

Tourism, farming and diversification: An attitudinal study

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Abstract

Although farm-based tourism has a long tradition, particularly within Europe, farm diversification into tourism has, in recent years, become more widely seen as an effective means of addressing the socio-economic problems of rural areas in general and the agricultural sector in particular. Accordingly, not only has there been significant growth in the supply of farm-based tourism in many countries (and evidence of rural development policies supporting such growth), but also increasing academic attention has been paid to the phenomenon. However, although a number of studies consider specific issues related to farm diversification into tourism, such as marketing or financial challenges, little or no research has been undertaken into the attitudes of farming families that have diversified. The purpose of this paper is to address this omission in the tourism literature. Based on a survey of farms in north-eastern England, it explores farmers' attitudes to a variety of issues related to diversification into tourism, including the socio-cultural context within which it occurs. In doing so, it both confirms and challenges previously held assumptions regarding the problems of diversification. In particular, however, it identifies a widespread desire amongst farmers to maintain a distinction between the farm/farming business, suggesting that the development of farm tourism enterprises is an employment, as opposed to diversification, issue. It concludes, therefore, that the role of public sector agencies in the support of farm tourism should be reassessed.

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1. Introduction

Farm-based tourism is not a new phenomenon (Busby & Rendle, 2000); indeed, tourism on farms has long been recognised throughout Europe as an identifiable form of rural tourism that, in some cases, dates back over a century (Dernoi, 1983). For example, it has been suggested that up to a quarter of farms in Austria have been 'receiving tourists for nearly 100 years' (Hummelbrunner & Miglbauer, 1994) whilst Germany also has a long tradition of farm-based holidays (Oppermann, 1996). At the same time, national policies for the support and development of farm tourism have been in existence in a number of countries for the last half-century. In France, state financial aid to support the redevelopment of redundant farm buildings into accommodation facilities, or *gîtes ruraux*,

was first introduced in 1954, whilst farms in Italy, Germany and Denmark have also long benefited from national support for the development of tourist facilities (Frater, 1983; Nilsson, 2002).

More recently, however, tourism in general, and tourism-based farm diversification in particular, have increasingly been considered an effective catalyst of rural development and regeneration. Throughout Europe, tourism has been widely promoted as a means of counteracting the social and economic challenges facing rural areas, primarily those associated with the decline of traditional agrarian industries (Cavaco, 1995; Hoggart, Buller, & Black, 1995; Williams & Shaw, 1998), whilst in many countries elsewhere not only is tourism employed as an engine of economic growth and development but it also enjoys varying degrees of state support (Fleischer & Pizam, 1997; Gartner, 2004; Hall & Jenkins, 1998; Hjalager, 1996).

This is certainly the case in the UK. Although a relatively late-starter in farm tourism—Britain does not

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enjoy the long tradition of farm-based tourism that exists elsewhere in Europe—the socio-economic decline in many rural areas, the restructuring of agricultural economies from productivism to post-productivism (Ilbery & Bowler, 1998) and the more specific challenges of food scares and Foot and Mouth Disease have fuelled farmers' interest in diversifying or seeking to develop what have been referred to as 'alternative farm enterprises' (Bowler, Clark, Crockett, Ilbery, & Shaw, 1996; Ilbery, Bowler, Clark, Crockett, & Shaw, 1998). Moreover, since 1988, when the Farm Diversification Grant Scheme (FDGS) was first introduced by the then Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF), a number of schemes offering both advice (for example, MAFF, 1995) and financial incentives, as well as some relaxation of planning restrictions, have facilitated farm diversification (Walford, 2001). As a result, the number of farms engaging in 'pluriactivity'—the generation of additional income from on- or off-farm activities (see Fuller, 1990)—has continued to grow with tourism, particularly the provision of farm-based accommodation, being a dominant form of diversification (Evans & Ilbery, 1992a). For example, although the response to the FDGS was relatively limited, overall more than a quarter of grants were provided for the development of tourist accommodation on farms whilst, in the north-east and south-west of England, over half of all grants were for this purpose (Ilbery & Stiell, 1991).

Accordingly, the last 20 years have witnessed a significant increase in the supply of farm-based tourism (including both accommodation facilities and farm-based attractions/activities) in the UK although, to date, no national database has been established. Nevertheless, an indication of this growth is evident from various surveys. For example, Denman and Denman (1993) reported that some 10% of farms in England offered tourist accommodation facilities whilst, overall, approximately 23% were involved in some form of tourist enterprise (Busby & Rendle, 2000); most recent official statistics show that 56% of full-time farmers in England have diversified, with tourism-related activity the most common form of diversification (DEFRA, 2004). At the same time, research has been undertaken into a variety of issues related to farm diversification in general, and farm tourism in particular, including patterns of development (Evans & Ilbery, 1992b; Hjalager, 1996; Walford, 2001); marketing (Clarke, 1995, 1996, 1999); 'pathways' to diversification (Bowler et al., 1996; Ilbery & Bowler, 1998); farm tourism markets (Brown, 1993); the characteristics of farm tourism (Hoyland, 1982; Nilsson, 2002); public sector agencies and farm diversification (Fleischer & Felsenstein, 2000; Ilbery et al., 1998); and family/gender issues (Evans & Ilbery, 1996; Garcia-Ramon, Canoves, & Valdovinos, 1995; Henderson & Hoggart, 2003; Whatmore, 1991). The most comprehensive survey of the demand for and supply of farm tourism in England remains the study undertaken by Denman and Denman (1993).

