



## A typology for defining agritourism

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### ABSTRACT

Agritourism has been studied in various ways and contexts. It can be argued, however, that studies have yet to provide a clear and basic understanding of the characteristics that underpin and define agritourism. This paper proposes an original typology for defining agritourism by identifying the key characteristics currently used to define agritourism in the literature and organising them into a transparent and structured framework. For the first time, the agritourism typology clarifies and classifies definitions of agritourism that currently exist in the literature. It therefore offers a comprehensive framework that can be used as a basis for more informed debate and discussion and for future empirical research.

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### 1. Introduction

Understanding any phenomenon requires a basic understanding of its fundamental defining characteristics. However this has yet to be done for agritourism. Comprehensive examination of the literature reveals numerous labels and definitions for agritourism based on a variety of characteristics (Table 1). Labels such as agrotourism, farm tourism, farm-based tourism, and rural tourism are often used interchangeably with agritourism and each other (Barbieri & Mshenga, 2008; Roberts & Hall, 2001; Wall, 2000), but have also been used explicitly to denote similar but distinct concepts (Iakovidou, 1997; McGehee & Kim, 2004; Sharpley & Sharpley, 1997). The result is a complex and confusing picture, especially when authors do not clarify why they have used one particular term rather than another. For the purposes of clarity and consistency, the term ‘agritourism’ will be used throughout this paper to refer to the range of related labels, concepts and products discussed in the literature as a whole. However we reiterate the argument that agritourism is not synonymous with rural tourism, rather it is a more specific subset of rural tourism as a broader concept (Clarke, 1999; Nilsson, 2002).

The aim of this paper is to provide for a better understanding of agritourism by proposing a framework of agritourism types. The

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typology proposed builds on three key areas of debate in the literature to help categorise the diverse range of products and activities identified in the literature into meaningful types based on a clear set of characteristics. These debates are: whether or not the product is based on a ‘working farm’; the nature of contact between the tourist and agricultural activity; and the degree of authenticity in the tourism experience. By systematically considering agritourism products according to these three characteristics for the first time, a framework of five different types emerges. The typology serves three important functions: it clarifies and classifies definitions of agritourism that currently exist in the literature; it serves as a basis for future empirical research; and it provides an initial framework to further refine the concept of agritourism in the context of wider rural debates. Next, definition of key terms and concepts which underpin the typology will be given, before illustrating and describing the typology itself.

### 2. Definition of characteristics underpinning the typology

#### 2.1. Working farm

This is arguably the most frequently cited requirement associated with agritourism (Table 1). However, the definition of what constitutes a working farm itself has been largely ignored in the agritourism literature and in the majority of cases where a working farm is specified as a requirement of agritourism no definition is given. In the context of broader rural debates this creates a significant problem as ‘the farm’ can not only be understood as an economic entity but also in terms of its social and cultural

