

The Agritourism Marketing Strategies in Luzon

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ABSTRACT

The main thrust of the study is to assess the effectiveness and impact of agritourism marketing strategies. It delved in determining the agritourism profile, agritourism marketing strategies, and impact of agritourism along variables on economic, cultural, and ecological. Data were collected from a total of twenty-two (22) farm owner and personnel. one hundred eighty-nine (189) customer gathered through a designated enumerator to distribute and collect the survey questionnaire employing a non-probability sampling technique. The marketing strategies of the agritourism businesses in Luzon are generally effective, specifically the educational tours, food services, commodity crops and processed foods. Owners of agritourism in Luzon perceived that their business have great impact to the community particularly when it comes to educating the consumers and visitors about the local agriculture, issues and importance to the country's economy and quality of life and increasing the visibility and the appeal of the locally grown products.

1. Introduction

Agritourism is a recreational sector that appears to be gaining ground in terms of traveler awareness, media exposure, and adoption by agriculturalists looking for diversified income streams. Agritourism is defined as “a commercial enterprise at a working farm, ranch, or agricultural plant conducted for the enjoyment of visitors that generates supplemental income for the owner” (Sullins et. al. 2010). Agricultural tourism merges the world of travel with experiences of food and farming production.

For many traditional agricultural producers, however, agritourism represents an entirely new business model. Transitioning from a wholesale business or an enterprise engaged in only limited direct marketing into a full-fledged hospitality and service business necessitates new approaches to marketing. This fact sheet explains the fundamentals of sound marketing and offers marketing strategies for making your farm a more appealing, welcoming, and well-known visitor destination. The development of a successful agritourism operation requires a keen focus on marketing the farm as a travel destination attractive to customers on the basis of farm products and services, hospitality, and experiences (Schilling, 2011).

Philippines is one of the largest archipelagos in the world composed of 7,101 islands and has about 11 million hectares of agricultural lands. It offers diverse agricultural products which are seen as assets in promoting different farm tourism sites. These varied offerings can bring revenue to the sectors of the country's agriculture and tourism which can create about 14 million jobs. The country's tropical climate and fertile soil makes it an ideal place for agriculture. The country has also been known to be rich in different and unique species of fauna and flora. Aside from the geographic features of the Philippines, the ability of the Filipinos to speak English is also seen as a favorable characteristic making it easier for tourists to communicate with the locals, thus, making the country more tourist-friendly.

Several decades ago, the country's economy and employment were dependent on agriculture. In recent year, however, the population has become less dependent on farming. In terms of share to the total economy, the agriculture sector's importance has continuously dropped over the past decades. In 1946, about a third of the economy (29.7 percent) was

agricultural. But this share of agriculture to the economy has declined over the years. In 2012, it is contributing in merely 11.1 percent to the economy.

Statistics always become interesting when they are compared across time and across space. Consider economic statistics across regions of the country. Based on the 2011 Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP), Central Luzon (Region III) and CALABARZON (Region IVA) are the top two contributors to the agricultural sector at 13.8 percent and 9.5 percent, respectively. Comparing the share of agriculture in the total economies across all the regions, it can be observed that the Autonomous Region of Muslim (ARMM) has the largest share of Agriculture industry to its economy with 63.0 percent. It is interesting to note that ARMM has consistently been on record as having one of the highest poverty incidences among all the regions (at 45.9 percent in 2009) in the country.

The Philippines, like other Association of South East Asian (ASEAN) economies, has likewise experienced changing structure of agriculture sector. For instance, the shares of Agriculture to the economy of most countries in the ASEAN have also been declining, especially in the case Vietnam, which was 40.2 percent agricultural in 1985 and was reduced to almost half in 2011 (at 22.02 percent). Note that even if the share of agriculture to the economy has been declining, the Gross Value Added of Agriculture in 2011 for ASEAN countries has still been a considerable amount like the leading country, Indonesia with 37,252 million US\$, followed by the Philippines with 15,397 million US\$, and Thailand with 14,182 million US\$. In terms of employment, Thailand has the most number of persons in ASEAN employed in agriculture at 41.5 percent in 1980 to only 41.5 percent in 2009.

