

EXPERIENTIAL AGRITOURISM: A CASE STUDY OF MEDITERRANEAN PLANT PRODUCTION IN HUNGARY

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1 INTRODUCTION

Sustainability and consumer awareness are playing an increasingly important role in our lives, with one of its cornerstones being healthy food consumption [1, 2, 3]. This can be related to the experiential tourism activities offered by agritourism. The first phase of our multi-stage research, the pilot phase, examines experiential tourism programs related to sustainably grown domestic Mediterranean plants. We hypothesize that innovative products and services, such as elements of experience-based tourism, can enhance interest in local, sustainable products, thereby contributing to the development of local communities [4]. From the perspective of domestic Mediterranean plant cultivation – especially citrus cultivation – visiting plantations provides relaxation, rejuvenation, and an invisible education for consumers and their families [5]. The interest in the topic is indicated by the fact that the Facebook group “Citrusok Magyarországon” currently has more than 24,000 members. The nationwide unique Citrus Festival, supported by the Ministry of Agriculture, saw its visitor count rise from approximately 500 in the first year to 2200 in the third year. This May, even more visitors are expected. This research examines the possibilities of experience-based agritourism through the example of Mediterranean plant growers, which are considered exotic in Hungary.

2 MATERIAL AND METHODS

In the study, we categorized the planned agritourism experience elements based on professional experience and literature sources as follows:

- animal husbandry (petting zoo, cheese making, beekeeping, candle making);
- plant cultivation:
 - domestically grown plants (herbs, flowers, garlic, fruits, truffles, etc.) and
 - Mediterranean plants (citrus fruits, olives, palm trees, persimmons, kiwis, pomegranates, etc.);
- gastronomic programs.

Within the framework of the case study, we only examined Mediterranean plants as experiential elements, where the main goal was to create experiences and, of course, the accompanying learning and gastronomic enjoyment. We collected the practical examples of the case studies through direct observation. After the literature review, the online content of the businesses featured in the case study (website, social media content, consumer feedback) was reviewed and analysed.

3 RESULTS

In the first phase of the research, in addition to processing domestic and international literature, we conducted data collection through content and document analysis. In addition to reviewing the websites and social media content of businesses and service providers related to experience-based agritourism, we also examined Google reviews in the spring of 2025, where each organization under study received a rating above 4.5, which can be considered an excellent result.

The case study includes 4 horticultural enterprises. One of the businesses is located in Western Hungary, specializing in the cultivation and trade of Mediterranean plants, while the other is a producer from the Balaton Highlands who grows, among other things, jujubes, Indian bananas, pistachios, pomegranates, and figs, and also organizes professional and agritourism events. A special feature is represented by two olive tree growers and olive oil producers in Hungary, one of them also in the Balaton Highlands, the other in Pécs, in southern Hungary. The latter, in terms of domestic standards, is also involved in breeding the highest quality olive trees that are adapted to the local climate.

4 CONCLUSIONS

In the case of the examined businesses, the increasing number of visitors led us to conclude that there is a growing demand for such experiential agritourism programs. The interested parties are increasingly seeking online presence as well. Based on the evaluation, visitor satisfaction is high. According to changing demands, it may be advisable for tourism service providers to open up to experience-based visits. As the next step in our research, we aim to assess consumers' interest and needs regarding experience-based agritourism through a questionnaire survey.

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