

**Krzysztof Firlej**

*University of Economics in Cracow, Poland*

## THE POLISH SECTOR OF AGRI-TOURISM AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

### *POLSKI SEKTOR AGROTURYSTYKI W ASPEKCIE ROZWOJU OBSZARÓW WIEJSKICH*

**Key words:** agri-tourism, eco-tourism, sector, development

*Słowa kluczowe:* agroturystyka, ekoturystyka, sektor, rozwój

**Abstract.** The paper tackles the issue of agri-tourism in Poland, its contemporary state and functioning and presents it as a subsystem of both tourism and agribusiness. The theoretical part of the paper delineates the main features of agri-tourism and its short history. The main emphasis is put on the attractiveness of agri-tourism as a form of agricultural entrepreneurship. An active role of the government in stimulating agri-tourism development has also been considered.

### Introduction

Many agricultural centres have cropped up over the last 15 years offering holiday makers leisure and entertainment in the countryside. These include both individual farms as well as villages focused on services provided by agri-tourism oriented farms. Farm holidays have become very popular among city dwellers who seek an opportunity to get closer to nature and discover a new form of tourism. The recipients of services provided by agricultural tourism are mainly wealthy inhabitants of big cities who prefer to take short breaks rather than long holidays, and spend their leisure time in the countryside, which stimulates the development of rural tourism. The main agri-tourism stimulating factors include growing demand for agri-tourist services and low profitability of the Polish agriculture. It needs to be emphasized though, it is demand that mainly enhances the growth of agri-tourism and its services, which have recently become very popular in Poland.

The EU member states are an example for the Polish entrepreneurship to follow in developing agri-tourism activity. At the beginning of this century, one out of four EU citizens with a number of agritourist offers at their disposal, chose farm holidays as a form of leisure. These offers are directed to individual tourists searching for a novelty at the travel agent's and trying to find an alternative to mass tourism. European countries that can boast successful agri-tourism businesses include: Austria, Germany, France, Ireland and Great Britain. In Austria 10% of farms offer agri-tourism services directed to over 300 000 tourists. In Italy nearly 7000 farms provide accommodation for 10 persons, which is comparable to the statistics in France and Germany.

At least one third of an average farm's income in the EU is derived from agribusiness<sup>1</sup>. The main source of income for 10% of farms in the EU is rural tourism successfully organized by farmers themselves who met the EU standards in setting up their agri-tourism businesses. It needs to be emphasized that these farmers were provided with both government and the EU subsidies on starting their ventures, which was the result of a wide scale promotion of agri-tourism development and growing popularity of farm holidays. Hence agri-tourism is a regular source of profit and

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ppr.pl/artykul.php?id=127370>

makes 15% income from tourism in the EU. As a result, agri-tourism centres are being established, high standard services are being provided, farms are being categorized and promotion activities are being propelled.

An active role of government organizations in the EU member states has largely contributed to the successful development of rural tourism. These organizations are actively engaged in promoting tourism in their regions, i.e. Tuscany in Italy or mountain regions of France and Austria. In England, barns provided with camp beds and washing facilities make a favourite accommodation among teenage tourists. In Germany, cowsheds are turned into country hotels and old-style inns are created, offering visitors regional food and drinks.

Agri-tourism is an important sector of tourism in the EU countries, which use their various resources to enhance and finance its development. Financial means necessary to propel rural tourism are derived not only from the EU funds but also from budgets of particular member states, where money is donated and distributed by government and local authorities. Farms that provide tourist services are subsidized by the system of loans and donations, i.e. low-interest loans given to Austrian farmers by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture with a 10-year repayment agreement. Financial means for agri-tourism development are also given to agri-tourist federations, which, in turn, distribute them among farmers as direct investment funds or use them to finance courses and trainings. It seems obvious that a network of farms providing agri-tourism services induces the development of the whole region. In the EU more than 20% of farmers derive their income from tourism<sup>2</sup>.