Unfortunately, these statistics only describe the past. Very often, even when policy interventions were made, the effects take time. Whether the current efforts of government will be successful or not, only time will truly tell. Many efforts have not yielded fruit, but perhaps, it is also time for us all to recognize that we cannot leave everything to the government. If people wish the agriculture sector to grow in importance, then we all have to do our share in helping farmers, in reducing transportation costs, and reducing the profits of middle-men. This is not the sole responsibility of government. Statistics in agriculture will also need to constantly improve to help serve as guideposts for government to calibrate its actions as need be. But these improvements will require investments. Government must not only need to invest in proper interventions, but also in statistics so that we can improve the performance of the agricultural sector.

The Philippines is a growing tourist hotspot with world-class beaches, diving, and shopping destinations. The country is now exploring another fast growing segment – agritourism – and has recently joined the ranks of the world’s top eight agritourism destinations. Agritourism has been present in the Philippines since the 1990s, but was not institutionally defined back then. In those early days, most agritourism farms were either privately owned or managed.

In 1991, the Philippines’ Department of Tourism (DOT) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) came together and formulated the Philippine Tourism Master Plan (TMP); aimed at developing tourism on an environmentally sustainable basis. In 2002, the Department of Agriculture (DAR) and DOT issued a joint circular project that identified ten (10) agritourism sites in the country. With this accreditation, all sites would have to adhere to the minimum standards prescribed by the Department for all operations and maintenance activities; guaranteeing a satisfactory visit for the tourists.

The Philippines’ topography is very ideal for Agritourism. Agritourism farms, such as those in Benguet and Guimaras, that are scattered throughout the country. Leisure farms or farm resorts, as they are called by the Department of Tourism (DOT), have sprung up in different regions of the country. These are farms with resort, accommodation, and dining components.

Experts agreed that Agritourism in the Philippines has a long way to go before becoming an economic driver of rural communities – facing challenges in administration, policy, regulation, and product development. But they likewise accorded that steps such as the conflation of research on the subject can significantly contribute to the development of the field. The Department of Agriculture (DA) believes that amidst the dwindling contribution of agriculture to the GDP, that is, from 30-40 percent half a century ago to today’s 15-18 percent, Agritourism can still work in the Philippines because farming is an integral part of Filipino culture.

The increased popularity of agritourism sites around the Philippines affirms earlier concepts that farmlands are also for tourists. As a predominantly agricultural country, it is crucial that tourism packages showcase the bounty harvests that grow on our rich soil; thus, exhibiting not only our abundant natural resources but also unveiling the rich cultural heritage of our people.

Agritourism will not only provide additional employment opportunities in agricultural communities but will also open additional market for local products and services. It will also facilitate transfer of income from urban to rural communities and hopefully enhance appreciation about agriculture among the people from urban areas especially the youth.

The agritourism sector in the Philippines is not necessarily a bed of roses. It is particularly vulnerable to natural disasters such as earthquakes and typhoons. Though considerable attention has been paid to disaster management, these efforts are largely concentrated on preparedness and post-disaster response; not so much on prevention and mitigation projects. Nevertheless, there is a vast potential for agritourism in the Philippines, thanks to the country's favorable geographical features. The Philippines agritourism sector may also spawn imitators across Asia, as other countries seek to tap into their mature agricultural sectors to grow the economy and nurture high quality jobs in rural areas.

2. Literature Review

Agritourism

Agritourism is a small-scale entrepreneurship or an innovative family-run business initiative organized in rural settings and focused on the provision of a complex cluster of services, aimed at offering memorable rural experiences in order to satisfy the natural and socio-cultural needs of customers. Broadly defined, agritourism is a strategic approach used for overcoming economic decline in rural areas and for relevant use of land-based resources with the purpose of preserving peripheral territories and having a favorable socio-economic impact in terms of generating alternative income, creating additional employment opportunities and reducing depopulation caused by migration to urban areas (Arroyo et al., 2013; Carpio et al., 2008; Sonnino, 2004).

Agritourism comprises of rural enterprises that incorporate both a functioning farm and commercial tourism component, for example: orchards, wineries and vineyards, pumpkin patches, corn mazes and organic farms (Stoddard, Evans & Davé, 2008). Agritourism provides an authentic experience in agriculture, including farming, education in organic lifestyles, and the creation one-of-a-kind products using only tools and supplies available on the farmland. The goal is to create sustainability in tourism, or as stated by Stoddard, Evans and Davé, (2008), "a level of tourism activity that can be maintained over a long term because it benefits the social, economic, natural and cultural environments of the area in which it takes place".

