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BRITISH AGROTOURISM BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THE COVID19 PANDEMIC

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the article is to discuss the development of agrotourism or farm tourism in the UK and explain how agrotourism boomed and became a key product for British farmers in the 21st century. The UK's approach to agrotourism paved the way for a successful presence on the tourism marketplace during the 2020 and 2021 British Summer staycation phenomenon. The study analyzes the processes of agricultural and rural restructuring that have characterized the British rural economies since the end of World War II. The article outlines the context and complex processes that have shaped the transition from traditional agricultural activity and farm management through to activity diversification and farm tourism development. Used interchangeably in the UK, farm tourism or agrotourism is a diversification strategy meant to promote a more sustainable rural economy and to protect farm incomes against market fluctuation. The article explains how agrotourism was set up for success; how it was possible for it to take full advantage of the Covid-19 upheaval and staycation needs; and explore where it is heading in a post-Covid19 world.

Key words: agrotourism, farm tourism, entrepreneurship, farm diversification.

JEL Classification: Q01, R11.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to agrotourism experts: "Britain's agritourism sector is booming since the coronavirus pandemic, leading it to become one of the fastest growing sectors of the rural economy. (…) Much of the reported success is down to individual entrepreneurship, but umbrella organisations, such as Farm Stay and Scottish Agritourism, are widely credited with supplying vital collective support." (Pate, 2021:1). Farm entrepreneurship and farm diversification have saved the rural landscape from many hardships over the last few decades. When the Covid19 pandemic hit, farms that had developed their agrotourism side of the business were in a good position to take advantage of the increased focus on rural holidays, fresh air, and interest in nature. Once lockdowns were lifted, this type of tourism leads the way in terms of UK tourism recovery.

The changes that took place in rural areas in the second half of the twentieth century had profound effects on how the British countryside now works. This period

was marked by a decrease in agriculture. This includes a decrease in employment on rural land and was facilitated by increased mechanization and specialization in agricultural production. For example, between 1960 and 2006, the UK farm labor force fell by one third, while the number of farm workers fell by almost half (Defra, 2006). The primary trend in UK agriculture has been that total agricultural income has fallen steadily over the same timeframe, from GBP 8.9 million in 1973 to GBP 4.4 million in 2010 (Defra, 2010). The changing political context, facilitated by the ongoing reform of the CAP, has put additional pressure on agricultural households and required farmers to become more enterprising and develop new capacities to remain competitive.

Rural diversification consists of two major components: (1) diversification of agricultural holdings and (2) rural industrialization. Farm diversification is seen to provide a new agricultural orientation to communities, while the industrialization of rural areas, characterized by an indigenous growth of rural industry and the growth of manufacturing and service industries, is seen as a response to the wider rural socio-economic problems identified, beyond traditional primary activities. Of course, rural entrepreneurship is seen as an effective strategy in combating the problems of rural decline (Lordkipanidze, Brezet and Backman, 2005), with the diversification of farms often contrasting with portfolio entrepreneurship, and farmers being generally seen as an important group in terms of setting up new business enterprises in rural areas.

The purpose of this article is therefore to examine this process of rural diversification, exploring farm diversification and structural change through new rural industrialization activities. More specifically, the article will review the role of tourism both in the context of farm diversification and as one of the emerging service industries that characterize the process of rural industrialization. However, first, it is necessary to review in more detail the structural changes in agriculture that marked the post-war period in the developed economies of the rural north. More specifically, this period was characterized by two major phases of agricultural change; in particular, the productivist phase from the early 1950s to the mid-1980s and the post-productivist phase – or the post-productive transition (PPT) – which begins in the 1980s and lasts to the present day (Phelan, 2014).

The following section will provide an overview of the steps taken by UK farmers towards rural diversification. Although this process has taken up a lot of time, farmers can now see how much good it can do for their businesses and how they can capitalize on a tourism industry impacted by health risks, safety concerns (terrorism, war), economic uncertainty, environmental pressures and changing demand characteristics. The article will argue that farm diversification through farm tourism or agrotourism is a good strategic move.

