

Implementation and impacts of agritourism in Bukidnon province: Basis of an action plan

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Abstract

Agritourism has gained significant attention in recent years as a sustainable and diverse form of tourism which combines agricultural and tourism activities. In the context of the Philippines, a country known for its rich agricultural heritage, agritourism presents immense potential for development, cultural preservation, environmental conservation, and economic growth. The study delves into the profile of the respondents; assess the degree of implementation of the agritourism programs in various agritourism sites in Bukidnon; determine the impacts of agritourism programs to the respondents; determine the significant differences among variables when grouped according to profile variables; test the relationship between the degree of implementation of programs and its impacts; and propose an action plan for the improvement of agritourism destinations in Bukidnon Province. Descriptive research design was used to gather data. A total of 120 respondents participated in the study which are current employees at the same time locals of agritourism site according to the list of the Department of Tourism in Bukidnon for the year 2023. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to test the reliability of the instrument. The findings of this study revealed that programs in agritourism sites in the province were implemented giving emphasizes on the program facility as it was interpreted as highly implemented. Furthermore, these programs implemented impacts the social, economic, cultural and environmental aspects of the agritourism sites. An action plan was conceived with the aim of developing and continuously advancing the Agritourism sector in the province of Bukidnon.

Keywords: agritourism sites, implementation, sustainability

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1. Introduction

Agritourism can be a great strategy for farmers to benefit from through innovating their farms, incorporating recreational and leisure activities for the tourists to enjoy. Diversifying and innovating farm lands produce many economic and non-economic benefits not only for the farmers but as well as the tourists, and the local community (Ciolac et al., 2019). Over the years, agritourism demands has been growing, as most farm owners tries to diversify their lands to expand their income to meet daily expenses. Regardless of the fact of the evident growth, studies about agritourism are young (Barbieri, 2020). Some studies were conducted on the different agritourism business strategies on how they have transformed their agricultural and tourism elements into a marketable goods and services, and their approach in doing so. Results were focused on the analyzing the key characteristics of the booming market for a luxury focused agritourism which includes authentic agritourism experiences and educational farm encounters for the tourists (Streifender et al., 2022).

The Philippines, on the other hand, is an agricultural country, blessed with culture and traditions, and surrounded by magnificent scenery. The raise of agritourism industry in the Philippines could bare many benefits especially with country's economic growth, social benefits, and the conservation of culture and heritage (Esguerra, 2020). Many of its populations are situated in rural areas which lifestyle is dependent on agricultural works as their means of living, most of these people are indigenous, farmers who rents land or works on landowners, and fishermen (Yamagishi et al., 2021). However, despite the challenges, agritourism can be a profitable and rewarding business. Operators who are able to overcome the challenges and provide a high-quality experience for their guests can be successful in this growing industry.

Agritourism is a growing industry in Bukidnon, a province in the Philippines known for its lush mountains, fertile soil, and diverse agricultural products. There are many agritourism farms in Bukidnon that offer tourists the opportunity to learn about agriculture, experience farm life, and enjoy the natural beauty of the province. According to Dejarne-Calalang, et. al., (2014), in an effort to accelerate agricultural development and tap into Bukidnon's potential, the government attracted settlers to farm the land. Bukidnon reigns as the agricultural king of Northern Mindanao, boasting a bounty of crops like maize, rice, sugarcane, pineapple, banana, and high-value veggies like carrots, potatoes, cabbage, and tomatoes.

The implementation of agritourism programs can be a complex process, but with the proper supplement of information would be helpful to create a successful agritourism programs. Some of which that one can consider is working with the local government agencies and tourism organizations to get a better support with the different program. Impacts of these programs could also have a significant effect on the economy, environment, social, and cultural. It is evident in the province that agritourism is a booming sector. However , improvements on the destinations are still lacking. There are few current studies available about agritourism in Bukidnon however, there only limited studies focusing on the development of the various programs in agritourism and its significant impacts. Although farm tourism in Mindanao offers exciting possibilities, it remains a nascent industry. As a result, there is a lack of information on how agricultural knowledge is currently disseminated within the context of agritourism experiences. However, the potential to educate a diverse group of stakeholders through agritourism is significant. Therefore, studies and researches into how agricultural knowledge sharing occurs within farm tourism settings is essential to maximize the benefits this industry can offer (Magdato, et. al.,2021). This study examines how to improve agritourism programs in Bukidnon Province, Philippines. It analyzes employee profiles, program implementation effectiveness, program impacts in terms of social, economic, cultural, environmental, and the relationship between program implementation and these impacts.