According to McGehee, Lee, O'Bannon and Perdue, (2010), agritourism connects residents within a community to work towards common goals and "social capital" to create sustainability of tourism within their region. It uses agriculture and the travel/tourism industry to open up new, profitable markets for farm products and services as well as travel experience (Ramsey & Schaumleffel, 2006). Agritourism also offers seasonal employment opportunities, new income for farmers, new products and new markets, as well as promoting a more organic lifestyle to help support the "green" movement (Singh, Slotkin & Vamosi, 2007).

Che et. al. (2005), cited that agritourism is another consumptive use of farmland, may help preserve farms. Agritourism has increasingly been proposed as a means for economic diversification and landscape preservation in agricultural regions undergoing restructuring as well as a means to satisfy increased demand for amenity countryside uses. Lobo (2001) has defined agritourism as the act of visiting a working farm or any agricultural, horticultural, or agribusiness operation for the purpose of enjoyment, education, or active involvement in the activities of the farm or operation. In a similar fashion, Maetzold (2002) views agritourism as an alternative enterprise that links value-added or non-traditional agricultural production or marketing with travel to a farm or ranch. Broadly defined, then, agritourism is any agricultural operation that caters directly to the general public with retail sales and/or the provision of services, involving food, fiber, flowers, trees, shrubs, and other farm products and conducting sales at the production location. While farms classified as agritourist operations must offer on-site commercial sales to the general public, they may also be conventional wholesale operations.

Sznajder (2009) emphasized that agritourism is style of vacation that is normally spent on farms. The term agri-tourism is understood differently by tourists and providers of agritourists services. One of the important issues in rural tourism is that many providers are involved in tourism. For example, the main business of a farm is in managing land, stock, machinery and the land. Family labour tends to be the main source of assistance in farm tourism enterprises. Successful farm tourism development requires substantive capital input, marketing, reliance on external advice and finance, (Page & Connell, 2012).

Bagi (2014) postulates that agritourism involves attracting paying visitors to farms by offering farm tours, harvest festivals, hospitality services (such as bed and breakfast), petting zoos, and other attractions. Farms that provide agritourism services, referred to here as agritourism farms, also typically produce agricultural commodities and may provide a variety of other

goods and services. Some agritourism farms engage in direct marketing of fresh foods to individual consumers and/or retailers, value added agriculture (such as the production of beef jerky, fruit jams, jelly, preserves, cider, wine, and floral arrangements), generating renewable energy, and custom work (such as machine hire and hauling for other farms). All of these are considered non-traditional or niche activities that involve innovative uses of farm resources. Research suggests that education and connections to the broader economy are associated with farmers' adoption of such activities, and agritourism farmers fit this profile.

Marketing Strategies

Che et al. (2005) stated that "Marketing-related barriers, however, have hampered agritourism from developing to its fullest potential. Marketing problems stem, in part, from the orientation of geographically isolated farmers. Independent decision-making has focused on improving production, rather than on marketing and consumptive uses of farmland."

Marketing is essential to the success of the agritourism enterprise. It is critical to determine if there is sufficient demand for the proposed agritourism venue products and services. In targeting a market, the consideration becomes the identification of a sub-segment of the total population that offers the highest potential for visiting an agritourism venue associated with a farming operation. Once identified, the potential for a particular agritourism product or service can be quantified.

According to Fall and Lubbers, (2010), the major market agritourism targets are people who are looking for authenticity and experience, as well as those who are interested in rural tourism and the benefits of the agricultural experience. Another group that agritourism targets are those suffering from economic hardships but still want to travel and experience new things (McGehee, Lee, O'Bannon & Perdue, 2010). Those tourists who are suffering financially can still travel and experience something unique without having to worry about air fare or hotel costs. Kelly, (2010), stated that another more recent target market are the people who are looking to take a step back from the societies in which they live that are constantly pushing for newer and faster technology. Tourists want farmers to take them back to a simpler time and give them a better sense of well-being and community (Kelly, 2010).