### Agri-tourism as a form of rural entrepreneurship in Poland

Agri-tourism is one of the spheres of tourism activity in rural areas that developed in Poland on wider scale in the 1990s and was based on farms offering accommodation. The main idea of agri-tourism was to provide tourists with board and accommodation, give them an opportunity to be close to nature, and offer them agricultural produce to buy. Agri-tourism as a form of leisure is particularly attractive to people who live in big cities and industrial areas. In general, agri-tourism can be defined as a form of leisure in a rural area, based on a farm providing accommodation and expanded services. Agri-tourism as such is part of multifunctional development of the countryside in Poland. Its main definitions involve:

#### Specification

**M. Nowakowski** (2001, pp. 5-6) Agri-tourism – a form of tourism characterized by great recreational and psychological values for adults and educational values for children in providing active leisure in the countryside, i.e. living on a farm, participating in daily activities like: farm work and meals.

**M. Drzewiecki** (1998, p 7) Agri-tourism – a form of tourism in the countryside which varies in terms of intensity of settlement, between extensively used protected areas and intensively used recreational regions. The latter includes agricultural settlements characterized by harmoniously combined elements of natural and cultural landscape. Agricultural settlement provides board and accommodation for tourist who use it as a starting point for excursions into surrounding areas.

**M. Długokęcka** (2001, pp. 227-228) Agri-tourism is a tool to realize the strategic aims of regional and structural policy including employment growth, alternative sources of income for farmers, improvement of economically neglected areas and stable development. A number of different functions, on the one hand, makes agri-tourism important not only for tourism but also for agriculture, regional policy, environment protection, business and small business development. On the other hand, this multifunctionality enables agri-tourism businesses to derive financial means for their development from various the EU funds.

**M. Dębniewska, M. Tkaczuk** (1997) Agri-tourism is a form of rural tourism in the countryside and rural areas which utilizes local natural resources. Agri-tourism is part of rural tourism.

**S. Mendlik** (1995) Agri-tourism (agricultural tourism or farm tourism) – holiday tourism based on farms. It may take different forms but always involves accommodation and sometimes other services as well. Its two main forms include accommodation with catering in a farmhouse and accommodation with self-catering on a farm and its surrounding areas (campsites, holiday cabins). Rural tourism or holiday tourism, sometimes identified with agri-tourism, is a more general term covering also the development of tourist routes, campsites, tourist centres, agricultural and folklore museums. It is concentrated in the countryside and propels income and employment growth as well as contributes to the economic diversification of the region.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ppr.pl/artukul.php?id=101314>

Tourist services can be divided in terms of national and international tourism. Agri-tourism is derived from rural tourism, and can be labelled unconventional, that is alternative to conventional mass tourism. Agri-tourism, as part of tourism, has many different functions which make it interesting not only in terms of tourism but also in terms of agriculture, regional policy, environment protection, business and small business development. As part of a multifunctional development of the countryside in Poland, agri-tourism has the ability to stimulate this development through the EU funds.

The main features of agri-tourism include its location in rural areas, direct connection to a farm i.e. agricultural farm, fish farm, animal farm, its use of farmhouses for tourist accommodation and active leisure in natural surroundings of a farm. Agri-tourism is a type of human activity where needs of two different social groups: urban and rural population, intertwine and complement each other. For city dwellers, agri-tourism is a form of active leisure in the bosom of nature, while for villagers it is either a form of business activity or an additional source of farm income.

In the light of transformations and growing awareness of healthy lifestyle among people, agri-tourism faces an opportunity of a constant development, as it is supposed to protect and enrich natural and environmental resources in rural areas. In Poland, a few thousand farms are engaged in agri-tourism activity. For many farmers agri-tourism is an excellent opportunity to get involved into out-of-agriculture activity. Agri-tourism and its role for rural development can be examined in a few different aspects, out of which the most important one is employment stimulation in the countryside. Agri-tourism provides an opportunity of creating new workplaces for farmers and their families. At first, being just an additional source of profit, agri-tourism can gradually turn a farm into a successful agri-tourist venture. This is particularly important for the Polish agriculture, which, owing to its specific agrarian structure has a potential of creating great opportunities for agri-tourism development. Gradually, agri-tourism can develop to such an extent, that it will become the main source of profit for a farmer, who may decide, for instance, to build a boarding house or a holiday resort for tourists. This type of activity is an incentive for the local population who will get an opportunity to find employment at housing construction and later on as hotel and catering staff. This type of entrepreneurship requires many workshops to be carried out in order to train farmers to conduct agri-tourism activity.