**Table 1**  
Overview of definitions used in the literature for agritourism and related labels.

Term used	Definition	Reference
Agritourism	"any practice developed on a working farm with the purpose of attracting visitors"	Barbieri and Mshenga (2008: 168)
	"a specific type of rural tourism in which the hosting house must be integrated into an agricultural estate, inhabited by the proprietor, allowing visitors to take part in agricultural or complementary activities on the property"	Marques (2006: 151)
	"rural enterprises which incorporate both a working farm environment and a commercial tourism component"	McGehee (2007: 111) and McGehee, Kim, and Jennings (2007: 280)
	"tourism products which are directly connected with the agrarian environment, agrarian products or agrarian stays"	Sharpley and Sharpley (1997: 9)
	"activities of hospitality performed by agricultural entrepreneurs and their family members that must remain connected and complementary to farming activities"	Sonnino (2004: 286)
Agrotourism	"tourism activities which are undertaken in non-urban regions by individuals whose main employment is in the primary or secondary sector of the economy"	Iakovidou (1997: 44)
	"tourist activities of small-scale, family or co-operative in origin, being developed in rural areas by people employed in agriculture"	Kizos and Iosifides (2007: 63)
	"provision of touristic opportunities on working farms"	Wall (2000: 14)
Farm Tourism	"rural tourism conducted on working farms where the working environment forms part of the product from the perspective of the consumer"	Clarke (1999: 27)
	"tourist activity is closely intertwined with farm activities and often with the viability of the household economy"	Gladstone and Morris (2000: 93)
	"to take tourists in and put them up on farms, involving them actively in farming life and production activities"	Iakovidou (1997: 44)
	"commercial tourism enterprises on working farms... This excludes bed and breakfast establishments, nature-based tourism and staged entertainment"	Ollenburg and Buckley (2007: 445)
	"activities and services offered to commercial clients in a working farm environment for participation, observation or education"	Ollenburg (2006: 52)
	"a part of rural tourism, the location of the accommodation on a part-time or full-time farm being the distinguishing criterion."	Oppermann (1996: 88)
Farm-based tourism	"increasingly used to describe a range of activities... [which] may have little in common with the farm other than the farmer manages the land on which they take place"	Roberts and Hall (2001: 150)
	"phenomenon of attracting people onto agricultural holdings"	Evans and Ilbery (1989: 257)
	"an alternative farm enterprise"	Ilbery, Bowler, Clark, Crockett, and Shaw (1998: 355)
Vacation Farms	"incorporate both a working farm environment and a commercial tourism component"	Weaver and Fennell (1997: 357)

significance (Burton, 2004). Clarke (1996) illustrates the 'fluidity' of characteristics used to define a working farm, based on discussions with local groups in the United Kingdom. Aspects such as the physical area of land, proportion of agricultural income, and individuals' expertise and motivations (e.g. livelihood, hobby) were found to be important. In existing definitions of agritourism it can be assumed that the term 'working farm' is used to signify a farm where agriculture is currently being practiced (e.g. Gladstone & Morris, 2000; Iakovidou, 1997; Kizos & Iosifides, 2007; Sonnino, 2004). Here 'agriculture' can be defined as the activity of rearing of animals and the production of crop plants through cultivation of the soil for consumption and for sale as food and other commodities (adapted from Robinson, 2004). This definition of agriculture is useful as it also helps establish a boundary between activities that are traditionally based on farms but are not agricultural (e.g. horse riding, food processing) from those that are agricultural (e.g. harvesting crops). It is also helpful because it addresses a key issue underlying wider debates by recognizing agriculture as a physical rather than a financial activity; which is especially important in terms of incorporating the large numbers of agricultural small-holdings that may be farmed on a part-time basis and those which are supported by other streams of income. In other words, a working farm is the place where agricultural activities are practiced.

## 2.2. Contact with agricultural activity

The nature of tourist contact with agriculture is also frequently discussed in the agritourism literature. Questions are raised regarding whether passive appreciation of agriculturally-produced landscapes as a backdrop for tourism can be considered as agritourism (Clarke, 1999), and there are examples where agritourism has "little more in common with the farm other than the farmer

manages the land on which they [agritourism activities] take place" (Roberts & Hall, 2001: 150). Other examples suggest there must be a direct connection between tourism and the agrarian environment for it to be defined as agritourism (Sharpley & Sharpley, 1997). This connection is sometimes expressed in terms of the two being intertwined (Gladstone & Morris, 2000), or as tourism involving active participation in farming life and production activities (Iakovidou, 1997), but often the nature of contact between agriculture and tourism is not defined (Sharpley & Sharpley, 1997; Sonnino, 2004).

By being based on a working farm, tourism implicitly comes into some form of contact with agriculture in terms of a shared physical environment. However, the level of contact tourists have with agricultural activities in a working farm scenario can vary considerably. We suggest that tourist contact with agricultural activity can be separated into three types: direct contact, indirect contact, and passive contact. Direct contact with agricultural activity indicates that agricultural activities are a tangible feature in the tourist experience (e.g. milking a cow; harvesting a crop). Indirect contact indicates a secondary connection to agricultural activity within the tourist experience, perhaps through contact with agricultural produce (e.g. crop maze, food processing, sale of or consumption in meals). Passive contact with agricultural activity indicates that tourism and agriculture are operated independently and only the farm location is held in common (e.g. outdoor activities). By defining these terms the nature of tourist contact with agricultural activity, and thus the role of agricultural activity in the tourism product, becomes clearer.