However, limited research has been undertaken specifically into the attitudes of farmers towards diversification into tourism, particularly amongst those who have already diversified. This is, perhaps, surprising given both the continuing policy emphasis on diversification and the widespread recognition that a number of potential challenges exist, such as high investment costs, low returns or a lack of appropriate training, which may limit the benefits of diversifying into tourism (Sharpley, 2002). In other words, although the relationship between the nature of engagement in alternative farm enterprises and specific characteristics of the farm, such as size, ownership, profit/debt levels and location with respect to key tourist sites, as well as issues related to the farm family (life stage, education, gender), is explored in depth in the literature, little or no attention has been paid to the attitudes and responses of farmers to the experience and challenges of diversification into tourism. For example, recent evidence suggests that a significant number of farmers in south-west England are abandoning their tourism businesses to return to full-time farming (BBC, 2001), yet there exists little understanding of why this might be so.

The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to address this gap in the literature. Presenting the outcomes of a survey of farms in north-eastern England that have diversified, it explores the attitudes of farmers towards a variety of issues related to the perceived benefits and challenges of tourism as an option for diversification. In doing so, it reveals a number of implications for the future of tourism-based farm diversification as a means of achieving longer-term socio-economic growth and regeneration in rural areas, both in England and elsewhere. Firstly, however, a brief review of the background to the need for diversification within the agricultural sector and the perceived benefits and challenges of tourism as a specific diversification pathway will provide a framework for the subsequent research.

2. Farm diversification: the context

As noted above, much of the literature on rural and farm tourism refers to tourism as a potential panacea to the socio-economic challenges facing rural areas. In other words, it is commonly generalised that rural areas throughout the industrialised world are suffering a variety of problems, including economic decline, out-migration, adverse impacts from agricultural restructuring and a loss of rural identity (and that tourism may alleviate these problems). However, as Hodge and Monk (2004) suggest, such 'stylised fallacies' should not be applied universally to all rural areas. They demonstrate that, at least in the case of England, the socio-economic characteristics of rural areas vary enormously; thus, local areas should be distinguished through appropriate statistical and qualitative analysis, providing the basis for appropriate development policies to meet local needs.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that, since the 1950s, not only has there been a significant overall restructuring of agriculture within developed market economies but also a more general transformation in the socio-economic and political structures of rural areas (Marsden, Munton, Whatmore, & Little, 1986; Marsden & Murdoch, 1998). With respect to agriculture in particular, the period following the Second World War was characterised by a political emphasis on the goal of securing food supply (Burton, 2004); as a consequence of generous systems of production-oriented subsidies, farmers were encouraged to follow a productivist model that focused upon maximising food production through intensive production and increasing reliance on biotechnology to improve yields (Wilson, 2001). According to Ilbery and Bowler (1998, p. 63), this industrialisation of agriculture was characterised by three processes, namely, intensification, concentration and specialisation, which, in addition to significantly raising farm outputs, collectively contributed to transformations in rural areas. These included increased differentiation between agricultural regions, the emergence of larger farm units, reduced employment in farming, a shift in the relationship between farmers and food retailers (notably, the rising power of supermarkets within the food production chain) and, of course, significant impacts on the rural environment (Harvey, 1997). Thus, the productivist phase set in motion many of the challenges facing contemporary rural areas, particularly in more peripheral regions.

By the late 1970s, the pendulum began to swing in the opposite direction. The increasing political influence of the environmental movement, the problems of oversupply, national budgetary constraints and increasing concern over health issues associated with intensive farming methods signified the emergence of the so-called post-productivist phase (Lowe, Murdoch, Marsden, Munton, & Flynn, 1993). Again directly influenced by government intervention in response to changes in international policy (including Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform in Europe, GATT agreements related to agriculture, and Agenda 21), the focus shifted from maximising the quantity of food production to the quality of farming within a broader context of sustainable rural development. Importantly, this did not signal the end of productivist farming; as Ilbery and Bowler (1998, p. 57) note, 'two diverging pathways exist', with intensive, high-output agriculture still encouraged in many regions alongside low-output, environmentally appropriate farming in others. Nevertheless, a variety of policies have been implemented, most notably the introduction from 2003 of the CAP's Single Farm Payment (SFP), signalling the decoupling of production from subsidy. In addition to reducing state subsidies related to output, the SFP emphasises farmland 'set-aside', increased environmental regulation, and schemes designed to integrate agriculture into the environmental and social management of the countryside. In short, farmers are being increasingly encouraged to adopt their more traditional role as guardians of the countryside.

Key amongst such policies are those which encourage farm diversification, designed to reduce farmers' dependence upon traditional agriculture and to become 'shopkeepers, leisure providers, foresters, nature conservers and public custodians of the countryside' (Burton, 2004). The type of diversification adopted depends upon both the external geographic and economic context and internal factors relating to the farm and the farm family. Thus, six diversification 'pathways' have been identified, including diversification into other agricultural or non-agricultural activities on-farm, off-farm activities, and semi-retirement (Ilbery & Bowler, 1998). However, given both the identified desire of farming families to remain in agriculture (Lobley & Potter, 2004) and, in many peripheral regions, the lack of off-farm employment opportunities, on-farm diversification, particularly into tourism, has proved to be most popular (Ilbery et al., 1998). Moreover, according to Walford (2001), farm-based accommodation is likely to be the most common form of tourism enterprise on those farms located within or near scenic areas, such as national parks or heritage coasts; in the English north Pennines, for example, 75% of farm tourism enterprises are accommodation-based (Ilbery et al., 1998).

3. Farm tourism: benefits and challenges

As considered above, the increasing incidence of farm-based tourism, in particular the provision of accommodation facilities, is principally the outcome of government policies that have, on the one hand, led to a reduction in both employment and income levels within agriculture and, on the other hand, encouraged diversification with support available, for example, to make new use of redundant buildings or land. Thus, for farmers, the main benefits to accrue from diversification into tourism is the additional income (and, hence, longer-term security in farming) earned from the provision of services, experiences or products. It is not surprising, perhaps, that those farmers most willing to diversify into tourism have high levels of indebtedness and also have children wishing to continue the farm business (Walford, 2001). Collectively, the development of farm-based tourism is considered an integral element of the revitalisation of rural areas through tourism (Hall & Jenkins, 1998; Kieselbach & Long, 1990; OECD, 1994).

