

## AGRITOURISM FARMS OWNERS' COMPETENCE IN RUNNING THEIR ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

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**Abstract:** The aim of the paper is to present the competence of the owners of agritourism farms in running their economic activities. It discusses information from the review of literature on the subject matter and the author's own experience of developing and managing an agritourism farm in the Podlaskie Voivodeship. It proves that a family is really important for the management of an agritourism farm. In order to make a tourist feel well in their company and environment, all its members should be engaged. Hosting visitors, a family should be open to them, support one another and share the care of the clients' good. The most important features of an agritourism farm owner recognised by the interviewed students are friendliness and kindness. In the respondents' opinions, service providers and their family members should be able to communicate in English. According to the people involved in the conducted survey, most often families with children spend their time on agritourism farms. All the respondents believe that agritourism is profitable for a rural family.

**Key words:** competence, agritourism, rural areas, family, servicing tourists.

### Introduction

At present, agritourism is of interest not only to social and economic policy but also to farmers who see opportunities to earn extra income. Agritourism is the most dynamically developing and the most sought-after form of leisure because people are eager to come back to their 'roots'. Standard holiday resorts with a lot of tourists and the same atmosphere every year are simply boring now. Contemporary tourists are demanding. They want to go sightseeing, see something special, learn something new and be serviced in an extraordinary way. A well-managed agritourism farm can provide all these things (Roman, 2014).

A human factor plays an important role in the assessment of agritourism products. It is a determinant of a well-sold offer and influences its image. Servicing people requires a lot of involvement of the family and employees (Brzeziński and Brzeziński, 2011; Khanal and Mishra, 2014). A professionally prepared team sharing duties properly can ensure not only better care of clients but also of the whole farm (Hurst, et al., 2009). The service providers' attitude is very important in the process of organising active relaxation, providing everyday services and taking care of tourists on the arrival day (e.g. helping them with the luggage, preparing meals, showing the house, the farm and the surrounding area) (Meyer and Milewski, 2009). Not all the farm owners, however, have the appropriate skills

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in servicing visitors and organising an interesting stay in their agritourism facilities (Cichowska, 2012).

### Research sample characteristics

The aim of the paper is to present the competence of the owners of agritourism farms in running their economic activities. The article discusses the information from the review of literature on the subject matter and the author's own experience in the development and management of an agritourism farm as well as students' opinions on agritourism services. In order to recognise the factors fully and objectively, the empirical material was collected with the use of an opinion poll method and its adequate research technique (a survey) at the turn of May and June 2014. A survey questionnaire was sent to 167 people, including 118 students of the Faculty of Economic Sciences of the Warsaw University of Life Sciences (21 full-time first year students of a bachelor programme in Management, 55 full-time first year students of a bachelor programme in Economics, 26 extramural first year students of a bachelor programme in Economics and 16 full-time first year students of a master programme in Logistics) and 49 students of Jadwiga Dziubińska Agricultural Education Centre Schools in Gołdkowo (12 first year students of agribusiness techniques, 16 first year students of agriculture mechanisation techniques and 7 second year students of veterinary). 73 respondents were women and 94 were men. All the respondents were divided into three groups: students who are learning in a secondary school, students who started studying at the university and students who are going to graduate from the university soon. The research was conducted on students because they are potential providers of agritourism services in the future.

### The essence of agritourism

The term 'agritourism' appeared at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century both in Polish and in the world literature. It is composed of two parts: 'agri' and 'tourism'. The prefix 'agri' derives from a Greek 'agros' meaning 'field', and 'agromos' referring to farm management. On the other hand, tourism is a form of active leisure away from the place of residence that is inspired mainly by the needs related to recreation, cognition and sport (Sznajder and Przezbórska, 2006).

Agritourism can be defined from two points of view: demand and supply. According to M. Drzewiecki, it is "*a form of recreation taking place in rural agricultural areas based on accommodation facilities and leisure activities connected with a farm (...) and its (natural, production and service) surrounding*" (Drzewiecki, 1995).