The British tourism industry is only starting to process the 2021 and 2022 tourism data, but the focus on rural areas for visitation is going to impact many tourism seasons to come. The world post-Covid19 is likely to be characterized by an increase in tourism and leisure activities consumption despite major economic and social shifts likely to characterize the world in the next few decades. This has been called revenge consumption and revenge tourism. This will benefit both international

travel and domestic travel, but it is expected that the staycation phenomena will grow mostly due to the looming economic crisis, raising cost of daily expenses, and conflicts in Europe and beyond. Farm tourism offers a low cost, peaceful, relaxing holiday by comparison to more traditional tourism experiences such as culture and heritage tourism, urban tourism, seaside holidays and other mainstream types of holidays. Farm tourism is therefore a good investment for farmers who wish to develop and diversify their portfolios (Phelan and Sima, 2020).

2. STATE OF KNOWLEDGE

In British agriculture, significant levels of debt and depression among farmers because of the agricultural crisis have, in themselves, been a driver for increasing involvement in non-food production activities and diversification of farms. As British farm incomes continued to decline, the National Farmers' Union reported that by the end of the 1990s, 64% of British farmers had borrowed money to keep their farm operational (NFU, 1999), with agricultural loans reaching a record high of £10 billion and growing (NFU, 2002). To stay relevant and competitive on the marketplace, farms have had to adopt a range of strategies in line with the 'industrial model' of productive agricultural development based on expansion, intensification and specialization using traditional agricultural products and services. This included the recombination of agricultural resources into new unconventional agricultural products and services on the holding; the recombination of agricultural resources into new non-agricultural products and services on the farm; the redistribution of agricultural resources (including human capital) in jobs outside the holding; or maintaining the 'traditional' model of conventional agricultural production or services; or the liquidation to hobby or semi-retired agriculture; even retirement from agriculture.

For Ilbery (1991), the diversification of agricultural holdings is the development of non-traditional (alternative) enterprises on the holding, although it must be recognized that the notions of non-traditional and alternative are as subjective as the term conventional and therefore subject to changes in values over time. Ilbery provides a typology of farm diversification, which divides activities into both structural and agricultural diversification, before a further breakdown into three groups representing a series of activities (see Table 1 below).

Organic farming is included in this diversification strategy, along with several alternative agricultural products, as well as tourism and recreational activities, retail trade and on-farm food processing, as examples of potential diversification activities. Originally seen as a deviation from real agriculture (van der Ploeg, 2003) and, in the case of agricultural tourism, even as a betrayal of the farmer (Jongeneel, Polman and Slangen, 2008), diversification is now seen as an important element in maintaining the viability of the agricultural business. In addition, "the failure to diversify is [now] seen as a poor agricultural practice, and the social status of the farmer is no longer judged on the basis of care and custody skills, but rather on the ability to successfully manage a complex business operation", with 86% of UK farms saying that they engage in some form of diversification activity (Walford, 2003, p.61).

Indeed, data on diversification activities are difficult to obtain and a challenge to compare. In addition, there have been criticisms that most of the data at the farm level was collected using systems that were designed when agriculture had as its main task food production. This has now led to blind spots in official statistics when it comes to understanding the broader impact of rural development (Knickel and Renting, 2000).

Recent OECD work has identified the scale of farm change activities in some member countries, noting that on-farm food processing is the preferred activity in Italy and Portugal, where more than 80% of farms declare this interest. Contract work takes place in over 55 % of farms in Finland and Greece, while 35 % and 47 % of farms in Austria and the UK, respectively, say that they engage in tourism enterprises as a complement to agricultural income (Jones, Moreddu and Kumagai, 2009).