However, it also widely acknowledged that, generally, tourism is not necessarily a 'magic wand that will speed up economic progress' in rural areas (Hoggart et al., 1995, p. 36) whilst, more specifically, the development of farm-based tourism faces a number of challenges that may limit its contribution to the longer-term financial security of farms. In particular, studies have consistently demonstrated that tourism contributes relatively little extra to farm incomes (Frater, 1983; Hjalager, 1996; Oppermann, 1996). For example, Ilbery et al. (1998) conclude that tourism enterprises on farms in the northern Pennines of England 'do not really transform the economic situation of

relatively low farm business profits... however, they do seem to ensure the survival of such businesses'. To an extent, this can be explained by the fact that farm tourism enterprises tend to be small-scale and supply a highly seasonal market (Fleischer & Pizam, 1997), but it also points to a number of other challenges facing successful diversification of farms into tourism. These may be summarised as follows:

- *Location*: not all rural areas are equally attractive to tourists. It is no coincidence that, as noted above, popular scenic areas create a 'neighbourhood effect' (Walford, 2001) of clusters of farm tourism enterprises whereas, in other parts of the countryside, the supply of tourist facilities is less intense. In short, the provision of accommodation facilities does not guarantee demand; the total product package must be sufficient to attract and retain visitors (Gannon, 1994).
- *Investment*: diversification may require significant investment beyond the means of the business owner or greater than justified by potential returns. In such cases, diversification may only be possible if applications for public subsidies or grants are successful (Fleischer & Felsenstein, 2000).
- *Marketing*: individual farm businesses normally possess neither the skills nor the resources for effective marketing, a prerequisite for success (Embacher, 1994). Therefore, there is a need for collective collaboration and marketing through regional or national structures (Clarke, 1999), whilst increasing attention has been paid in the literature to the potential contribution of clusters to developing local rural tourism business (Meyer-Cech, 2001).
- *Quality*: the quality of products and services provided by farm tourism enterprises must meet tourists' demand and expectations. For example, rural accommodation providers in Northumberland, UK, are having to upgrade their facilities in response to the needs of tourists attracted to the new and successful Alnwick Garden attraction (France, 2004).

Most importantly perhaps, the farming community may experience difficulty in adapting to a service role. According to Fleischer and Pizam (1997), agricultural values and guest-service values are frequently incompatible, although this may be understating the depth of the challenge facing farmers choosing to diversify into a service, or non-productivist, role. Burton (2004), for example, referring to a number of studies that highlight the limited success of various diversification schemes designed to encourage farmers away from agricultural productivist roles, suggests that farmers may 'resist change on the basis of an anticipated loss of identity or social/cultural rewards traditionally conferred through existing commercial agricultural behaviour'. Indeed, he goes on to argue that farmers' resistance to change occurs principally because they see themselves as food producers, their

social identity being dependent on their ability to successfully maximise the productive capacity of the land. Thus, diversification may require farmers to 'give up' the socio-cultural status acquired by the farm family over generations.

One consequence of this is that, frequently, the tourism business on farms is managed by farmers' wives. A study by Garcia-Ramon et al. (1995) found that the successful diversification into tourism on Spanish farms was dependent on the involvement of the farm wife whilst, more generally, studies have shown that a majority of farm tourism enterprises are run by female family members (Busby & Rendle, 2000). Nevertheless, the potential transformation in the social identity of farmers demanded by diversification into a non-productivist role remains a significant issue.

As noted earlier, although these challenges have long been recognised, little or no attempt has been made to address farmers' attitudes or responses to them. Indeed, no relationship has been established in the literature between the context/challenges of farm diversification into tourism and farmers' subsequent attitudes towards it. As a result, there exists a lack of knowledge and understanding about farmers' roles as tourism-service providers and the longer-term potential of tourism as a form of farm diversification.

From a conceptual perspective, farmers' attitudes towards diversification, particularly into tourism, are likely to be shaped by a variety of factors. The influence of these is likely to vary according to the particular circumstances of individual farmers or farming units, although the wider political-economic context within which farming occurs points to a potential greater acceptance on the part of farmers of the need to diversify. In particular, CAP reform, embracing the decoupling of production from subsidy and environmental stewardship schemes linked to access and recreation, may encourage diversification, particularly in more peripheral (and, as tourist destinations, more popular) areas and as existing production-related support is phased out. However, farmers' willingness to diversify, or the extent to which new ventures, such as the provision of tourism services, are blended into core farming activity, may vary according to a variety of factors, including

- economic need for diversification,
- physical/geographical characteristics of the farm,
- perceptions of the socio-economic role of farming,
- demographic and lifestyle factors,
- availability and nature of public sector support, and
- perceptions of tourism as diversification option.

In addressing the lack of attention paid to farmers' attitudes in the literature, the research considered in the following section explores these factors within the broader context of farmers' responses to the problems and challenges associated with diversification into tourism.