It is worth adding that according to M. Dębniwska and M. Tkaczuk, it is "*a form of tourism that is offered in agricultural areas, using free rooms, farm buildings (after adaptation) and the owners' production and services*" (Dębniwska and Tkaczuk, 1997).

B. Mikuta and K. Żelazna describe agritourism as a form of planning the development of the country and rural areas to obtain a multifunctional model, especially of the development of the reception function of the areas (Mikuta and Żelazna, 2004).

According to E.T. Davies and D.C. Gilbert, agritourism is “*a form of rural tourism providing tourists and one-day visitors with an opportunity for co-participation in the life on a farm*” (Davies and Gilbert, 2013).

Agritourism is a part of rural tourism connected with people’s leisure (including active one) on an operating farm that offers various recreational and tourist services in its area and outside it in the tourist season or throughout the whole year (Roman, 2014).

The above definitions of agritourism demonstrate its key features, i.e. that agritourism (Kosmaczewska, 2007):

- should be limited to agricultural areas and exclude rural areas from the administrative point of view;
- must have a strong link with a farm consisting in the use of residential and farm buildings to offer accommodation;
- makes active recreation possible in the natural surrounding of a farm and with the use of plant and animal production.

In everyday life and sometimes also in literature, agritourism is associated with tourism in rural areas. Although the terms often overlap, they should not be treated as synonyms. According to J. Majewski, “*rural tourism is any form of tourism taking place in the rural environment and using rural virtues (nature, scenery, culture, buildings etc.), which constitute main attractions*”. On the other hand, agritourism is a narrower concept that covers various forms of tourism connected with the operation of a farm where plant and animal production constitute the main attractions (Majewski, 2004).

In the areas where agricultural production is disintegrated, it is justified to use the term ‘rural tourism’ rather than ‘agritourism’. As the importance of traditional rural communities is becoming more and more marginalised, one can guess that in the future the concept of agritourism will be used more often than rural tourism.

### **Running an agritourism farm by family members**

Starting an agritourism business, one should expect some inevitable changes in their family life. At the initial stage one should prepare rooms for tourists, start marketing activities, place information boards next to roads – open one’s house for the needs of tourists who want to be welcome and feel free to move around.

This form of tourism in rural areas is a business activity, i.e. a small enterprise that is subject to various legal acts and market rules. In order to run this business effectively one needs to have a general idea, a business strategy (vision and mission). The process of developing the strategy is a process of developing long-term plans that will let predict both opportunities and threats and determine the venture’s

profitability (Sznajder and Przezbórska, 2006). Success in this business to a great extent also depends on external factors, i.e. those that exist in the market at present and on those that may appear in the future. The scale of these changes depends on the type of offered services, e.g. whether the accommodation base is organised in the same building where the hosts live or in a separate one that is only for guests as well as on the attitude of other family members. The good of the family is always a priority. All its members should accept a decision to start agritourism activities. Having opened the house for visitors and providing board and lodging, every member of the family becomes a small-scale entrepreneur, an accountant, a guide showing the surrounding area, a cleaner, a cook etc. If an enterprise is to be bigger than a 12-room one, it is worth thinking of employing additional staff (Raszko and Sikora, 1998).

The role of a family in agritourism is paramount. All the family members should be involved so that a tourist feels well in their company. Hosting guests, a family should be open to visitors and support each other in their care of clients (Legutko, 2005). Each member of the family should have their individual tasks and know the common goal. This chain of tasks must meet a series of tourists' expectations and so, e.g. a man should be involved in house extension, cleaning the surrounding area, accounting, purchases and animal breeding. A woman should prepare meals, do the washing and cleaning and decorate the inside and outside of the house. Other members of the family should help their parents and create a nice atmosphere so that tourists feel well, e.g. they can organise excursions, evening meetings, bonfires and act as newsagents. The whole family should attract interest of 'new lodgers' in order to make them come back and 'bring' followers. The role of a family is in this case really important because visitors want to feel well and leave with pleasant memories. Advertising is also important. It is good to spend one's free time in a friendly atmosphere. Informing others about a given family, tourists promote agritourism and advertise the place. A single member of a family cannot create the atmosphere that would make visitors recall their stay and want to come back.