3. Methodology

This study made use of methodological triangulation which involves using more than one method to gather data such as interviews, observations, questionnaires, and documents (Bautista, 2015). Triangulation is a powerful technique that facilitates validation of data through cross verification from more than two sources. In particular, it refers to the application and combination of several research methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon. This method has the following characteristics that best fit the present study. It can be employed in both quantitative (validation) and qualitative (inquiry) studies, it is a method-appropriate strategy of founding the credibility of qualitative analyses, and it becomes an alternative to traditional criteria like reliability and validity. Several scholars aimed to define triangulation throughout the years. Cohen and Manion (2000) define triangulation as an "attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it from more than one standpoint. Altrichter et al. (2008) contend that triangulation "gives more detailed and balanced picture of the situation. Triangulation is a "method of cross-checking data from multiple sources to search for regularities in the research data (O'Donoghue & Punch, 2003). This study also made use of a descriptive type of research wherein the analysis of data was employed. The data were gathered through a questionnaire which was the main instrument in this study.

The study focused on agritourism key head managerial position personnel, owner, and customer. Out of thirteen (13) accredited agritourism from the roster as hereto presented in the Senate, the researcher utilized the purposive technique to come up with nine (9) agritourism sites from Luzon with a total of twenty-two (22) farm owner and personnel. In another end of the spectrum, a total of one hundred eighty-nine (189) customer comprised part of the respondents gathered through a designated enumerator to distribute and collect the survey questionnaire. This non-probability sampling technique was the appropriate sampled scheme as it responded to the unsatisfactory conditions of the researcher's observation in her place of teaching position. Purposively, at her work in Quezon, it contemplated a greater advantage to efficiently maximize her budget, time, effort, and the desired results of the study, thus fulfilling the stipulated objectives of the study. There were a total of two hundred eleven (211) respondents that comprised part of the respondents consisting of twenty two (22) manager/ owner from the diverse managerial position (top, middle, and supervisory) level and one hundred eighty nine (189) client-respondent who were stakeholders and agritourism enthusiast.

The researcher made use of a questionnaire which served as a main tool in gathering the needed data. This was a self-made instrument designed based on several readings of foregoing variables done by researcher. The researcher collated on the capsule view of the locations of the selected agritourism respondents. Hence, schedule for the itinerary and be guided on where to go first. The researcher personally facilitated the administration of the survey questionnaire and encourages the respondents to cooperate in the administration of the questionnaire.

After the data were collected, organized, analyzed, and finally, subjected to statistical treatment to ascertain the relationship of the variables.

4. Results and Discussion

The main thrust of the study is to assess the effectiveness and impact of agritourism marketing strategies. This study delved in determining the agritourism profile in terms managerial position level. Likewise, the study tackled on the parameters along agritourism marketing strategies as to product, price, place, and promotion. In another end, the researcher tackled on the impact of agritourism as perceived by the respondents focusing on economic, cultural, and ecological.

Based on the gathered, data revealed that the profile of agritourism as managerial position level revealed that in terms of job position, 9 (40.91%) are in the supervisory/managerial level such as accounting/administrative staff, farm manager, marketing manager, and tour guide supervisor. The demographic profiles of the respondents are as follows: in terms of age, 54 (28.57%) are aged 40 – 49; in terms of sex, 113 (59.79%) are females; in terms of civil status, 102 (53.97%) are married; in terms of educational attainment, 75 (39.68%) have finished bachelor's degree; in terms of monthly income, 41 (21.69%) earn P15,000 – P24,999 a month, followed by less than P10,000 with 35 (18.52%), and P10,000 – P14,999 with 30 (15.87%).