4. The research: farmers' attitudes to diversification into tourism

4.1. Research area: north-eastern England

The research was based upon a postal questionnaire survey undertaken in north-eastern England, embracing the two tourist regions, as defined by regional tourist board boundaries, of Northumbria and Yorkshire (Fig. 1). Northumbria, stretching from the Scottish borders in the north to the industrial region of Teesside and the northern fringe of the North York Moors National Park to the south, is predominantly rural, with some 70% of the population living in major conurbations along the river corridors of the Tyne, Wear and Tees. These originally developed to serve the area's traditional industries of mining, ship-building and heavy industry, many of which have declined dramatically over the last two decades. About two-thirds of the region is rural in character and sparsely populated; the dominant land use is, therefore, agriculture and forestry. However, reflecting the topography of the region, with the Pennines to the west and the Cheviot Hills to the north, just 27% of agricultural land is used for arable cropping compared with 44% nationally, whilst 57% of agricultural land is permanent grassland or rough grazing, compared with 37% nationally. Thus, many farms in the region are smaller, hill farms with the larger, arable farms concentrated along the coastal plain. Following national trends, employment in agriculture in the region declined by 14% between 1987 and 1997 and, in the region as a whole, farming, forestry and fishing account for less than 2% of employment. However, in the more sparsely populated rural areas, up to 30% of employment is in agriculture (DEFRA, 2005a).



Fig. 1. Research area (Northumbria and Yorkshire region).

A similar picture is evident in the Yorkshire region. Agricultural land accounts for over 75% of the regional area, with the highest quality farmland found in the central Vale of York area. However, to the west lies the Pennines chain embracing the Yorkshire Dales National Park and part of the Peak District National Park whilst, to the east, the North York Moors (also a National Park) rise to over 400m at their highest point. Thus, the region is well endowed with spectacular and protected landscapes that act as a magnet for tourists although, from an economic development perspective, much of Dales, Pennines and North York Moors are designated as less favoured areas. As a result, they attract funding to support traditional, smaller sheep and cattle farms but, at the same time, tourism has assumed critical importance within the local rural economy. The main population centres lie in the south western part of the region, principally Leeds and Bradford in West Yorkshire and Sheffield in South Yorkshire, although the tourist-historic city of York is the main population centre in the north of the region. Over 75% of the region's population live in these urban centres whilst agriculture and forestry remain the dominant activities in rural areas. As in Northumbria, the Yorkshire region experienced a 17% reduction in the total agricultural workforce between 1987 and 1997 and, overall, less than 1.8% of the region's working population are employed in agriculture, forestry and fishing (DEFRA, 2005b).

Not surprisingly, tourism represents an important economic sector in both regions although Northumbria remains one of the least visited regions in the country. In 2002, for example, the region attracted just 2.6% of international visits and 3.6% of domestic visits in England although, in that year, over 5 million staying visitors generated over £1037 million in receipts, with day visitors contributing a further £280 million (NTB, 2004). Conversely, tourism in Yorkshire is worth almost £4 billion annually (YTB, 2004) and employs over 7% of the region's workforce. In both regions, tourism activity is spatially defined: established coastal resorts attract significant numbers of visitors whilst specific destinations, such as York, Durham, Hadrian's Wall and the West Yorkshire region with its museums and literary association with the Brontë sisters, tend to dominate tourist flows. In Northumbria, the Newcastle-Gateshead conurbation attracts the greatest proportion of visitors to that region although the recent development of the Alnwick Garden has proved to be a major attraction to tourists in the northern area, providing significant opportunities for farm diversification. The existence of three national parks in the Yorkshire region has long underpinned a thriving rural tourism industry though, in both regions, the continuing challenge facing the agricultural sector has served to increase the incidence of (and need for) farm diversification, whether into tourism or other on- or off-farm activities.

4.2. Methodology

During April 2005, self-completion questionnaires were mailed to a total of 150 farms within the study area. Given the identified predominance of farm-based accommodation as the most common form of diversification (Walford, 2001), the sample was limited to farms offering some form of tourism accommodation, typically bed and breakfast or self-catering accommodation, in order to facilitate compatibility of outcomes. The sample was selected principally from the national Farm Stay UK organisation's 2005 'Stay on a Farm' brochure—Farm Stay UK is Britain's largest farm tourism marketing consortium. Additionally, printed and web-based brochures of smaller, regional farm tourism marketing consortia were utilised, whilst an extensive Internet search was undertaken in order to identify farm tourism enterprises within Northumbria and Yorkshire that are marketed independently rather than through membership of a national or regional organisation. In all cases, the main criterion for including a farm tourism enterprise in the sample was that, in addition to offering tourism accommodation services, it should also be a working farm. In order to encourage responses, stamped addressed envelopes were enclosed whilst, wherever possible, the questionnaires and covering letter were addressed to the named contact on the farm. A period of 4 weeks from the date of posting was allowed for the return of questionnaires although the great majority of responses were received within 2 weeks.

4.3. The questionnaire

The overall purpose of the research was to elicit the attitudes of farming families on a variety of issues related to their experience of diversification into tourism. More specifically, it sought to identify their attitudes and responses to the challenges and problems, as reviewed earlier in this paper, that are commonly associated with such diversification. Thus, the questionnaire was primarily based upon a 43 item, 5-point Likert scale, which addressed nine attitudinal themes linked to the alleged challenges of diversification as follows:

- Reasons for diversifying into tourism and attitudes towards tourism as a diversification option.
- The extent to which diversification is perceived to have been successful and expectations of future success.
- The socio-economic role of farming and the relationship between farming and tourism-service provision.
- The relationship between rural tourism experiences and the rural/farm environment.
- The relevance of appropriate training to successful diversification into tourism.
- The importance of rural business clusters.
- The need for public sector support for diversification.
- The marketing of farm tourism enterprises.
- The costs/benefits of diversification to the farm family unit.

The questionnaire also included a number of descriptive/categorisation questions as well as four open-ended questions that sought to both test the validity of responses to items on the Likert scale and to provide respondents with the opportunity to make more general comments.

