

AGRITOURISM AND *FERMERS* DIVERSIFICATION IN SAMARKAND REGION

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study is to examine the current situation and identify issues influencing the sustainable development of agritourism in rural areas in Samarkand region of Uzbekistan. Increasing the economic potential of the rural areas by introducing innovative activities on Samarkand region's *farmers* and ensuring sustainable development is essential. Samarkand has extremely favorable conditions for many forms of tourism, especially agritourism. The study conducted with 110 randomly selected *farmers* in Samarkand. Based on this data collection and analysis using chi-square and t tests, this study found significant socio-economic differences among agritourism and nonagritourism *farmers*. The results also indicated that agritourism is not popular among *farmers* in Samarkand. Finally, this paper investigated the general characteristics of *farmers* in the region, the current state of agritourism, the economic situation of *farmers*, and challenges in the development of agritourism.

Keywords: Agriculture; tourism; agritourism; sustainable development; rural areas.

INTRODUCTION

Agritourism has been discussed as a useful alternative activity to promote income growth on farms and rural development. It has been increasing steadily worldwide and has become one of the most significant supplementary income sources for farmers. It is not a new activity in many countries, having been undertaken since the early 20th century (Busby *et al.*, 2000; Arroyo *et al.*, 2013). In 2019, the value of agritourism activities in the global economy amounted to 69.24 billion USD (FBI, 2020). It is already being practiced in countries including Italy, the United States, Germany, Spain, France, Malaysia, and India, and is providing many benefits to the rural areas of these countries. Agritourism activities have become an alternative and important part of the agricultural sector and the development of rural areas in these countries. Moreover, agritourism is said to promote sustainable development, as it diversifies farming and is



predominantly focused on improving the livelihoods of the rural farming community. In Uzbekistan, agritourism is a new and innovative direction for development, because *farmers* and rural communities lack even an initial understanding of this type of tourism (Togaymurodov *et al.*, 2016). Only 0.11% of farms in Uzbekistan have commenced agritourism activities. This is because agritourism is not sufficiently popular enough among Uzbekistan's *farmers* or medium-sized farms, many of which are accustomed to engaging only in agricultural activities. Moreover, there is little cooperation on the organization of nonagricultural activities.

Agriculture in Uzbekistan is the main livelihood of the rural people, and the sector needs to focus on building potential linkages with other sectors of the economy. Uzbekistan has three types of agricultural farms—*dehkhans*, *farmers*, and agricultural enterprises—each of which are legal farms with their own operating characteristics. *Dehkhans* are small farms with small land areas. *Farmers* are medium-sized farms and one of the main producers of agricultural products. *Agricultural enterprises* are small business companies engaged in the production of agriculture and all other farming and agricultural-related industries. The majority of the population, around 50%, in Uzbekistan resides in rural areas and around 23% engage in agricultural activities as their main livelihood (World Bank, 2020). The experience of developed countries shows that agritourism is playing an important role in the diversification of agriculture and the sustainable development of rural areas. Although Uzbekistan has various agricultural sector activities and resources that can be used for agritourism, it has not been adequately adopted compared with agritourism in other countries. The agricultural sector has been emerging as the leading economic contributor in Uzbekistan, and key areas of Uzbekistan are rural, with potential for the development of both tourism and agriculture. Linkages between agriculture and tourism would be beneficial for both sectors. However, Uzbekistan has not used these linkages to maximize the benefits of agritourism as a strategy for creating alternative sources of income for the rural community, including *farmers*. In the existing literature, few studies examine the interrelated aspects of tourism and agriculture in Uzbekistan and only examine a narrow range of linkages and agritourism activities; this is even more the case in the Samarkand region of Uzbekistan. However, Samarkand is one of the world's greatest cities from a historical perspective, with a rich heritage and potential for agritourism, given that heritage and pilgrimage tourism is one of the most popular forms of tourism (Statistics Department of Samarkand Region, 2019).

Therefore, it is important to study the existing opportunities in the region.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A survey questionnaire was the main method that we used for primary data collection. To collect the data, we conducted face-to-face interviews with *farmers*, one of the popular types of agricultural farms in Uzbekistan. The main interviews with *farmers* were conducted to determine the challenges facing the sustainable development of agritourism in the Samarkand region. Based on the data collected from 100 *farmers* that did not engage in agritourism and 10 agritourism *farmers*, we studied the existing opportunities for agritourism development and the challenges facing the implementation of agritourism activities at the *farmer* level. In addition, we gathered and analyzed data on the current agritourism activities in the region.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We found that among these nonagritourism *farmers* in the Samarkand region, 12% were familiar with the concept of agritourism, 47% had heard of the concept, and 41% had no awareness of it. However, 36% of *farmers* were interested in agritourism, whereas 64% of *farmers* were interested in other off-farm activities.