The researcher believes that putting emphasis on the different agritourism programs would be helpful for the agritourism businesses in the province for its development and how it could affect us. Thus, the crafted action plan will be beneficial but not limited to the Department of Tourism, agritourism businesses, and the local community. Through this action plan, stakeholders will be able to create a solid strategy tailored according to the need for the improvement of the agritourism sector in the province. This will also serve as a guide or reference for the policy makers, program developers, and the involved stakeholders for crafting policy brief in order to contribute to a long-term success of agritourism. This research also aligns with several crucial Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations. It contributes to SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by potentially creating new jobs and boosting local economies. It promotes SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) by encouraging sustainable practices and potentially reducing environmental impact. It also aligns with SDG 15 (Life on Land) by potentially preserving natural habitats and protecting biodiversity. Finally, its emphasis on collaboration between communities, governments, and the private sector echoes SDG 17 (Partnership for the Goals), highlighting the importance of collective action for achieving broader sustainable objectives.

Objectives of the Study - This study aimed to improve the implementation of agritourism program in Bukidnon province and propose an action plan for the improvement of agritourism destinations in Bukidnon Province. Specifically, it assessed the degree of implementation of programs in agritourism sites in terms of program development, training program, and program facility; determined the impacts of agritourism programs to the respondents in terms of social, economic, cultural, and environmental impact; tested the relationship between the degree of implementation of programs and its impacts; and presented an action plan for the improvement of agritourism destinations in Bukidnon Province.

2. Method

Research Design - This study used the descriptive research design. Descriptive studies help researchers to understand who, what, and where by observing things in their natural state. Researchers act as keen observers, rather than manipulators, meticulously describing the sample and its variables. Whether focusing on a single aspect or conducting comparisons across groups, these studies unveil population characteristics, illuminate internal problems, and highlight diverse practices across institutions and countries (Siedlecki, 2020). The information was gathered through the use of questionnaires. This design was used to assess the degree of implementation of programs in agritourism sites and to determine its impacts for the improvement of the agritourism destinations.

Participants of the Study - The researcher used a total population sampling method in choosing the participant of the study. The expected sample size population is 112 employees of agritourism site according to the list of the Department of Tourism in Bukidnon for the year 2023. Due to the increase of agritourism sites in the province, the researcher increased the total population to 120 employees. This is to accommodate other unregistered agritourism sites in the province.

Data Collection Instrument - The researcher adapted two questionnaires for this study. The first and the third part of the questionnaire were adapted from the study of Ation et al. (2020), entitled "Implementation of Agri-Tourism Programs in Quezon Province: Basis for Sustainable Action Plan". The second part of the questionnaire was adapted from the studies of Ation et al. (2020), entitled "Implementation of Agri-Tourism Programs in Quezon Province: Basis for Sustainable Action Plan". Since there were no indicators available of the sub-variables: program development, training program, and program facility, self-made questionnaire was used. The second part of the questionnaire was based on the results of the studies of Grohmann et al. (2013), entitled "Evaluating training programs: development and correlates of the Questionnaire for Professional Training Evaluation", Kuehn et al. (2000) entitled Considerations for Agritourism Development, Malkanthi et al. (2012), entitled "Visitor Satisfaction in Agritourism and its Implications for Agritourism Farmers in Sri Lanka", and Srisomyong et al. (2015) entitled "Political economy of agritourism initiatives in Thailand". Thorough

content validation was done by experts to verify the validity of the research questionnaire. After the experts' validation, pilot testing was conducted to determine the reliability of the questionnaire; to analyze the data collected, Cronbach Alpha test was used. The results of the Cronbach Alpha test is shown in the table below.

Table 1

Summary Result of the Cronbach Alpha Reliability Test

	Cronbach Alpha	Remarks
Program Development	0.828	Good
Training Program	0.934	Excellent
Program facility	0.948	Excellent
Social Impact	0.898	Good
Economic Impact	0.898	Good
Cultural Impact	0.817	Good
Environmental Impact	0.945	Excellent

The questionnaire was divided into three parts: The first part includes the profile of the respondents according to age, sex, monthly income, highest educational attainment, civil status, and occupation. The second part includes the degree of implementation of programs applied to agritourism destinations in terms of program development, training program, and program facility. The third part includes the impacts of agritourism programs applied to the respondents in terms of social impact, economic impact, cultural impact, and environmental impact.

Data Gathering Procedure - The researcher had asked for approval of the title of this study and when it was approved, the researcher proceeded to the collection of data which was done through paper and pen. The researcher visited the different agritourism sites in the province in accordance to the accredited list given by the Department of Tourism. Before obtaining the data, the researcher sought for approval to the owner of the agritourism destinations in order not to disturb the tourist visiting the destination.

Data Analysis - The researcher used descriptive statistics for this study. Weighted mean was used to assess the degree of implementation of programs in agritourism sites. To determine the impacts of agritourism programs to the respondents, t-test was used. Pearson's *r* was used in determining the relationship among variables.