## 2.3. Authenticity of tourists agricultural experience

Definitions of authenticity in the context of tourist experiences are most often related to MacCannell (1973), who presents

a continuum of authenticity based on the concept of ‘front’ and ‘back’ regions. By thinking of front regions as the stage, where actors or musicians perform for an audience, and back regions as the preparation areas that the general public do not usually get to see, it can be argued that for a tourist to experience authentic agricultural activity they must go ‘back-stage’. Alternatively, tourists can experience ‘staged authenticity’. According to MacCannell’s continuum there are varying ways in which authenticity can be staged, from reproduced settings that appear to be authentic (e.g. a model farm) to organised visits that allow tourists a glimpse back-stage (e.g. farm tours). One implication of this is that farmer and tourist perceptions of authenticity can potentially be quite different, primarily because their original understanding of agriculture and what it entails is quite different. This also shows how agricultural activities staged by the farmer for tourism may be perceived by tourists as providing a genuine insight into farming practices. However ultimately an authentic experience of agriculture may only be had by tourists where agricultural activities are practiced as they normally would be. The prospect of tourists experiencing authentic agricultural activity is quite rare and normally involves physical participation in farm tasks. In the majority of cases where tourists have the opportunity to come in direct contact with authentic agricultural activities there will be at least some element of staging.

### 3. Towards a comprehensive typology of agritourism

In our approach, each of the characteristics defined above acts as a discriminator of agritourism type. By considering activities and products systematically according to these three discriminators, five discrete types can be identified and defined. Fig. 1 illustrates the typology for defining agritourism based on the three discriminators discussed. We contend that the range of agritourism products and definitions identified in the literature can all be categorised according to this typology. Each type is discussed below and examples are given to illustrate its application. By framing agritourism as the activity in this way it is possible (and common) for more than one type of agritourism to co-exist on a single landholding.

#### 3.1. Non working farm agritourism

For many authors a working farm is the key defining characteristic of agritourism; tourism as a supplementary income stream for farm households (Gladstone & Morris, 2000; Iakovidou, 1997; Kizos & Iosifides, 2007; Sonnino, 2004). So by many definitions ‘non working farm’ (NWF) agritourism could actually be identified as generic rural tourism, making this the most controversial type of agritourism in the proposed typology. However, although much of the literature excludes tourism that is not based on a working farm, there are examples where it has been suggested that tourists can participate in agritourism whereby the connection is made to farming in some other way. Indeed, Fleischer and Tchetchik (2005: 500) find that a working farm is not necessary from the perspective of the tourist, and Jaworski and Lawson’s (2005: 142) findings suggest that sanitised portrayals of farming are increasingly being presented by new groups of agritourism providers including “lapsed farmers and townies settling in the countryside”. In the majority of cases NWF agritourism is realised through agricultural heritage or imagery (e.g. accommodation in a converted farmhouse), or where agricultural practices past or present form part of the tourist product (e.g. sheep shearing demonstrations located at a woollen mill). Other examples of NWF agritourism include, farm heritage attractions, tourism activities based on converted farms (e.g. horse riding), and could arguably include farmers markets and farmland access (e.g. walking where the working farm is not central to tourist activity). Importantly, what distinguishes NWF agritourism from rural tourism more generally is the connection made to agriculture or agricultural heritage in some way other than a working farm location.