The level of assessment on the effectiveness of the marketing strategies of the agritourism businesses in Luzon shows that in terms of products agricultural products; with average weighted means are 4.08, 3.97 for the owner and customers, with a grand total mean of 3.98, all described as "effective". Value added products, with average weighted means are 3.59 and 3.75 for the owners and customers and a grand mean of 3.73, all with verbal interpretation of "effective"; recreational activities, with average weighted means are 3.96 and 3.94 for the owners and customers, with a grand mean of 3.93, all described as "effective"; and hospitality services, with average weighted means of 4.57 and 4.29 for the owners and customers, described as "highly effective" and "effective", with a grand mean of 4.33, also interpreted as "effective". in terms of price, with average weighted means are 3.86 and 3.75 for the owners and customers, respectively with a grand mean of 3.76, all described as "effective". In terms of place, with average weighted means of 4.25 and 4.17 for the owners and customers, respectively and a grand mean of 4.18, all described as "effective"; and in terms of promotion, with average weighted means are 4.57, 4.12 for the owners and customers respectively, resulting to a grand mean of 4.17, described as "highly effective", "effective", and "effective":

The impact of the marketing strategies of the agritourism businesses in Luzon displays that in terms of economic, with average weighted means of 4.83 and 4.41 for the owner and customer, described as "very great impact" and "great impact" respectively, and a grand mean of 4.46, also interpreted as "great impact"; in terms of cultural, with average weighted means are 4.76 and 4.42 for the owners and customers, described as "very great impact" and "great impact", respectively, and a grand total mean of 4.47, also described as "great impact"; in terms of ecological.

It is ascertained that there are significant differences in the level of assessment of the marketing strategies of agritourism businesses in Luzon among the respondents in terms of product, price and place, with computed t values of 0.427, 0.615, and 0.582 resulting to p-values of 0.672, 0.539, and 0.561, all greater than the .05 level of significance.

Furthermore, there are significant differences on the impact of the marketing strategies of the agritourism businesses in Luzon among the respondents in terms of economic, cultural, and ecological, with t-values of 5.931, 4.358, and 6.836 for economic, cultural, and ecological all resulted to p-values of 0.000 each, lower than the .05 level of significance.

5. Conclusion

In light of the findings, the researcher concluded that majority of the respondents is in their early to late 40s, female, married, completed bachelor's degree, and average earners. Most of the respondents from the agritourism businesses are in the supervisory level.

The marketing strategies of the agritourism businesses in Luzon are generally effective, specifically the educational tours, food services, commodity crops and processed foods. For the owners of the agritourism businesses in Luzon, their marketing

strategies have very great impact to the community particularly when it comes to educating the consumers and visitors about the local agriculture, issues and importance to the country's economy and quality of life and increasing the visibility and the appeal of the locally grown products, while the customers assessed these as great impacts. There are no significant differences in the assessment of the respondents in terms of marketing strategies of the agritourism businesses in Luzon in terms of products and services, price and place while they differ when it comes to promotion.

The owners and customers differ in their level of assessment on the impact of the marketing strategies of the agritourism businesses in Luzon where in the owners have the highest level of assessment while the customers have slightly lower level of assessment.

6. Recommendations

The researcher hereby recommends for the owners and management of the agritourism businesses in Luzon: (1) to increase the capacity building of agritourism industry for value-addition to optimize the resource utilization. Enhance the Research and Development in the sector to drive the product development and create a product differentiation. (1) to explore and expand to new export markets and promote compliance to international standards enabling agritourism industry to enter into the foreign market; (2) to improve the Philippine agritourism's market intelligence, information and communication through the creation of the "Main Depository" who will gather relevant, timely and accurate market information; (3) to establish an "Agritourism Traveling Website" and "Online Community" in strengthening the linkage among members of the agritourism industry to fervently showcase their products and services. The Department of Tourism (DOT) may consider launching an "Agritourism Travel Magazine" as platform for advertising the local produce. Aside from the abovementioned, extensive use of the television shows and different media may be considered as venue to effectively showcase the agritourism products and services aside from the traditional word of mouth, and brochures/ leaflets; (4) Sufficient number of investors may be encouraged through good promotional strategies to be spearheaded by the Local Government Units (LGU); (5) Develop systems and structures that promote development of market infrastructure that supports all levels of the agritourism's value chain.

The study may be replicated in other areas which needed strengthening of its agritourism industry encompassing determination of the impact of the agritourism businesses in the country in terms of sales turnout and expenditures. Programs related to the economic development such as job opportunities, promotion of cultural ingenuity, and environmental advocacy may be realized in line with improving the agritourism marketing strategies.

Also, parallel and similar researches may be generated using other prospects which relate to political conditions, transportation and communications to determine if these are correlative to tourism industry improvement.

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