Animals also play an important role, especially dogs, cats, horses and goats because tourists often come with small children. Sometimes it is the first time a child has contact with the country, nature and animals (Młynarczyk, 2002). If a family creates a nice atmosphere, parents with children will be willing to come back. All the hosts must do their best to earn the visitors' trust and liking. They all should organise trips, bonfires, sightseeing, social events and purchases, and take care of their guests. It is necessary to like it so that work is pleasure.

An agrotourism farm is an opportunity to sell one's own products and services. It mainly refers to small-scale production that big food processing companies and sales people from supermarkets are not interested in. The products that are not mass-produced, e.g. honey, cheese, bread and cold meats, can let the producers earn their living (Gurgul, 2005; Brzeziński et al., 2014). What encourages tourists to buy product from an agritourism farm is the fact that they can try these products during their stay and that farmers on these farms do not use excessive amounts of

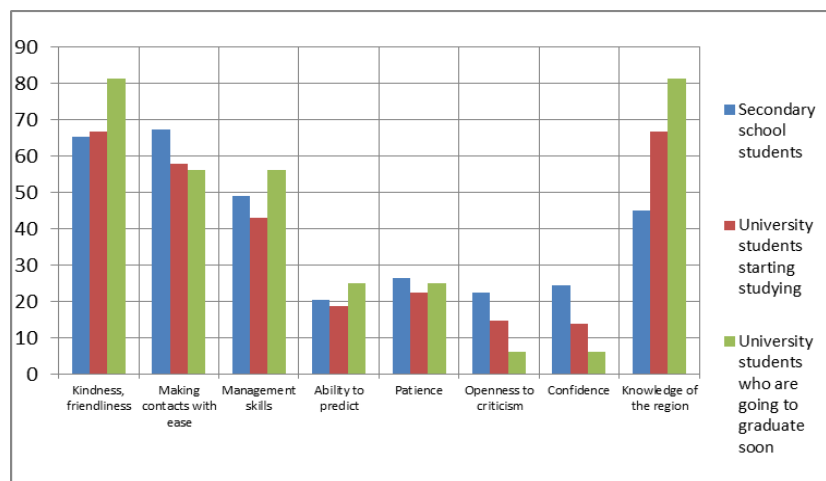
fertilizers and pesticides. A farm like this is focused on quality rather than quantity. The fees paid by tourists for their stay compensate the loss of income from agricultural production. Starting an agritourism farm, it is worth remembering that tourists, choosing a place for recreation, take into account not only a farm itself but also the landscape around it, the scenery that results from human economic activities, clean air and water, smell and noise etc.

Tourism enterprises in rural areas are most often started by (Dębniowska, 2000):

- farmers who run their farms – as an additional business activity of renting rooms and camping space, selling home-made meals and providing other services connected with the tourists' stay,
- villagers who do not run farms but provide tourism services,
- other people living outside a village – it is most often a small business activity connected with running professional accommodation facilities and restaurants.

### Research findings

Human features are very important elements in the management of an agritourism enterprise. Only people who are communicative, friendly and smiling, who can talk and listen to another person, know the region and can interest others in the country life, and first of all people who like hosting guests can succeed. Otherwise, an agritourism business can fail. Figure 1 shows personal features that an agritourism farm owner should possess, according to respondents.