5. Research outcomes

5.1. Respondent characteristics

During the assigned 4-week period for the survey, a total of 79 fully completed questionnaires were returned from the 150 farms included in the sample, representing a response rate of almost 53%, well above average for a postal survey. Of these, 62 (79%) were completed by the farmer's wife/female partner. This proportion was predetermined by the named contact for each farm in the marketing material used to compile the sample but, nevertheless, reflected the findings of earlier studies suggesting that farm tourism enterprises are, in general, run by female family members (Busby & Rendle, 2000).

The farms upon which the respondents' tourism enterprises were based varied in both size and core farming business although, not surprisingly given the topography of the region covered by the survey, almost half were relatively smaller farms of up to 250 acres (101 ha) whilst just nine farms were over 1000 acres (405 ha). Similarly, the core business of the majority of farms was livestock or mixed livestock and arable; just 14 respondents ran arable-only farms. These characteristics mirror the overall structure of farming within the study region as well as the fact that farm accommodation provision is more strongly associated with upland livestock holdings (DEFRA, 2005b). Two thirds of respondents owned their farms whilst a quarter were tenant farmers; the remainder were owners with additional leased land holdings. The majority of respondents had run their farms for over 20 years (and one third were aged between 45 and 54 years), but all respondents were at least second generation farmers with some farms having been the family business for up to 150 years.

With regards to diversification into tourism, no particular pattern emerged as to when diversification had been undertaken although almost 30% had diversified within the last 5 years and 65% within the last 15 years, reflecting the growing need for diversification during that period. Nevertheless, as an indication of the historical role of tourism in the region, 19% of farms had diversified more than 20 years ago. Respondents were also asked whether options other than tourism had been considered at the time of diversification; 56 (71%) indicated that no other option had been considered whilst, of the remainder, a number of alternatives were considered, although these were pursued in only five cases.

All farms responding to the survey had diversified into tourism accommodation, typically offering either bed and breakfast, self-catering in converted buildings and holiday

cottages, or a combination of the two. Three respondents offered camping/caravanning facilities in addition to bed and breakfast and self-catering, whilst four provided only camping and caravanning. A further five respondents indicated that they provided accommodation *plus* other facilities—three offered horse-riding, one a farm shop and one a farm trail (Table 1). No association was identified between the size of farm and the type of accommodation offered.

Finally, 43% of respondents considered running the tourism business on the farm to be a full-time job and 67% viewed it as a part-time job, whilst 67% have or previously had other, off-farm employment. As discussed later, this may be related to the desired degree of separateness between the core farm business and the tourism business.

5.2. Farmers' attitudes

As indicated above, the principal means of exploring the attitudes of farmers/farming families was a 43-item Likert scale based on nine attitudinal themes related to the commonly perceived challenges of diversification into tourism. For convenience, the research outcomes are considered under each of these theme headings and, where relevant, compared with the results of the open-ended questions. The implications of these findings are subsequently discussed in the concluding section of this paper.

Table 1
Farm diversification: type of tourism business

| Type of business | Frequency | % of total |
|-------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Bed & breakfast (B&B) | 24 | 30.5 |
| Self-catering | 24 | 30.5 |
| B&B/self-catering | 19 | 24.0 |
| B&B/self-catering/camping | 3 | 3.7 |
| Camping | 4 | 5.0 |
| B&B/self-catering <i>plus</i> | 5 | 6.3 |
| Total | 79 | 100.0 |

Table 2
Attitudes towards tourism as a diversification option (% of respondents)

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither agree nor disagree | Agree | Strongly agree | No response |
|---|-------------------|----------|----------------------------|-------|----------------|-------------|
| It is/was important to diversify our farm business for longer term financial security | 5.1 | 2.5 | 5.1 | 31.6 | 55.7 | 0 |
| I/we diversified into tourism as it provides the best opportunity for generating extra income | 3.8 | 3.8 | 10.1 | 45.6 | 36.7 | 0 |
| I/we diversified into tourism as it was the only choice available for diversification | 1.3 | 21.5 | 21.5 | 38.0 | 16.5 | 1.3 |
| I/we would have preferred not to have had to diversify into tourism | 5.1 | 34.2 | 31.6 | 16.5 | 12.7 | 0 |
| In the longer term, I/we would prefer to diversify into businesses other than tourism | 19.0 | 32.9 | 35.4 | 7.6 | 3.8 | 1.3 |

5.2.1. Reasons for diversifying into tourism and attitudes towards tourism as a diversification option

The purpose of this theme was twofold. Firstly, it sought to identify the extent to which financial considerations, specifically the need for extra income, had influenced the decision to diversify and, secondly, how positively tourism is viewed as a diversification option. Not surprisingly, diversification was undertaken for the potential additional income it offered; 87.3% agreed that diversification had been necessary for longer term financial security whilst 62.3% agreed that tourism in particular had offered the best opportunity for generating extra income (Table 2). Interestingly, however, in response to the question 'what is the *principal* reason that you diversified into tourism', 59.5% identified extra income as the main reason, 12.7% wanted to make use of redundant buildings (implicitly as an investment) and the remainder cited a variety of reasons, including the desire to work from home/to be there for the children or to do something different. For example, in response to the open-ended question, 'what do you most enjoy about your work in farm based tourism, a number of respondents referred to the benefits of working from home. Thus, a typical response was '*Being self-employed allows flexibility. I can still work on the farm when needed and I love to live and work in a very pleasant environment.*' Nevertheless, income generation is undoubtedly the dominant reason for developing on on-farm tourism business, often replacing previous off-farm work—67% of respondents previously had other, off-farm jobs.

Roughly half of the respondents agreed that tourism had been the only diversification choice available to them, whilst 48.1% agreed that they could provide specific activities or experiences for tourists. Moreover, almost 52% disagreed with the statement, 'In the longer term, I would prefer to diversify into businesses other than tourism'. Along with responses to the earlier question on diversification choice, this suggests that, for about half the sample, diversification into tourism had been a positive choice. However, around 60% of respondents were unsure or agreed that they would have preferred not to have diversified into tourism, suggesting that, for many,

diversification had been a necessary, though not preferable, course of action.