Table 1

A typology of farm diversification options

Farm diversification options	
Structural diversification	**Agricultural diversification**
1. Tourism **i. Accommodation** *Bed and breakfast* *Self-catering* **ii. Recreation** *Farmhouse tea/café Demonstrations / open days Farm zoo / children's farm Water / land based sports War games* *Horticulture* *Craft centres* *Nature trails / reserves Country / wildlife parks* **iii. Combined Activity holidays** **2. Adding value to farm enterprises** **i. By direct marketing** *Farm gate sales* *Farm shop* *Delivery round PYO scheme* **ii. By processing** *Cheese* *Ice cream / yoghurt* *Cider / wine* *Jams / preserves* *Potato packing* *Flour milling* **iii. By selling skins / hides / wools** **3. Passive diversification** *Leasing of land* *Leasing of buildings*	**1. Unconventional enterprises** **i. Crop products** *Linseed* *Teasels* *Evening primroseBorage* *Triticale* *Fennel* *Durum Wheat* *Vineyards* **ii. Animal products** *Fish* *Deer* *Goats* *Horses* *Lamoids* *Sheep milk* **iii. Organic farming** **2. Farm woodland** *Energy forestry Amenity/recreation* *Wildlife conservationFor timber* **3. Agricultural Contracting** *For other farmers* *For non-agricultural organisations*

Source: Ilbery, 1991, p.210.

Data from the Farm Business Survey (FBS) reports on a regular basis that, in England, income from diversified activities often exceeds £360 million, with over 50 % of farms diversifying. Moreover, for 23% of the surveyed farms, incomes from diversified activity exceeded the incomes generated by traditional agricultural activity, reaffirming the crucial role of diversified projects for the viability of the agricultural household (Defra, 2011).

FBS identifies the most popular non-agricultural activity in England is renting out farm buildings, which generates an average of 15 % of the total revenue for these businesses (more than £30 million in England). A growing number of farmers are also becoming involved in the processing and retail sale of food, usually generating more than 20 % of the revenue for these businesses (more than £40 million in England).

3. MATERIAL AND METHOD

The study draws from secondary data to support its claims. Secondary data or desk research is used because of the exploratory nature of the topic. Understanding and research on the impacts of the Covid19 pandemic year on rural communities, rural tourism, agrotourism or farm tourism are in its initial stages. This article adopts a systematic literature review approach using desk research and existing articles, statistics, and relevant reports, to introduce this line of questioning in relation to farming and agriculture first and foremost. Agriculture is often described as "one of the most powerful and enduring symbols of rurality" and has for centuries been the dominant and driving force of rural economies (Woods, 2005, p. 42), often representing the main source of income, employment, and production for rural areas. However, since the end of World War II, a decline in fortunes in the agricultural sector has been obvious as agriculture has moved from the center to the periphery of daily lives. For example, in many developed countries, less than one fifth of the rural population is now dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods (Woods, 2005). The agriculture of the United Kingdom, which employed more than one million people in the early 1950s, recorded this halving of this number, while the agricultural population of France has also halved since the 1980s (Storey, 2009). At the same time, the relative importance of agriculture for national economies has declined, currently accounting for less than 1% of GDP in the UK, Ireland, Germany, and the US and less than 2% of GDP in France, Austria, Italy, and the Netherlands (World Bank, 2010). As the dominance of agriculture declined, farmers adapted by identifying and exploiting new flows of 'non-agricultural incomes' both from agricultural sources and beyond. Indeed, in the United States in 2004, 52 percent of farm operators and 45 percent of spouses worked off-farm to provide additional income (Jones, Moreddu and Kumagai, 2009), while 58 percent of farms in England

engaged in a diversified form of activity in 2009 (CRC, 2010). Consequently, Johnson (2001, p.15) notes the irony that in the 21st century, "farms are [now] more dependent on local communities than local communities are on farms." However, the Covid19 pandemic has generated a surge in interest in local farms and visitor leisure activities on the farm (such as feeding animals, enjoying farm food and drink, strolling on the farm, educational activities, and workshops), and farm tourism across the United Kingdom. Understanding the evolution of farm tourism (the most common name for on the farm tourism activities), or agrotourism (as it is often called in mainland European countries and the US), may be key to keeping the momentum going.