Table 1. General information on nonagritourism *farmers* (based on owners) in the study area (n = 100)

Variables	Categories	All <i>farmers</i>	Including	
			Interested in agritourism	No-interested in agritourism
Gender	Male	82	29	53
	Female	18	7	11
Age	Less than 24 years	0	0	0
	25-30 years	3	1	2
	31-40 years	24	7	17
	41-50 years	30	10	20
	51-60 years	23	9	14
	More than 61 years	20	9	11
Education	Secondary school	25	7	18
	Bachelor degree	71	25	46

Master degree	3	3	0
Other	1	1	0

Source: Survey results of study areas, 2021

As shown in Table 1, out of the 100 nonagritourism *farmers*, the owners of 82 *farmers* were men and only 18 were women. The average age of these farmers was between 41 and 50 years. Most possessed higher education qualifications, most of which were bachelor’s degrees. This is higher than the average education level in Uzbekistan, as less than 20% of the population possesses bachelor’s degrees. We compare the gender, age, and education levels of the agritourism and nonagritourism *farmers*. The results, based on a t test of the difference between *farmers* interested in agritourism and *farmers* not interested in agritourism, showed that a clear correlation was observed only for education ($t = 2.071$; $p < 0.05$). The results indicated that the education level of *farmers* interested in agritourism is higher than that of *farmers* who are not interested (see Table 1.)

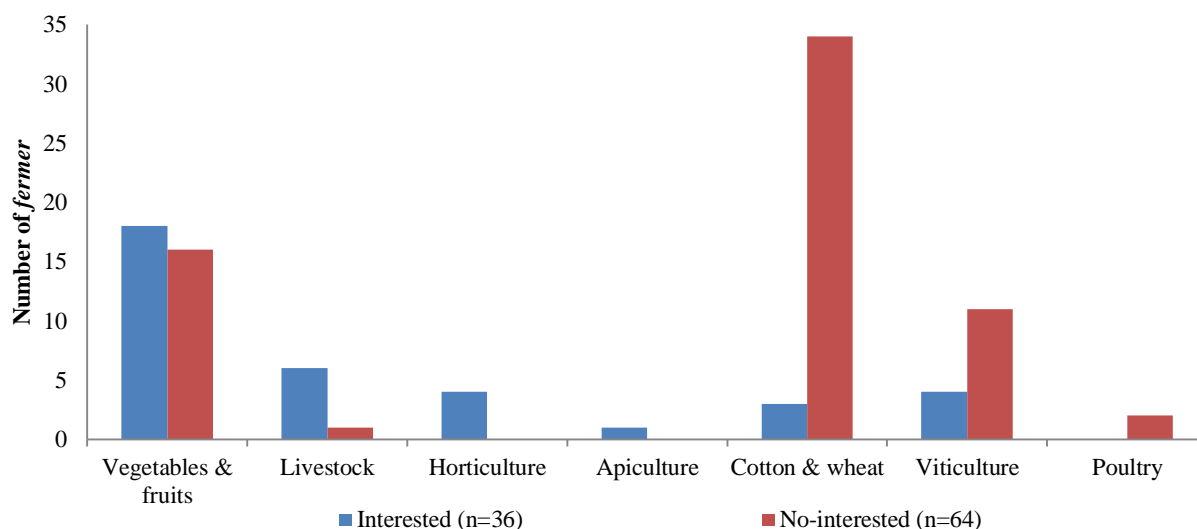


Fig. 1. Farmers’ interest in agritourism by agricultural specialties (n = 100)

As shown in Fig. 1, this study studied the interest in agritourism activities based on dividing *farmers* into seven specialties, namely vegetables and fruits, livestock, horticulture, apiculture, cotton and wheat, viticulture, and poultry. This study divided the specialties into two broad groups based on the level of *farmers’* interest in agritourism. Group A consists of *farmers* specializing in vegetables and fruits, livestock, horticulture, and apiculture *farmers*. In Group A, there are a greater number of *farmers* interested in agritourism activities compared with those not interested in agritourism. These



farmers independently plan and manage their agricultural production activities and, for this reason, they are attempting to earn extra income by organizing alternative agritourism activities on their *farmers*. In Group B are the cotton and wheat, viticulture, and poultry *farmers*. Group B *farmers* mainly produce for and sell according to government or company orders. That is, this group of *farmers* operates under the control of the government or companies. Therefore, the level of interest in alternative activities is lower among this group.

Table 2. *Farmers'* annual incomes in Samarkand region, 2019

Categories	All <i>farmers</i> (n=110)	All <i>farmers</i>	
		Agritourism (n=10)	Nonagritourism (n=100)
US\$ 0 - 5000	23.9%	0.0%	11.0%
US\$ 5001 - 10000	34.8%	0.0%	16.0%
US\$ 10001 - 20000	87.0%	0.0%	40.0%
US\$ 20001 - 30000	43.5%	20.0%	20.0%
US\$ 30001 - ~	28.3%	80.0%	13.0%
Mean	19722.7	36098.4	18085.1
Min	2299.5	23861.0	2299.5
Max	63101.6	50000.0	63101.6

Note: 1 USD = 9,350 Uzbekistan som (UZS) (Central Bank of Uzbekistan, 2019)

Agritourism had a strong impact on farm incomes, as shown in Table 2. A statistical comparison between agritourism and nonagritourism *farmers* showed that the average income of the former is double that of the latter (36,098.4 USD versus 18,085.1 USD). Furthermore, more than 80% of agritourism *farmers* have annual incomes of more than 30,000 USD. When we analyzed the average income of the 100 nonagritourism *farmers* and 10 agritourism *farmers*, we found that the average and minimum incomes of the agritourism *farmers* are higher than those of nonagritourism *farmers*.