5.2.2. *Extent to which diversification is perceived to have been successful and expectations of future success*

Despite the evidence of some ambivalence towards tourism as a diversification option revealed above, a majority of respondents (77.2%) felt positively that investing in tourism had been a success whilst, interestingly, 74.7% agreed or strongly agreed that the revenues from tourism had met their original expectations. A similar proportion agreed that they were confident about the future success of their tourism business, whilst over two thirds of respondents considered that the longer-term financial survival of their farm will be ensured by the income from tourism. The basis of this confidence is unclear, particularly as it contradicts the findings of earlier research that diversification into tourism contributes relatively little to farm incomes or does not cover the costs of investment. However, over 60% of respondents believed that the demand for rural tourism is increasing whilst 65.8% agreed that they attract a sufficient number of guests throughout the year, undoubtedly reflecting the fact that most farms included in the survey are located in popular rural tourism areas. Ten respondents disagreed/strongly disagreed that they attract a sufficient number of guests; an analysis of the location of these respondents' farms suggests that remoteness from attractions or facilities might be a contributing factor to this lack of demand although, as noted below, virtually all respondents believed that there is an appropriate local cluster of attractions and facilities sufficient to attract visitors.

5.2.3. *Social role/identity of farming and the relationship between farming and tourism-service provision*

One of the more significant challenges identified in the literature is the difficulty experienced by farmers in adapting to a service role (Fleischer & Pizam, 1997). More specifically, Burton (2004) argues that farmers' self-perception of their social identity as principally food producers represents a significant barrier to their adoption of other, non-productive roles. The purpose of this theme

was, therefore, to explore attitudes towards the role of farming and responses to the potential conflict between the core farming work and tourism-service provision.

As Table 3 demonstrates, the majority of respondents indicated that not only would they wish farming to remain their core business—that is, their role/identity as farmers is important to them—but also that their role is to provide food for the nation. Interestingly, however, although only nine respondents disagreed about farmers' productive role, 67.1% positively agreed that farming should remain their core business, suggesting that about one third of respondents were less committed to farming in the longer term. It is not surprising, therefore, that only 24% of respondents disagreed that the tourism business should be kept separate from the farm business; similarly, almost two thirds of respondents indicated that, within the family farm unit, they manage the tourism business whilst their partner runs the farm business. Thus, the tourism business is, in the majority of cases, unrelated to the farm business—indeed, this sense of separateness is amplified by the fact that 77.2% of respondents (typically, the female partner) consider running the tourism business to be a positive means of achieving work satisfaction and independence (implicitly from the farm). Indeed, one respondent stated that '*making my own money and being independent from the farm business in terms of finance*' was what she most enjoyed about running her farm-based tourism business. Moreover, in response to the open question 'What do you most dislike about your work in farm-based tourism?', only three respondents referred to conflict with farming, one responding noting that it is '*Difficult to fit in everything to do with the farm and the holiday business ... [and]... the pressure of being the one who has to do everything*'. More usually, respondents referred to the problems associated with running a small tourism business, the intrusion on family life and '*being on duty 24 hours a day*'.

Further evidence of the desire to keep the tourism and farming businesses separate was provided by responses to the statement that farmers should play a wider role in countryside management and the provision of recreational opportunities, the basis of a number past and current rural development schemes. Less than 30% agreed that farmers

Table 3
Attitudes towards the social role of farming and the farming/tourism relationship (% of respondents)

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither agree nor disagree | Agree | Strongly agree | No response |
|---|-------------------|----------|----------------------------|-------|----------------|-------------|
| It is important to me/us that farming should remain my/our core business | 6.3 | 6.3 | 19.0 | 24.1 | 43.0 | 1.3 |
| The principal role of farming is to produce food for the nation | 2.5 | 6.3 | 11.4 | 35.4 | 44.3 | 0 |
| I manage the tourism business and leave my partner to run the farm business | 12.7 | 16.5 | 7.6 | 25.3 | 29.1 | 8.9 |
| The tourism business should be kept separate from the farm business | 10.1 | 13.9 | 21.5 | 30.4 | 21.5 | 2.5 |
| In running my tourism business, I am achieving independence and work satisfaction | 1.3 | 3.8 | 17.7 | 46.8 | 30.4 | 1.3 |

should play a wider role. Overall, then, the responses to this theme point to a desire on the part of farmers to maintain a distinction between farming and tourism, the latter being seen as something that, in a sense, occurs on the farm but is peripheral to core farming activity. As the next thematic section shows, this distinction is also evident in farmers' attitudes to the nature of rural or farm tourism experiences.

5.2.4. Relationship between rural tourism experiences and the rural/farm environment

Building upon the previous responses, this attitudinal theme sought to explore the extent to which farmers perceive or recognise a relationship between the demand for rural tourism and the potential experiences offered by the rural or farm environment. In other words, it sought to identify farmers' understanding of rural tourists' potential needs and, implicitly, their willingness to meet them. The survey revealed almost universal support amongst respondents for the idea that the public should have opportunities for experiencing rural life and the countryside, whilst about 75% of respondents believed that rural tourists are seeking a rural experience in general and that local traditions and culture in particular play a part in tourists' desire to stay in the countryside. In contrast, however, there was less evidence to suggest that farm tourism businesses should provide rural or farm-based attractions and experiences for visitors. Only half of all respondents agreed that it is important to provide attractions such as farm trails or horse-riding in order to attract tourists whilst a similar proportion disagreed with the statement 'Footpaths, bridleways and other rights of way are an opportunity to add value to my farm based tourism business'. In other words, although farmers are generally anxious for the public to gain an understanding of rural life, fewer are willing to contribute to that understanding. Indeed, in response to the open-ended question, 'What do you most like/enjoy about your work in farm based tourism', only 17.8% of respondents referred to meeting or dealing with people interested in learning about farm or rural life, although a number of respondents stated that they enjoyed providing a good service to their visitors and, in one case, providing '*solace in their stressful lives*'. Thus, although

farmers are happy to earn extra income through providing accommodation services, and enjoy meeting the variety of people who stay on their farms, there appears to be a general lack of willingness amongst those surveyed to contribute to a broader rural recreational experience.