Agri-tourism can be also analysed in a functional and economical aspect. A functional aspect of agri-tourism, in turn, can be considered from the point of view of service provider and service recipient. For a service recipient (tourist), agri-tourism is an alternative form of leisure that differs from other forms of organized leisure in creating an opportunity for a holiday maker to benefit from the natural environment in an active way. For this reason the largest group of service recipients are wealthy, educated families from big cities. For a service provider (farms) agri-tourism is an additional and alternative form of business activity for rural population. As an incentive for rural entrepreneurship, agri-tourism provides an additional source of profit and a great opportunity for development, which is particularly important for small farms.

In an economical aspect, agri-tourism is presented as a form of investment aimed at increasing capital. In order to be profitable, agri-tourism has to provide such services that cannot be offered by mass tourism. A profitable venture that brings the service provider a stable source of income is to be connected with a particular area/ region and potential abilities of a farm providing agri-tourism services [Wiatrak 1996]. Other advantages of agri-tourism are enumerated by Chapon [Drzewiecki 1995]:

- historic building conservation,
- accommodation in the areas where hotel/catering industry is non-existent,
- cultivation of local traditions,
- agricultural produce marketing,
- stimulating social awareness regarding the importance of the local environment,
- creating higher standards of housing facilities,
- promotion of rural culture and identity,
- creating bonds between urban and rural population,
- creating better quality of living in the countryside.

Agri-tourism in Poland has a great opportunity for development since the Polish agriculture, as the only one in Central Eastern Europe has retained in its structure a dominating position of an

individual farm drawing on rich cultural resources, authentic folklore, rural customs and traditions. Poland can boast regions of beautiful and diverse landscape, unpolluted natural environment, and varied wildlife [Sikora 1999].

The attractiveness of agri-tourism is enhanced by the variety of food offered by farms including organic and vegetarian food. The value of agri-tourist services depends on whether or not a farm has been granted a quality certificate for its produce and services.

Nowadays agri-tourism undergoes an intensive development propelled by many national and regional agri-tourism organizations. Agri-tourism associations are being established which support and popularise agri-tourism and rural tourism among city dwellers. The vital role in agri-tourism development is played by local self-government authorities. An agri-tourist organization which actively takes part in agri-tourism popularisation and development in Poland is for example *Gospodarstwa Gościnne* Polish Federation of Rural Tourism [http://www.ppr.pl/artykul.php?id=1857]. *Gospodarstwa Gościnne* started cooperation with the Agency for Restructuring and Modernization of Agriculture in terms of evaluating and categorizing agri-tourism businesses and providing tourist services like creating the rural tourism database (which does not cover hotels as defined by The act of August 29th, 1997 on tourist services – Journal of Law, art. 36, p.884). This cooperation is carried out as part of Sector Operational Programs „Restructuring and Modernisation of the Food Sector and Rural Development”, measure: „Diversification of agricultural activities and activities close to agriculture activities to provide multiple activities or alternative incomes”.

According to agricultural consultancy centres, in 1990, there were 590 farms involved in agri-tourism activity in Poland. This number increased to 4800 in 1997, and then to 7350 in 2002, while in 2004 agri-tourism services were provided by 8244 farms, involving 214 farms which specialised in ecological tourism. According to agricultural consultancy centres the largest number of agri-tourism farms can be found in Małopolskie voivodeship (2004), Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodeship (854), Pomorskie voivodeship (837), Podlaskie voivodeship (707) and Podkarpackie voivodeship (560). According to 2004 statistics provided by Agricultural Consultancy Centres agri-tourism farms offer 89513 beds including 1908 beds offered by eco-tourism farms. In terms of specialization, the largest number of agri-tourism farms offer angling and mushroom picking (4463), catering for functions and events (1152) and cooperation with health resorts (269) [Biuletyn 2005]. According to experts from Agricultural Consultancy Centres 14 500 agri-tourism farms including 8500 agricultural farm are involved in agri-tourist activity. Statistical data concerning the functioning of agricultural tourism

**Table 1. The number of accommodation places on farms agr-tourist services in 2004**

Voivodeship	Agricultural tourism	Ecological tourism	Farms specializing in:			Others
			angling and mushroom picking	cooperation with health resorts	functions and events	
Dolnośląskie	450	30	350	15	200	125
Kujawsko-Pomorskie	170	2	119		21	13
Lubelskie	120	1	62	35	10	13
Lubuskie	78		36		11	18
Łódzkie	169	1	165		7	75
Małopolskie	2004	42	1025	128	152	57
Mazowieckie	320	12	220	1	69	8
Opolskie	85	2			83	
Podkarpackie	560	14	140	17	13	56
Podlaskie	707	13	300	4	130	8
Pomorskie	837	16	604	2	119	33
Śląskie	520	26	2	5	5	
Świętokrzyskie	279	19	120	25	37	9
Warmińsko-Mazurskie	854	22	600	10	90	190
Wielkopolskie	420	4	350		50	50
Zachodniopomorskie	457	10	370	27	155	23
Total	8030	214	4463	269	1152	678

Source: Ministry of Agriculture: Activity in agri-tourism and rural tourism.