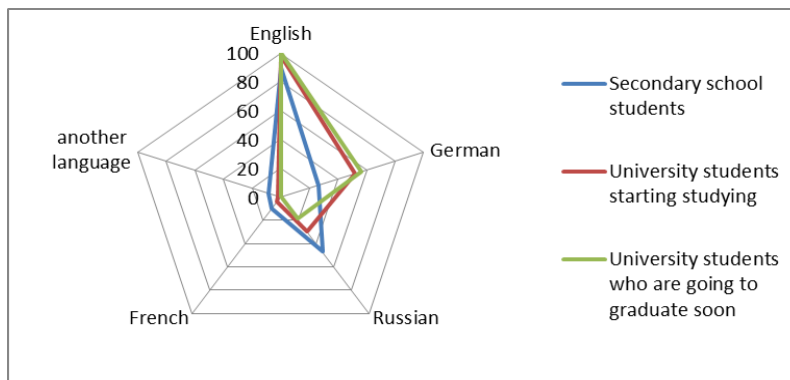


**Figure 1. Personal features characteristic of an agritourism farm owner indispensable for providing services in rural areas, according to the students [%]**  
(The respondents could choose more than one answer)

The most important features of an agritourism farm owner indicated by both the secondary school and university students are kindness and friendliness. It is a very important personality feature essential in interpersonal contacts. Personal culture,

kindness and friendliness are key elements that decide about success in agritourism. Hosting tourists, it is necessary to think of them as of invited guests, treat them in the way you would like to be treated. Another feature pointed out mainly by the university students is the knowledge of the region. The knowledge of the countryside and its landscape is often useful for choosing a tourist trail. A tourist often wants to visit the area around on one's own and asks the service provider for help. The secondary school students also pointed out an ability to make contacts easily and management skills.

Farm owners' qualifications are a key element of agritourism, e.g. the knowledge of foreign languages or basic knowledge of *savoir vivre*. Figure 2 presents the respondents' opinions on the owners and their family's knowledge of foreign languages.



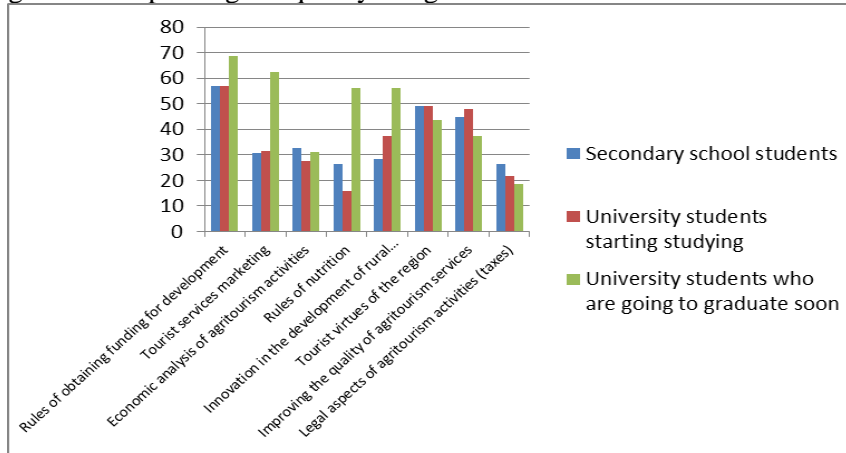
**Figure 2. Farm owners and their family's knowledge of foreign languages indispensable for the provision of agritourism services, according to the respondents [%] (The respondents could choose more than one answer)**

In the respondents' opinion, service providers or their family members should prove to be able to communicate in English. The secondary school students believe that Russian is an important language for communication with tourists. The university students think that it would be good if farmers and their family could communicate in German. Some respondents' opinions are that farm owners and their families should know French, Spanish or Italian.

In the course of agritourism activities, it is essential to participate in training courses. Figure 3 presents topics of courses that, in the respondents' opinion, let course participants acquire new knowledge and skills.