Ethical Considerations - One of the significant points in doing research that involves human intervention is to make sure that the participants of the study understand everything that is being asked for them to do and they are informed properly. The respondents were also provided a consent in participating with the research, which also includes their rights to access their information and withdraw when they feel like they need to. It is also important to keep the identity of the respondents confidential and assures the protection of their names and to avoid using self-identifying statements to protect the respondents from potential harm (Fleming et al., 2018). In view of the preceding, the researcher performed ethical precautions to conduct the study. To guarantee the respondents' consent and willingness to participate, the respondents were informed about the rationale and the process of the study. Respondents were also given a chance to choose whether to participate on the study or not. The data privacy consent section of the survey questionnaire was included which adheres to the highest ethical standards, prioritizing the privacy and well-being of all participants. Specifically, the researcher is committed to comply with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (RA 10173) and ensure informed consent from all respondents. Written informed consent forms was obtained from all participants before any data is collected. These forms explain the purpose of the research, the benefits of participation, how their data will be used, and their right to withdraw.

3. Results and discussion

Table 1 presents the degree of implementation of programs applied to agritourism destinations with the composite mean of 4.27 and a verbal interpretation of implemented.

Program facility as shown in the table ranked the first with the weighted mean of 4.65 and verbal interpretation of highly implemented. This indicator ranked first since one of the famous tourism destinations in the province are agritourism sites. Bukidnon offers diverse mountain ranges which covers a fair part of the land of the province, plays a significant role to its environment. Various farm owners diversify their agricultural lands into various ventures to increase their profit and sustain their basic needs. They added different activities related to agriculture where their customers can participate and at the same time create a memorable experience. Developing their agritourism destinations invites customers to visit the destinations. Offering experiences for visitors, like tours or workshops, allows farmers to earn extra income. This additional income can help make their farms more sustainable in the long run (Obeidat, 2022). Studies suggest that most of the hardworking individuals considers visiting nature base tourism such as agritourism as a form of reward. Thus, it creates a positive vibe to the customers and gives them the drive to achieve their goals. Moreover, some customers visit agritourism destinations because of the picturesque scenery, to create experiences with the nature, and to participate with various outdoor activities (Delos Reyes et al., 2021). A study of Bhatta, et. al., (2020), explores various strategies for successful agritourism development, particularly focusing on farms in developing countries. The effectiveness of offering on-site experiences and activities for tourists plays a significant role in expanding the business' profitability. By creating engaging experiences directly on the farm, these businesses can attract visitors, showcase their agricultural practices, and ultimately increase their profitability. This focus on on-site activities allows developing countries to leverage agritourism's potential without extensive initial investment.

Table 2

Summary Table on Degree of Implementation of Programs Applied to Agritourism Destinations

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1.Program Development	3.73	Implemented	3
Training Program	4.42	Implemented	2
Program Facility	4.65	Highly Implemented	1
Composite Mean	4.27	Implemented	

Legend: 4.50-5.00=Highly Implemented; 3.5-4.49= Implemented; 2.50-3.49=Moderately Implemented; .50-2.49=Slightly Implemented; 1.00-1.49=Not Implemented

Training program ranked second with the weighted mean of 4.42, implemented. Training programs implemented in the agritourism destinations in the province can be improved and develop for the success of the business. Among the three indicators, program development ranked the least with the weighted mean of 3.73, implemented. Most of the DOT accredited agritourism destinations in the province received different support from the government, although some aspect given by the government such as effective trade agreements for a better price, promotion of diversification of activities through agritourism schemes, and information and technical assistance to the farmers, and financial support were limited. Government support is essential for farmers especially for the growth of their business. Laws were implemented to boost agritourism businesses in the country, however, issues such as lack of farm tourism knowledge and promotion, limited marketing efforts provided by the attached local government agencies has not been addressed (Yamagishi et al., 2021). Effective government policies can provide a strong foundation for agritourism development. These might include regulations that streamline business permits, tax breaks for agritourism ventures, or infrastructure improvements in rural areas. However, emphasis should also be given on the need to couple with initiatives that directly address the challenges faced by farmers themselves. This could involve providing access to financial resources through grants or loans, or offering technical assistance in areas like marketing, hospitality training, or sustainable agricultural practices. By fostering collaboration between these two approaches, governments can create a more comprehensive support system that empowers farmers to thrive in the agritourism sector (Kubickova et al., 2018). The Philippines faces challenges in managing the connection between large farms, protected natural areas, and international trade. Existing laws treat these issues separately, overlooking the way they actually influence each other. This means that the laws might not effectively address the impact of large-scale farming has on protected areas and how this, in turn, affects the country's ability to export agricultural products (Ortiz et al., 2020).