#### 3.2. Working farm, passive contact agritourism

In ‘working farm, passive contact’ (WFPC) agritourism the working farm provides the context for tourism, but the relationship between tourism and agriculture goes no deeper than that. Tourism activities that can be said to represent this type of agritourism (e.g. farmhouse bed and breakfast; outdoor activities) have previously been identified as a particularly frequently occurring type of

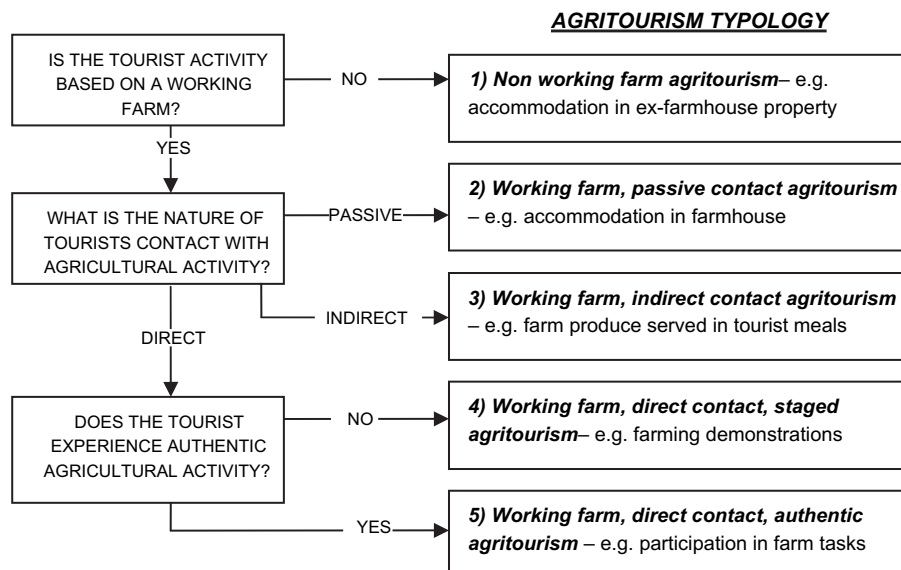


Fig. 1. A typology for defining agritourism.

agritourism on the market (Roberts & Hall, 2001). The nature of activities and products in WFPC agritourism allows farmers to capitalise on existing resources as a means of supplementing their income without interfering with agriculture as a discrete activity. In terms of the literature, it can be argued that this is the most frequently studied type as several definitions stipulate that agritourism should be based on a working farm but do not stipulate any requirement for contact with agriculture beyond that (Barbieri & Mshenga, 2008; Evans & Ilbery, 1989; Oppermann, 1996; Walford, 2001; Wall, 2000). Furthermore, it can be suggested that authors considering agritourism from the perspective of farm diversification, as opposed to tourism development, focus on WFPC agritourism as it is amongst the most logical options available to farmers (Bowler, Clark, Crockett, Ilbery, & Shaw, 1996; Ilbery, Bowler, Clark, Crockett, & Shaw, 1998; Walford, 2001). Examples of WFPC agritourism include an array of products based on farm resources such as outdoor space (e.g. activity centres) and previously disused outbuildings (e.g. holiday cottages).

### 3.3. Working farm, indirect contact agritourism

'Working farm, indirect contact' (WFIC) agritourism begins to integrate agriculture on the farm with the tourism product. The nature of contact in this instance is 'indirect' in the sense that agricultural commodities, as opposed to the agricultural activities themselves, feature in the tourism product. A number of authors imply an indirect connection between agriculture and tourism components in their definition of agritourism. For example, Sonnino (2004: 286) suggests that agritourism must remain "connected and complementary" to agriculture, and Gladstone and Morris (2000: 93) specify that it should be "closely intertwined" with agriculture. Although these authors do not exclude direct interaction with the farm, their focus is on hospitality and accommodation components, respectively, which supports the idea that there is an important sector where diversified farms supply fresh local food to the tourist market. This may happen through the consumption of the farm produce in tourist meals served in accommodation or cafés, or through sale to tourists at farm shops. On-site processing of agricultural goods is another key example of WFIC agritourism (e.g. visiting a winery or butter-making demonstration), and another example which is growing in terms of popularity is crop mazes; that is when farmers grow arable crops (e.g. corn or maize) into a maze design to construct a seasonal tourist attraction (e.g. Butts, McGeorge, & Briedenhann, 2005).