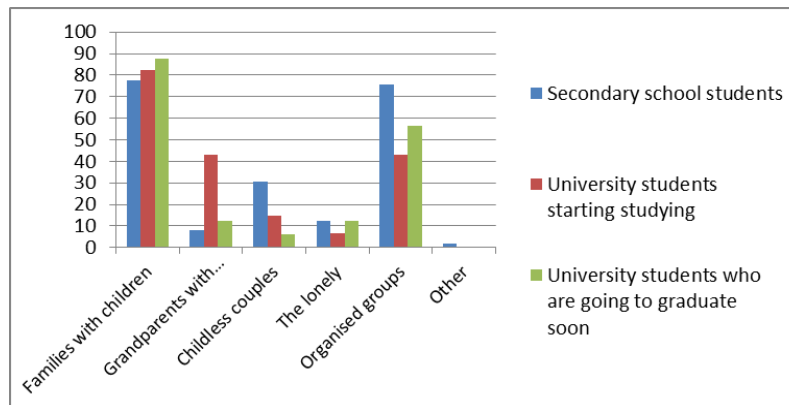
In most respondents' opinion service providers should participate in training courses on the use of funding from the European Union. According to the university students who are starting studying, an agritourism farm owner should take courses on: tourist services marketing, rules of nutrition and innovations in the development of rural tourism. The students who are going to graduate soon and

secondary school students believe that a farmer should take courses in virtues of the region and improving the quality of agritourism services.



**Figure 3. Topics of courses in which agritourism farm owners and their families should participate, according to the respondents [%]** (The respondents could choose more than one answer)

Figure 4 presents types of groups and people who use agritourism farms' services, according to respondents.



**Figure 4. Types of groups and people visiting agritourism farms, according to the respondents [%]** (The respondents could answer more than one question)

According to the respondents, families with children most often relax on agritourism farms. It probably results from the offer of agritourism farms that is adjusted to the needs of this market segment. Organised groups of people constitute another group using agritourism accommodation services, according to respondents. Many secondary school students believe that childless couples relax in tourist facilities in rural areas while the university students who are starting studying think that grandparents with grandchildren visit farms.

Figure 5 presents the respondents' opinions on people responsible for the provision of agritourism services.

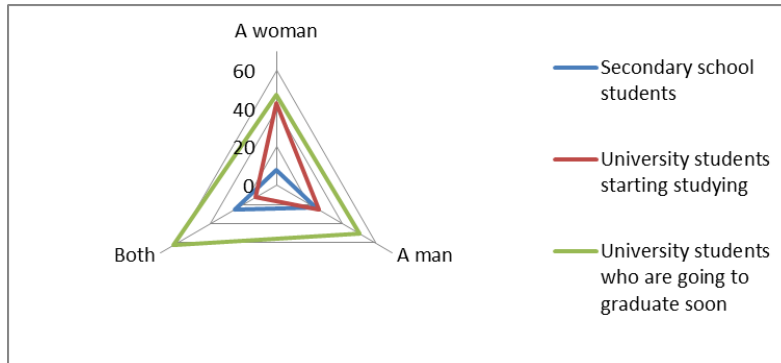


Figure 5. Persons responsible for the provision of agritourism services, according to respondents [%]

According to the university students who are going to graduate soon, both spouses should run an agritourism farm. The students who are starting studying believe that a woman should run an agritourism farm. The secondary school students' opinions are divided: some of them think the landlord should be a man, some think it should be both spouses. Figure 6 presents the respondents' opinion on agritourism profitability.

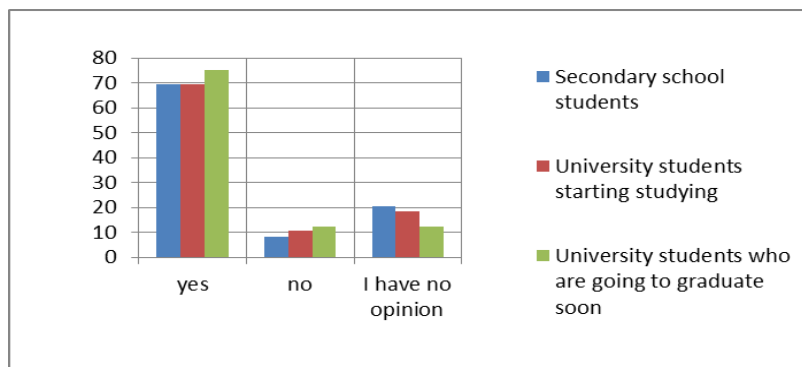


Figure 6. Respondents' opinion on agritourism profitability [%]

All the respondents believe that agritourism is profitable for a rural family.