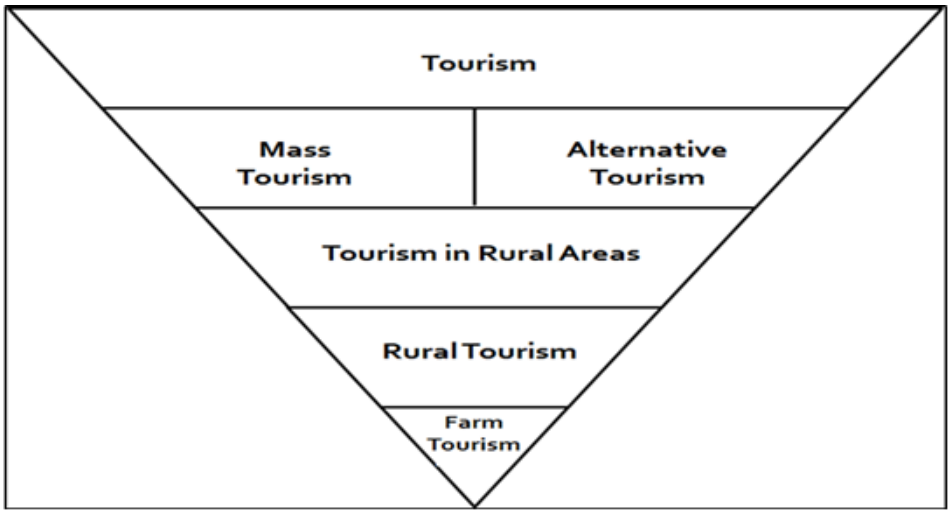
4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Agricultural tourism (farm tourism, agrotourism) is not a new phenomenon, with many researchers pointing to the long history of farm visits. These have been practiced for over 150 years in Germany, although more widespread in its conventional form in Scandinavia and in many central European countries since the end of the World War II (Nilsson, 2002). While early forms of visitation tended to emphasize agricultural residence and rural romance, it has today evolved into a complex phenomenon. Agricultural tourism, farm tourism or agrotourism, which ever name it is tagged under, are often recognized as forms of rural tourism, although more diverse and therefore increasingly difficult to define.

Ainley and Smale (2010, p.61) question what distinguishes agricultural tourists from rural tourists in general and ask "are the farm 'tourists' different from rural visitors to cultural and historical sites ... or from those individuals who are simply trying to escape the hustle and bustle of the modern city in the idyllic countryside?". Research conducted by Sidali *et al*. (2010, p.220) at the request of agricultural tourism bodies in Germany, identified that farmers were looking for their own piece of the rural idyll, with a focus on health and well-being, on regional foods and on the memorable experiences that urban life cannot offer. Roberts and Hall (2001) point out the vision of nature as a box of chocolate, and Wilson *et al*. (2001) argue the notion of mysticism is often associated with rural destinations in general.

A more specific view of agricultural recreation and agricultural tourism is like a niche activity within rural tourism, in which the farm framework itself is a requirement. Indeed, according to Roberts and Hall (2001), agricultural tourism is one of five categories of rural tourism, along with ecotourism, cultural tourism, activity and adventure. Sznajder, Przezborska and Scrimgeour (2009) present agricultural tourism as a subset of rural tourism (see Figure 1). In addition, Sznajder, Prezborska and Scrimgeour (2009) identify three factors that they believe make agricultural tourism different from rural tourism in general, including:

(1) – the opportunity of tourism involvement in the food production process; (2) opportunities to learn about the lives of rural people, including their customs and culture; and (3) the possibility of coming into direct contact with animals, agricultural products and the experience, odors, sounds and attractions in the countryside and on the farm in general.



Source: adapted from Sznajder, Przezborska and Scrimgeour, 2009.