5.2.5. Relevance of appropriate training to successful diversification into tourism

Appropriate training is commonly cited in the literature as a particular need facing those diversifying into tourism, particularly with respect to meeting the challenge of moving into a service-based business. However, the outcomes of this research were less conclusive regarding the need for such training. Indeed, 83.6% of respondents agreed that they had found it easy to adapt to providing a service for their visitors, directly contradicting the results of previous studies, whilst overall the research revealed a degree of ambivalence regarding the need for training in either business/service skills or in knowledge about local culture and tradition (see Table 4). Whilst there was slightly more support for training in business, the mean frequencies of responses to the relevant statements indicated a lack of importance attached to training in general. In fact, one respondent added the unprompted comment that '*endless training and business courses are unhelpful... visitors like to meet folk who are relaxed and natural, not playing a role*'. Nevertheless, three quarters of respondents had attended training courses relevant to their tourism business.

Related to training/service issues, there was almost unanimous agreement with the statement, 'I believe that the personal touch is important in running my tourism business', whilst 70 respondents agreed that they enjoyed providing a service for their guests. In fact, dealing with or meeting people was the most common 'like' about running a farm-based tourism business and almost 94% of respondents believed that they provide the level of service expected by their guests.

5.2.6. Importance of rural business clusters

As noted above, the development of clusters is considered to be an important factor for the successful development of rural tourism businesses. For farm-based

Table 4
Attitudes towards training for farm-based tourism provision

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither agree nor disagree | Agree | Strongly agree | No response |
|--|-------------------|----------|----------------------------|-------|----------------|-------------|
| I/we found it easy to adapt to providing a service for our customers | 1.3 | 3.8 | 10.1 | 59.5 | 24.1 | 1.3 |
| I/we believe there is a need to be trained in the traditional and cultural aspects of the region | 5.1 | 29.1 | 31.6 | 29.1 | 3.8 | 1.3 |
| It is important to participate in training courses to develop business/service skills | 3.8 | 26.6 | 22.8 | 34.2 | 12.7 | 0 |
| I have participated in training schemes relevant to my tourism business | 1.3 | 8.9 | 15.2 | 54.4 | 19.0 | 1.3 |

accommodation providers this may be seen as of particular importance, especially given the fact that, as identified in this survey, few such tourism businesses offer activities on-farm. Only five respondents did not feel that there are sufficient attractions or places for tourists to visit in their region, a factor which, as noted in Section 5.2.2 above, may be related to their satisfaction with the number of guests they receive throughout the year. Similarly, almost 90% felt there were sufficient pubs and restaurants locally to meet visitors' needs. Moreover, virtually all respondents indicated that they actively promote local attractions, activities and facilities, supporting the belief amongst 84.8% of respondents that it is important to work closely with other tourism-related businesses in the region. There was also strong support for the proposal that local visitor centres should provide regular information to accommodation providers regarding opening times and special events/exhibitions. Thus, close collaboration with other tourism service providers locally was seen in general to be an important activity.

5.2.7. *Need for public sector financial support for diversification*

Given the potential investment costs of diversification, the availability of financial support is often claimed to be vital to encourage diversification (Fleischer & Felsenstein, 2000). Surprisingly, however, the research identified an almost equal split between those who felt the availability of financial support had been an important factor in deciding to diversify and those who did not; for 41.8% of respondents financial support had been important whereas, for 40.5%, financial support or grants had not been available or were not considered necessary. The role of the public sector was further addressed in the open-ended question, 'What, if anything, could government/local agencies do to help your tourism business more successful?'. Of those who responded, a quarter asked for more financial support for converting redundant buildings or other tourism-related development, whilst 12% suggested on-going financial support through a reduction in local taxes or business rates. The great majority, however, considered that the public sector should be more proactive in supporting the promotion of rural tourism businesses, either through subsidising individual business' advertising or more generally promoting the region more effectively. Indeed, half of those responding suggested that the public sector should focus upon promoting rural recreation and the region. Typically, a key role for government or local agencies was seen to be '*promoting farms and rural areas in a more positive way*'.

5.2.8. *Marketing of farm tourism enterprises*

With respect to marketing, 73.4% of respondents agreed that it is more effective to market their tourism business through a consortium or farm tourism marketing group, although this result was, of course, biased by the sampling method employed for this survey. However, only one third

of respondents disagreed with the statement, 'I prefer to market my business independently', suggesting that a majority undertake some form of individual marketing or promotion, though also subscribing to a marketing group. Confirming the response to the open-ended question referred to in the previous section, 86% of respondents agreed that more support should be available from regional agencies for marketing farm tourism businesses. Interestingly, in response to the open-ended question, 'What do you believe is the most effective way of marketing your tourism business?', 17% preferred word-of-mouth/personal recommendation, 20% considered the Internet to be most effective whilst almost 40% thought that a combination of methods, primarily Internet and word-of-mouth, to be the best form of advertising. Conversely, less than a quarter considered guides or brochures to be effective.