As shown in Fig. 2, *farmers* face several challenges in developing agritourism in the Samarkand region. We used a survey questionnaire to determine and analyze such challenges. Based on the survey data, we divided challenges into three groups. Group A consists of challenges for both *farmers* who are currently engaged in agritourism and *farmers* who want to commence agritourism activities, as both these types of *farmers* face similar challenges. Group B challenges are those that agritourism *farmers* consider to be low-level challenges. This is because such *farmers* have practical skills in agritourism. However, these issues are important for *farmers* who are intending to commence agritourism activities. According to the results of the t tests, there is a strong



association between Group B challenges and agritourism beginners. In Group C are challenges that the main agritourism *farmers* are attempting to solve by formulating plans for the future development of agritourism. In general, *farmers* who are just commencing or about to commence agritourism activities should consider all three groups of challenges because they play an important role in the sustainable development of agritourism. For now, however, the main focus should be on solving the Group C challenges, as doing so will increase the propensity to adopt agritourism among the nonagritourism *farmers*.

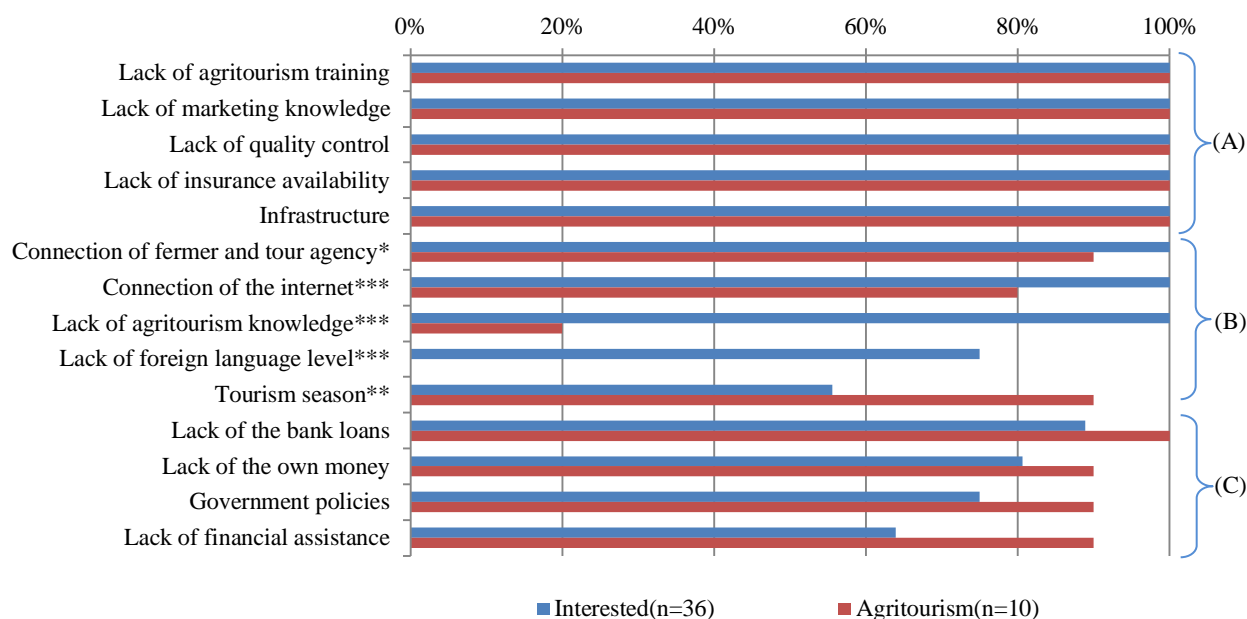


Fig. 2. Challenges to the development of agritourism by *farmers*

CONCLUSIONS

Samarkand has the potential and sufficient opportunities to develop agritourism. The concept of agritourism and the details of agritourism practices are not sufficiently well known or popular among *farmers*. However, many *farmers* have an interest in engaging in agritourism activities on to earn additional income. There is strong potential for the development of agritourism activities by *farmers*, particularly given that the annual income of *farmers* engaged in agritourism is twice as high as that of other *farmers*. Thus, actively engaging in agritourism is a good opportunity for *farmers* to increase their farm income.

We make the following recommendations for the sustainable development of agritourism by *farmers* in the region. To encourage the sustainable development of agritourism on *farmers*, it is necessary to increase the knowledge of agritourism among *farmers*, teach the owners of

farmers foreign languages, improve their use of the Internet and online services, strengthen communication between *farmers* and tourism agencies, and organize agro-activities suitable for the tourist season on the *farmers*. These activities will have a positive impact in terms of increasing the number of agritourism *farmers* in the future.

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