Figure 1. Hierarchical positioning of rural and farm tourism

Table 2 presents a range of definitions on farm tourism. In North America, the descriptor agritourism or agrotourism is more commonly used to refer to agricultural tourism. This refers to the act of visiting a working farm or any agricultural, horticultural, or agro-industrial operation to enjoy, educate or actively engage in the activities of the farm or operation. In this case, the terms *agri-*, *agro-* or *farm-* (tourism) are used interchangeably, and although the status of "work farm" is recognized, the emphasis is on the visitor, with the implication that he should not assume a passive role, but be involved in some form of activity, joy, or education.

Henderson (2009, p.259) points out that visiting agricultural and horticultural sites is not exclusively reserved for rural locations, giving examples of agricultural tourism in the urban city of Singapore. In addition, Henderson argues that if the tourism enterprise is related to agriculture, but "does not have a constituent element of the working farm", then this is more precisely called agritourism. In contrast, the term agritourism is used more generally to refer to agricultural tourism in Mediterranean countries, where it is the preferred descriptor (Gousiou, Spilanis and Kizos, 2001), and Phelan's suggestion (2014) that the prefix agri- refers to the status of worker or non-worker of a tourist farm does not seem to be widely supported in the literature.

Table 2

Farm Tourism: a chronology of definitions

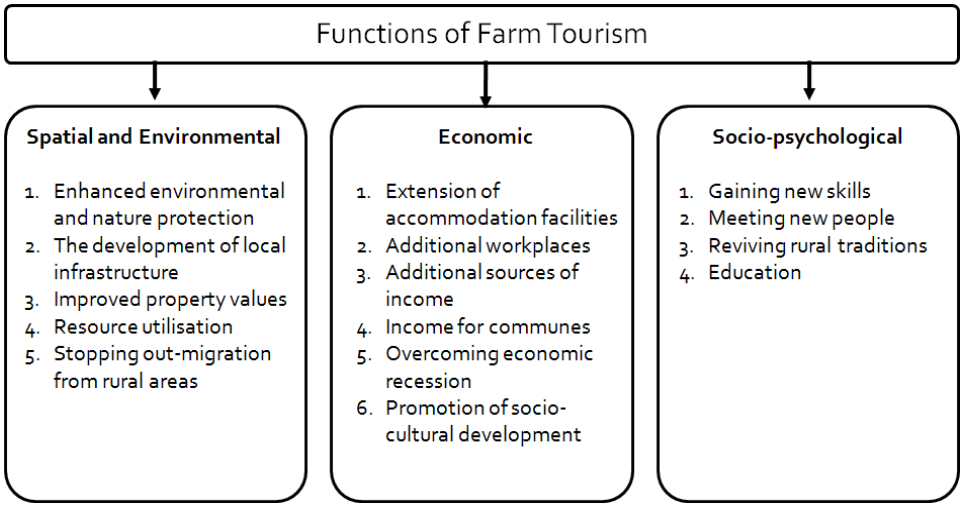
DART (1974): any tourist or recreation enterprise on a working farm.
Hoyland (1982): the provision of temporary accommodation and/or indirect recreational facilities on a working farm.
Frater (1983): tourism enterprises that are present on working farms and yet are largely supplementary to existing farm activities.
Murphy (1985): working farms that supplement their primary function with some form of tourism business.
Wales Tourist Board (1986): working farms, irrespective of type or size, where the primary activity is agriculture and where tourism is a supplementary activity.
Denman and Denman (1990): active provision of facilities for tourists within a working farm.
Davies and Gilbert (1992): a form of rural tourism whereby paying guests can share in farming life either as staying guests or day visitors on working farms.
Pearce (1990): farm tourism represents continuing ownership and active participation by the farmer in, typically, small-scale tourism ventures.
Roberts (1992): farm tourism is about people who are away from the place where they normally live and work, and about the things they do on a working farm, whether they visit for the day or for a longer holiday.
Denman (1994): covers the provision of facilities for tourists on a working farm.
Clarke (1996): tourism products in which the consumer is aware of the farming environment, at a minimum.
Weaver and Fennell (1997): rural enterprises which incorporate both a working farm environment and a commercial tourism component.
Ilbery *et al*. (1998): farm tourism is conceptualized as an alternative farm enterprise (AFE) comprising one of seven possible 'pathways of farm business development'.
Morris (2002): farm tourism can be defined as any accommodations business or visitor attraction based on a working farm.
Carpio, Wohlgenant and Boonsaeng (2008): visits to farm, ranches, and other agricultural settings with recreational purpose.

