structure of an eco-farm was proposed, which reflects the positive economic consequences of its creation in rural areas (Fig. 4).

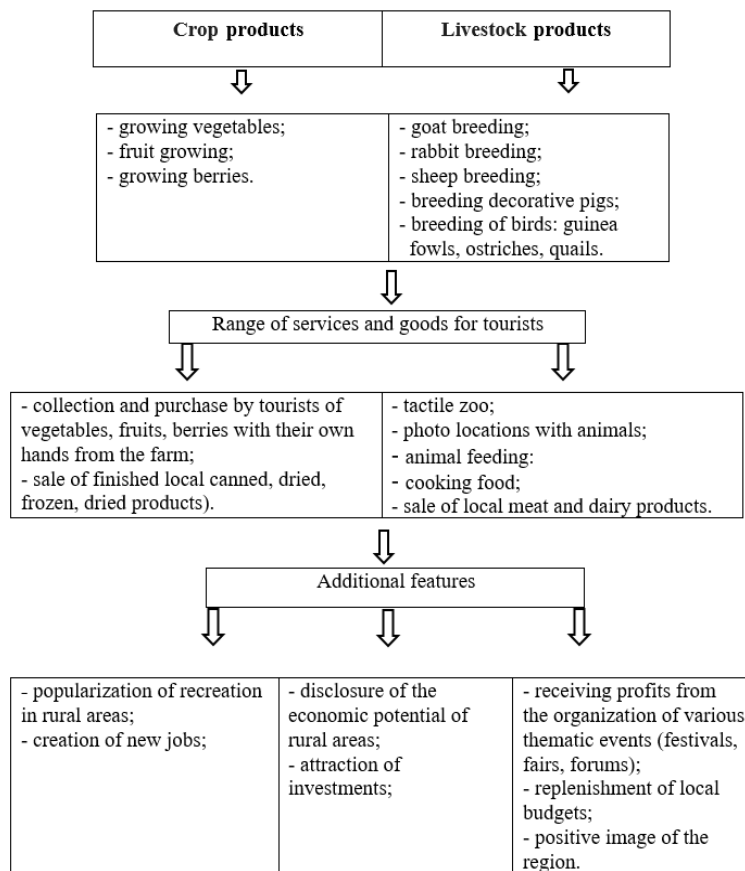


Figure 4. The structure of an eco-farm

Source: (Shepeleva & Sarkisyan, 2021)

Discussion and conclusions. Thus, the development of rural tourism opens up new opportunities for:

- promotion of local products and support of agricultural products enterprises;
- improvement of the infrastructure of rural areas;
- increasing the level of employment due to the creation of new jobs;
- increase in tax revenues to local budgets due to the growth of population incomes;
- preserving the cultural and historical heritage of rural communities.

Eco-farms play a multifaceted role in the development of tourism, combining sustainability, education and recreation. They attract tourists looking for a meaningful, environmentally conscious experience while contributing to local economic development and environmental preservation, which aligns with the growing trend of sustainable tourism. This is a new and exciting format of tourist locations in the hospitality system. They offer unique tourism experiences that combine environmental awareness, agriculture and natural beauty.

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