Table 2. The number of farms agr-tourist services in rural areas in 2004

Voivodeship	Agricultural tourism	Ecological tourism	Farms specializing in:			Others
			angling and mushroom picking	cooperation with heath resorts	functions and evens	
Dolnośląskie	5500	400	4500	200	2500	1700
Kujawsko-Pomorskie	1204	14	864		182	68
Lubelskie	963	6	406	429	50	72
Lubuskie	922		469		280	825
Łódzkie	1514	20	1495		142	
Małopolskie	24 248	365	1505	1620	716	
Mazowieckie	2748	44	1628		592	
Opolskie	1000	10			990	
Podkarpackie	5080	121	1217	167	249	
Podlaskie	8982	94	2818		1293	
Pomorskie	9202	191	6585	38	1363	2815
Śląskie	6700	148	146	50	66	
Świętokrzyskie	2069	145	753	125	294	
Warmińsko-Mazurskie	8500	250	6000	150		200
Wielkopolskie	4401		3600		700	
Zachodniopomorskie	4572	100	1960	151	2000	
Total	87 605	1908	33 946	2930	11 417	5680

Source: Ministry of Agriculture: Activity in agri-tourism and rural tourism.

and showing the number of farms that provided agri-tourist services in rural areas and the number of beds in 2004 were presented by Tables 1-3.

Research conducted by Central Statistical Office (Główny Urząd Statystyczny) predicts that more and more farmers will show interest in the new source of income. It is estimated that since the beginning of 2006 year over 10 000 farms have been offering their agri-tourism services or beds, and from 2003 to 2005 over 60 000 people living in rural areas found employment in agr-tourism. Nowadays tourist base is not growing as rapidly as at the beginning of 1990s, nevertheless the assortment of services is constantly increasing, which will influence its competitiveness in the near future. Since the year 2000 farmers have been offering a good quality and a varied tourist product: active leisure – angling, mushroom – picking, horse riding, hunting, golfing and guided hiking, as well as passive leisure – regional food tasting, story – telling, relaxation at a campfire, etc. Among agri-tourism farms that enjoy the highest popularity all year round are those specializing in eco-tourist services. They also attract the largest number of foreign tourists mainly from Germany, Denmark and Holland.

Evaluating the agri-tourist sector in Poland, it can be said that there is a great potential and opportunities for its development. Expertise shows that 50% of rural areas in Poland have an opportunity for agri-tourism development. In order to achieve this goal adequate financial reserves need to be found. The financial means derived so far from the EU fund PHARE were insufficient with regards to the number of applications submitted. Nevertheless, these measures can be treated as preliminary ones, giving hope for the future. Entrepreneurs engaged in agri-tourism activity are also supported by Ministry of Agriculture through various programs and training courses. The important role in supporting agri-tourism development is played by local self-governments, which, however, are not always able to finance tourism. Unfortunately, there is still no sufficient financial aid from the banking sector. Interest rates support for bank credits obtained from the Agency for Restructuring and Modernization of Agriculture seems to be insufficient while bank loans seem to be difficult to obtain for many farmers. Moreover, farmers are required to present their business plans and evaluation of their real estates.