Source: adapted and updated from Busby and Rendle, 2000.

Gal, Gal and Hadas (2010), extending Busby and Rendle's (2000) proposed transition from "farm tourism" to "agricultural tourism", report that the link between agriculture and tourism is weakening; proposing that, as farmers develop income from tourism, they should withdraw from agricultural production. Indeed, it has been found that this is the case in Croatian agriculture, agricultural families that engage in agricultural tourism activities, considered to be the reduction of agricultural production (Brščić, 2006). Similarly, Di DiMenico and Miller (2012), in their study on agricultural attractions in the UK, identify that many farms, faced with an economic imperative for diversification, now identify themselves as tourism entrepreneurs rather than farmers, and have a clear desire to get out of agriculture. However, this is likely to be a trend that requires regional analysis on a case-by-case basis. Garcia-Ramon *et al*., in 1995, recognize that, in Spain, farm tourism offers at most only additional income which is unlikely to replace agriculture.

Definitions aside, a series of studies on the demand side of agricultural tourism (Oppermann, 1995) observed that the status of an active farm has no value for the visitor, with Oppermann (1995, p.65) commenting that "the real agricultural environment seems to be reverting to other reasons for travel." In contrast, a profile of farm visitors in Victoria, Australia, identified that involvement in farm-related activities (the most important element being even described as "watching agriculture") was evaluated and prioritized as an activity by just over 30 percent of those surveyed (n= 230); only a figure exceeded by the 44 percent who wanted to engage in passive activities such as "walking" and "bird watching". Therefore, it can be assumed that setting up farmland was still important (Kidd, King and Whitelaw, 2004). Here, regional signatures for the development of agricultural tourism may very well come into play, with Ollenburg (2008) reminding us of that state legislation in Italy, which requires agricultural tourism to have a direct link with agriculture to avoid the misuse of the Italian label 'agriturismo'. Instead, the Convention in Greece is for farmers to provide accommodation located at an additional property a few kilometers from the main farm. Here, contact with both the farm and the family of the farm is understandable less likely.

Having identified that agricultural tourism fulfils specific roles for the rural visitor in terms of tourism involvement in the process of food production, the possibility of interacting with rural life and the potential for direct contact with animals and the experience of the farm in general (Sznajder, Przezborska and Scrimgeour, 2009), it is appropriate to move the discussion from defining and conceptual aspects to considering the functions of agricultural tourism. Phelan (2014) points out that these functions can be expressed as spatial, environmental, economic, and socio-psychological functions, as outlined in Figure 2.



Source: Iakovidou, Partalidou and Manos, 2000.

Figure 2. The functions of farm tourism

As outlined above, an emerging body of literature now emphasizes the motivations of farmers and farm households in their decisions to diversify to tourism enterprise. In North America, research indicates that farmers primarily diversify to provide additional income and employment opportunities for the farm family. Research by Nickerson, Black and McCool (2001) on family farms and ranches in Montana tests eleven reasons for diversifying, with principal component analysis resulting in three factors: social reasons, economic reasons, and external influences. Unsurprisingly, in the context of the earlier discussion regarding the pressure on agriculture, 61 % of respondents diversified for economic reasons, including: the need to generate additional income; to overcome fluctuations in agricultural income; and to make full use of existing resources. McGhee and Kim (2004) used the same motivational statements to assess 987 farm tourism operators in Virginia, again finding that economic drivers were dominant – with 'additional income' holding the highest mean importance – despite the nature of farming here being very different from that of Montana. Table 3 outlines farmer motivation to diversify in different areas of the world.