### Synthesis and conclusions

Agritourism, as an extra-agricultural activity, requires constant development. It is a source of and a drive to develop additional market of local food products and services. It is becoming a stimulus to activation of regions for which agriculture used to be the main source of income.



The whole family should be involved in the development of agritourism farms and everybody should be assigned tasks. All family members should do their best to create a nice atmosphere – visitors should feel at home on a farm.

Preparing to change an agricultural farm into an agritourism one, it is worth thinking how to utilise the country's cultural heritage. Religion-related customs, local rituals or legends make tourists flood some regions for a couple of days every year.

The most important features of an agritourism farm owner highlighted by the students are kindness and friendliness. These are very important personality features that are essential for interpersonal contacts. Personal culture, kindness and friendliness are key elements that decide about success in agritourism.

According to the respondents, service providers or the members of their families should prove to be able to communicate in English. In the opinion of the secondary school students, Russian is an important foreign language in contacts with tourists. Most respondents believe that service providers should take training courses on the use of funding from the European Union funds. According to the respondents, families with children most frequently relax on agritourism farms. It is probably due to the adjustment of the offer to the needs of this market segment. All the respondents believe that agritourism is profitable for a rural family.

If a family creates a nice atmosphere, parents with children will be willing to come back. All the hosts must do their best to earn the visitors' trust and liking. They all should organise trips, bonfires, sightseeing, social events and purchases, and take care of their guests. It is necessary to like it so that work is pleasure.

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### KOMPETENCJE WŁAŚCICIELI GOSPODARSTW AGROTURYSTYCZNYCH W PROWADZENIU DZIAŁALNOŚCI GOSPODARCZEJ

**Streszczenie:** Celem opracowania jest przedstawienie kompetencji właścicieli gospodarstw agroturystycznych w prowadzeniu działalności gospodarczej. Przytoczono informacje pochodzące z przeglądu literatury przedmiotu oraz własne doświadczenie przy budowie i w prowadzeniu gospodarstwa agro-ekoturystycznego w województwie podlaskim. Z artykułu wynika, że rodzina w działalności agroturystycznej ma istotne znaczenie. Wszyscy jej członkowie powinni być zaangażowani, aby turysta czuł się dobrze w ich środowisku i towarzystwie. Przyjmując gości rodzina powinna być otwarta do osób przyjeżdżających, wspierać się nawzajem w trosce o dobro klienta. Wśród najważniejszych cech charakteryzujących właściciela gospodarstwa agroturystycznego wymienionych zarówno przez studentów, jak i uczniów była uprzejmość oraz życzliwość. W opinii respondentów usługodawcy bądź też członkowie rodzin powinni wykazywać się zdolnością porozumiewania się w języku angielskim. Według badanych osób, najczęściej w gospodarstwach agroturystycznych wypoczywają rodziny z dziećmi. Wszyscy respondenci opowiedzieli się za tym, że agroturystyka jest dochodową działalnością dla rodziny wiejskiej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** kompetencje, agroturystyka, obszary wiejskie, rodzina, obsługa gości

### 家族企業服務農業旅遊中的作用

**摘要：**本文的目的是展現在農業旅遊服務行為的家庭的重要性。從文獻的審查，並在建設和農場的農業生態旅遊的管理波德拉謝我們自己的經驗報價信息。從文章表明，家庭農業旅遊的業務是非常重要的。所有成員都應該參與到旅遊，以感覺舒適的環境和社會。假設客人的家庭應該是開放的，以人來，相互支持，為了客戶的利益。其中一個農莊的學生和學生雙方通過設置所有者的最重要的特徵是禮貌和仁慈。在受訪者的意見提供者或家庭成員應表現出的英語溝通能力。據受訪者中，在一個農場家庭兒童最常見的休息。所有受訪者都贊成這一事實旅遊業是一個賺錢的生意農村家庭

**關鍵詞：**農業旅遊，農村，家庭，賓館的服務