### 3.4. Working farm, direct contact, staged agritourism

'Working farm, direct contact, staged' (WFDCS) agritourism corresponds with the intermediate stages of MacCannell's (1973) continuum of authenticity, whereby tourists experience agricultural activities that have been put on purposefully (or staged) for tourism. The two key ways this happens is through reproduction (e.g. model farm) or organisation (e.g. farm tour) of agricultural activities for tourism. Increasing concerns relating to health and safety and liability can mean in many cases where tourists come in direct contact with agriculture staging is necessary to overcome hazards implicit to an otherwise authentic working farm environment. Products and activities that may be classified as WFDCS agritourism are discussed less in the literature than other types of agritourism, such as WFPC agritourism. However, Di Domenico and Millar (2007) discuss the various ways that agriculture can be staged for tourism, ranging from simple temporal variations that allow agriculture and tourism components to be operated at coordinated intervals (e.g. feeding and visiting times), to the implementation of purpose-built agricultural attractions. Other

examples of WFDCS agritourism include farming demonstrations (e.g. milking cows, sheepdog display, cattle drives), and direct physical contact with farm animals (e.g. feeding or petting animals).

### 3.5. Working farm, direct contact, authentic agritourism

Under 'working farm, direct contact, authentic' (WFDA) agritourism tourists experience physical agricultural activities first-hand, for example 'pick-your-own' facilities, or participation in farm tasks. This is the only type of agritourism which goes beyond 'normal' tourist settings into agricultural 'back regions' (MacCannell, 1973). Products and activities that may be classified as WFDA agritourism are also discussed less in the literature than other types. One example which has been studied where tourists make direct contact with authentic agricultural activity is 'Wwoofing', used to refer to Worldwide Opportunities (or Willing Workers) on Organic Farms. In this instance tourists contribute to the farm economy in terms of labour in return for accommodation and often food (e.g. McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006). Here, it can be argued that organic agriculture provides a significant opportunity for WFDA agritourism owing to the labour-intensive nature of the production techniques employed. Crops that must be hand-picked, such as berries, grapes, or olives, also present a fitting opportunity (e.g. Marques, 2006). Although opportunities to experience WFDA agritourism are limited they represent an important niche that must not be excluded and should be separated from staged agritourism experiences.

## 4. Conclusions

The typology proposed in this paper is motivated by the lack of consistency and lack of a shared understanding of agritourism in the literature. Until now, there has been no attempt to analyse or synthesise the different definitions and ways of understanding agritourism. The agritourism typology presented addresses this gap by identifying the key characteristics used to define agritourism in the literature, and organising them into a transparent and structured framework, which is the first of three important functions of this paper. Secondly, the typology serves to clarify what is meant by agritourism and related labels, allowing a more solid foundation for future empirical research. For the first time, the typology provides a comprehensive framework that integrates the broad range of products and activities identified as agritourism in the literature – from passive appreciation of agriculturally-produced scenery (NWF agritourism), to farm tours (WFDCS agritourism), farmhouse bed and breakfast (WFPC agritourism), and working farm-stays (WFDA agritourism). Thirdly, a major benefit of the typology is its capacity to underpin studies with a simple and logical conceptual framework that may prevent continued inconsistency in the literature and help future studies position themselves relative to others in the field. Thus, the framework allows researchers to refine the concept of agritourism in the context of wider rural debates. The framework is flexible as it allows the different agritourism types to be explored separately, comparatively or as one overarching phenomenon. As each of the five types in the typology represents a legitimate form of agritourism, the typology is not hierarchical and no type is superior to the others.

Another innovative feature of the agritourism typology is its capacity to bridge the gap between theory and practice. As well as providing a consistent framework to support academic study of the phenomenon, it also has the potential to underpin more practical market research by highlighting the differences between agritourism types to allow more focused research of what consumers want. The authors are currently building on the agritourism typology to structure their data collection with tourists and

agritourism providers in Scotland. The typology will also aid data analysis to increase understanding of the motivations and expectations that drive agritourism in Scotland from the perspectives of both supply and demand.

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