Table 3

Stated motivations of farm tourism operators worldwide

Motivations of farm tourism operators worldwide			
Region	**No.**	**Motivations**	**Reference**
Herefordshire,UK	118 (Not known)	71% Income 25% Social	(Frater, 1983)
Northumbria and Yorkshire,UK	79 (53%)	60% Income 13% Use buildings	(Sharpley andVass, 2006)
Saskatchewan,Canada	40 (52%)	55% Income 34% Social	(Weaver and Fennell, 1997)
New York, USA	Not known	82% Income	(Kuehn and Hilchey, 2001)
Montana, USA	292 (41%)	61% Income 23% External 16% Social andIncome	(Nickerson, Black and McCool, 2001)
Virginia, USA	412 (67%)	Income; utilise buildings; education	(McGehee andKim, 2004)
New Zealand	13	Social	(Pearce, 1990)
New Zealand	172 (67%)	41% Social 32% Income	(Oppermann,1998)
Southland, New Zealand	36 (55%)	64% Social 28% Income	(Hogh, 2001)

Source: adapted from Ollenburg and Buckley, 2007.

Considering the contextual factors surrounding the supply of agricultural tourism, together with the objectives and motivations of the operators, it is now

necessary to consider more closely both the farmer and the agricultural household in the context of diversification from the tourist enterprise. While the literature on agricultural tourism remains fragmented and somewhat limited, a small number of studies have begun to overcome motivations to address the characteristics and performance of the agricultural tour operators themselves. For example, in a study of U.S. farms, Brown and Reeder (2007) found that farmers with agricultural tourism holdings tend to have a higher education: with 95 percent who have a high school education, compared to 89 percent of farmers in general; another 44 percent also hold a university education, compared to 24 percent of farmers in general. Moreover, Bowler, *et al*. (1996), in a farm study of farms in the North Pennines of England, concluded that highly educated farmers tended to make higher profits.

Wilson (2007), using the family business development model, explores the role that family and friends play, both as an available source of labour and to compensate for skills gaps in agricultural operations. This labor supply can range from 20 hours per month for guiding farm visitors, up to 750 hours a month on farms with guest houses. Moreover, they identified that in most cases, it was the partner (or farm wife) who oversees these diversified activities.

The role of the family business has been a recurring theme in agricultural tourism research (Andersson, Carlsen and Getz, 2002), with Nilsson (2002) identifying that the farm's wife is essential to the tourist business. In addition, in an analysis of agricultural tourism in England and Wales, McNally (2001) notes that the probability that tourism will be present – as one of a series of diversification options – increases by 12 % if the husband is considered present as part of the diversified holding. This marital presence is also positively associated with the likelihood of observing retail trade or recreation on the farm, confirming that, according to the wider literature on rural and agricultural tourism, many diversification roles can be considered gender specific (Brandth and Haugen, 2007).

Garcia-Ramon *et al*. (1995) confirm this situation by demonstrating that the role of farm women is crucial to the success of farms in Spain, with guest care being considered an extension of domestic agricultural burdens. However, they note that this has endowed women with greater profile and economic independence than they would ordinarily enjoy in their agricultural roles. These studies expand the debate and highlight the fact that, increasingly, tourism is seen as an important household activity, as opposed to the individual farm development strategy. Although Das and Rainey (2010), in the review of agricultural tourism in Arkansas, suggest that if recreational operations represent a natural expansion of agricultural activity, it is difficult for researchers to determine the relative contributions of the family workforce allocated between the two.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The article demonstrated how a shift from productivist to post-productivist agriculture resulted in a shift to a multipurpose rural space, and additional avenues of development for the agricultural business. These additional development pathways include the diversification of agricultural holdings in general, as well as the diversification of agricultural tourism. To summarize, it becomes clear that literature on agricultural tourism addresses certain elements of the characteristics of the farmer and the farm household. This type of understanding is crucial if the industry is to grow and capitalize on the changing tourism trends, the Covid19 recovery years, and the renaissance in interests around the agricultural landscape. The success of farm tourism or agrotourism/agritourism post-Covid largely depends on raising awareness around the needs of the farm and to what extent they can benefit from the additional pressure of diversification and tourism.

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