5.2.9. *Costs/benefits of diversification to the farm family unit*

The purpose of the final theme was to consider attitudes towards the impacts of diversification into tourism on family life. One third of respondents suggested that the business did not intrude on family life, whilst over 44% indicated that it did intrude although, not surprisingly, cross tabulation reveals that the majority of the latter group provided bed and breakfast accommodation rather than self-catering. However, few responses to the 'dislikes' open-ended question referred to impacts on family life whereas, as noted above, half of those responding cited being tied to the business and the need to be there most of the time as a particular dislike whilst another third found tedious work—cleaning, ironing and paperwork—to be the least attractive part of running the business. Such 'dislikes', of course, are likely to be felt by any small-scale tourism accommodation provider, particularly those providing bed-and-breakfast: '*Your home is never your own. Being at the beck and call of people... is very time consuming compared to the rewards*'.

6. Discussion and conclusions

Although the above review of the research outcomes is structured around the nine attitudinal themes, neither the themes nor the responses are mutually exclusive. That is, a number of issues emerge from the overall research that, in some cases, have implications for the development and support of farm tourism enterprises, particularly with respect to public sector agency involvement.

Generally, some of the findings were unsurprising, in particular the principal reason for farm diversification into tourism being the need or desire for extra income. With much of the study region comprising peripheral rural areas supporting smaller scale, hillside farms where the need for diversification into alternative, on- or off-farm activities has long been recognised (Ilbery & Bowler, 1998), it was to be expected that income generation for longer term financial security would be a dominant motive. Also

unsurprising was the fact that the decision to diversify into tourism appeared to be, for many respondents, a positive or proactive choice. That is, although the literature suggests that, for many farms, there are few alternatives other than tourism, not only is tourism a significant activity throughout much of the study area, underpinning the confidence of many respondents in the potential success of a tourism enterprise, but also almost two thirds of respondents had previous, off-farm jobs. Thus, diversification into tourism was undertaken for the perceived associated benefits of working from home, being able to look after young children, and so on.

More surprising, perhaps, was the finding that a majority of farm-based tourism businesses were meeting expectations in terms of income, were satisfied with the overall level of business achieved throughout the year and were confident about the future health of their business. This contradicts the outcome of earlier research which suggests that farm-based tourism enterprises frequently fail to have a significant impact on overall farm incomes or fail to recoup investment costs. Undoubtedly, the popularity of the study region for rural tourism is a major influence on the success of farm-based tourism businesses and, therefore, comparative research in other, less tourism-dominated rural areas may be necessary to explore the extent to which this finding is replicated elsewhere.

However, a major issue to emerge from the research was the degree of separateness between the farm business and the tourism business. Not only did the majority of respondents state their desire to maintain farming as their core business activity, most probably to maintain their social identity as farmers, but that distinction is maintained both through defined roles, with the female partner usually responsible for the tourism business, and also through an apparent unwillingness on the part of farmers to merge the two businesses through, for example, providing on-farm tourist activities or more generally managing the countryside for recreational opportunities (for which a number of support packages are available). Moreover, many (female) respondents indicated that running their tourism business provides them with both job satisfaction and a sense of independence. Therefore, diversification into tourism is, essentially, an employment issue rather than a farm development issue. This, in turn, implies that relevant public sector agencies should reconsider the extent to which many agri-environment policies are linked to the development of tourism and recreation opportunities. In the UK, for example, a number of land management schemes explicitly link subsidy payments with the opening up of land for public access for a variety of purposes, such as educational visits or linking existing recreational routes, yet the evidence from this research suggests that many farmers would be unwilling to commit to such schemes. At the same time, it also implies that financial support for tourism development should be considered in terms of only job creation opportunities. That is, subsidies should be based not, for example, on the costs of redeveloping redundant

buildings but on the number of jobs potentially created by such redevelopment.

The implication of this is that relatively few farms may qualify for financial support for diversification in tourism. In other words, the provision of farm accommodation, whether bed-and-breakfast or self-catering, is unlikely to produce significant numbers of new jobs. This, in turn, suggests that future funding in the rural development arena should, perhaps, be decoupled from business diversification, focusing instead on environmental improvements and other schemes which provide a more favourable context for the development of on-farm tourist enterprises.

Nevertheless, many rural areas currently suffer a variety of well-documented socio-economic challenges which the development of rural tourism in general, and on-farm tourism businesses in particular, may alleviate. Thus, although public sector financial support for farm tourism as an element of rural development policy is not contentious, the outcomes of this research point to ways in which that support may be better directed. More specifically, five key points emerged from the survey:

- Although a number of respondents considered that grants for the development or renovation of buildings were important, for many the availability of financial support had not been an influential factor in the decision to diversify into tourism.
- Training, widely considered to be prerequisite to business success in rural tourism, was accorded significantly less importance by respondents.
- Word-of-mouth/personal recommendation, Internet marketing or a combination of the two were considered to be the most effective means of marketing the business. However, a majority of respondents public sector support should be directed towards the promotion of tourism in the region.
- Working with other tourism businesses in the area (i.e. developing clusters) was considered to be a vital success factor.
- For many, the financial success of their business is restricted by the local tax regime.

Collectively, these points imply that public sector support for farm-based tourism may be more appropriately directed towards the continuation, rather than the start-up, of business. In other words, the research suggests that many respondents, having established their business themselves, would prefer public sector support to be focused on supporting their business through regional marketing programmes, the subsidising of individual advertisements or the development of local tourism business clusters.

To conclude, then, in exploring the attitudes of farmers to diversification into tourism, the research described in this paper supports some of widely-held beliefs about the role and importance of farm diversification into tourism, yet challenges others, in particular with respect to the

relationship between farming and tourism and, consequently, the role of public sector agencies in supporting farm tourism development. Undoubtedly, further research is necessary to determine the extent to which many of the findings are replicated elsewhere but, nevertheless, it has contributed to a broader understanding of the phenomenon of farm-based tourism.

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