Many agriculture-environmental organizations are being established that support agri-tourism development. One of them is ECEAT-POLAND, the member of ECEAT-INTERNATIONAL (European Centre for Ecological and Agricultural Tourism). Its top priority is the promotion of tourism on ecological farms, which produce organic food grown in a natural way, without artificial fertilizers and pesticides. The Centre fulfils an important role in providing information on pro-ecological activity in

**Table 3. Agri-tourism services in 2000**

Voivodeship	Number of agri-tourism farms	Number of accommodation places	Number of categorized farms	Number of accommodation places in categorized farms	Number of persons spending their holidays in agri-tourism farms
Dolnośląskie	250	3945	47	560	62 320
Kujawsko-Pomorskie	195	1394	28	245	14 842
Lubelskie	256	1636	31	251	7 275
Lubuskie	74	865	29	325	4 163
Łódzkie	154	1171	1	6	2 945
Małopolskie	1227	13603	98	1079	41 904
Mazowieckie	214	2389	15	155	6 432
Opolskie	68	544	27	270	1 850
Podkarpackie	429	3617	97	647	6 570
Podlaskie	543	4403	86	706	13 684
Pomorskie	617	6105	105	464	14 089
Śląskie	167	2308	0	0	3 037
Świętokrzyskie	206	1683	69	29	16 480
Warmińsko-Mazurskie	1000	5000	100	900	125 000
Wielkopolskie	249	2168	22	192	18630
Zachodniopomorskie	140	758	15	0	2814

Source: Ministry of Agriculture: Activity in agri-tourism and rural tourism.

the countryside for rural population, especially for children and teenagers. The ECEAT-POLAND was founded in 1993, and registered in January, 1994. Among ECEAT members are: Hungary, Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Latvia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, Sweden, France, Greece, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Slovenia. Members of ECEAT-POLAND include farmers engaged in ecological agriculture and rural tourism. Most of them have already been granted the certificate of organic food producer or applying for it – redirecting their agricultural activity from traditional into ecological. At present ECEAT-POLAND include 100 farms from all over Poland. These farms are located in six main regions of Poland<sup>3</sup>: Region I: Pomorze (4), Region II: Mazury/Podlasie (10), Region III: Wielkopolska (7), Region IV: Mazowsze (3), Region V: Sudety (23), Region VI: Karpaty (29).

## Conclusions

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century agri-tourist services started to develop rapidly in Poland. Agri-tourism is a type of tourism which together with small business should provide an important source of out-of-agriculture income as can be exemplified by developed countries. People who are vitally interested in taking up agri-tourism activity are farmers from economically underdeveloped rural areas of high unemployment as well as young entrepreneurs who set up professional agri-tourist businesses providing high quality services. Agricultural tourism development faces many problems the solutions to which need to be provided by both the government and the service-providers. The most important questions are as follows:

- agricultural tourism needs to be considered in plans and programs for social and economical development of all administrative units,
- agricultural and rural tourism development needs to be based on the implementation of marketing strategies including promotion and prices of agri-tourism services which should meet requirements of the tourist market,
- agri-tourism development requires local authorities and organizations to join in the marketing strategy of agricultural tourism. These include: self-government organizations, job agencies, financial institutions (cooperative and regional banks), institutions of business environment, agricultural producer organizations, agricultural trade unions, etc.,
- agri-tourism activity needs to be considered as part of agribusiness, and as such well organized in all administrative units – on local, regional and national level,

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.poland.eceat.org/czlonkowie.htm>

- agricultural tourism as a form of rural entrepreneurship needs to be the main source of income for many agricultural producers as it is in the EC member states,
- agri-tourism development needs to be supported by favourable laws and regulations, especially tax relief,
- agri-tourism development needs to be accompanied by the development of rural tourism organized by integrated farms capable of providing services over a larger areas,
- agri-tourism and tourism development needs to be supported by rural cooperatives, which as a result will contribute to the multifunctional development of rural and regional areas,
- there is a necessity of extensive research in agricultural tourism on how agri-tourism affects incomes of rural population, fights unemployment and stimulates regional development.

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### Streszczenie

*W artykule podjęto problematykę aktualnego stanu i funkcjonowania sektora polskiej agroturystyki, która ma na celu zobrazowanie go jako podsystemu turystyki, a zarazem agrobiznesu. W części teoretycznej zaprezentowano podstawowe cechy agroturystyki oraz nakreślono jej krótką historię funkcjonowania. Szczególny nacisk położono na zaprezentowanie atrakcyjności sektora agroturystyki, która stanowi jedną z form przedsiębiorczości wiejskiej. W opracowaniu poruszono kwestię czynnego udziału państwa w rozwoju agroturystyki.*

#### Address:

Dr Krzysztof Firliej  
Akademia Ekonomiczna w Krakowie  
Katedra Podstaw Organizacji i Zarządzania  
ul. Rakowicka 27  
31-510 Kraków  
tel. (0 12) 2935197  
e-mail: firliej@ae.krakow.pl