Table 4*Summary Table on Impacts of Agritourism Programs as Observed by the Local Community Members*

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Social Impact	4.15	Agree	2
Economic Impact	4.10	Agree	3
Cultural Impact	3.71	Agree	4
Environmental Impact	4.59	Strongly Agree	1
Composite Mean	4.14	Agree	

Legend: 4.50-5.00=Strongly Agree; 3.5-4.49= Agree; 2.50-3.49=Moderately Agree; .50-2.49=Disagree; 1.00-1.49=Strongly Disagree

Table 3 shows the impact of agritourism programs as observed by the local community members with the total weighted mean of 4.14 and a verbal interpretation of agree. Environmental impact ranked first since it has the weighted mean of 4.59 and interpreted as strongly agree. It only shows that agritourism programs conducted in various sites in the province have a positive impact environmentally and to the community. Through their programs, the surrounding area of the sites and the community has benefited. First, according to the result is the environmental impact. Both the employees of the agritourism sites and the locals in the area saw a positive results in their environment. Through the programs implemented, people are more aware about sustainable tourism, and how their initiatives make a difference for the improvement of their environment and how it affects their daily lives. Most of their products and activities in the sites are environmentally - friendly, making it unique from the products outside the destination which motivates employees and locals to continue and take part of making a difference. It can also be observed that the site gives a relaxing vibe, fresh air, and enjoyable activities. This is supported by the study of Ciric et al. (2021) claiming that agritourism has profound impact to the environment. Specifically, it develops the physical image of the destination not only limited to the site but as well the surrounding community; it also promotes environmental awareness to the employees, the tourists, and the local people.

According to Sekar et al., (2023), agritourism often serves as a valuable educational tool, exposing visitors to eco-friendly farming methods. This includes practical knowledge of techniques like agroforestry, organic farming, and water conservation.. While some agritourism owners initially worried that tourist activities could harm the environment and deplete local resources, many are now open to the idea. Agritourism owners recognize the potential downsides of tourism but are also eager to learn how sustainable practices can be incorporated into agritourism. This shift in perspective indicates a growing understanding that responsible tourism development can coexist with environmental protection (Popescu et al., 2023).

Social impact ranked the second with the weighted mean of 4.15 and verbal interpretation of agree. Economic impact ranked third with the weighted mean of 4.10 and verbal interpretation of agree. Cultural impact ranked the least with the weighted mean of 3.71 and interpreted as agree. Economic and cultural impacts can also be observed in the agritourism sites in the province as to the results. However, the various programs created a bigger impact on the environment and the community compared to their local economy and their culture. Thus, positive impacts are also evident and has improved the lives of the people in the area. According to the results, cultural impact ranked the least. Despite the fact that positive results show to the cultural aspect of the community, there are only a few that can be observed, such as cultural exchange through conversing with different language/dialects, preservations of their traditional farming, and providing opportunities for the tourist to learn about their cultural heritage through their food, and experiences. This is supported by the study of Ciric et al. (2021) saying that a favorable outcome was noted from the impacts of agritourism to the respondent's culture. This includes the chance to learn and understand about different cultures and share experiences which promotes mutual respect, preserving the culture and promoting it to gain deeper understanding of their way of life. keeping traditional farming methods and cultural heritage alive. By visiting agritourism destinations, visitors gain a deeper understanding of the history and importance of farming within a community. This firsthand experience fosters a sense of pride and appreciation for the local agricultural traditions, ensuring their

preservation for future generations (Zvavahera, et. al., 2023). Furthermore, the study of Lak, et. al., (2022) states that agritourism can be impacted by cultural differences. By promoting appropriate cultural behavior and attitudes is crucial.

Table 5 presents the association between the degree of implementation of programs applied to agritourism destinations and impacts of agritourism programs as observed by the local community members. It was observed that the computed r-values indicate a moderate direct correlation and the resulted p-values were less than the alpha level except on cultural impact. This means that significant relationship exists and implies that the better the implementation, the greater the impact of agritourism programs. Program development has significant relationship with social, economic, and environmental impacts because these programs can foster deeper appreciation for food productions, promote sustainable agritourism practices, and contribute to the economic growth.

Table 5

Relationship between Degree of Implementation of Programs Applied to Agritourism Destinations and Impacts of Agritourism Programs as Observed by the Local Community Members

Program Development	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Social Impact	.468**	0.000	Significant
Economic Impact	.511**	0.000	Significant
Cultural Impact	-.060**	0.516	Not Significant
Environmental Impact	.288**	.001	Significant
Training Program			
Social Impact	.533**	0.000	Significant
Economic Impact	.357**	0.000	Significant
Cultural Impact	.149**	0.104	Not Significant
Environmental Impact	.571**	0.000	Significant
Program Facility			
Social Impact	.500**	0.000	Significant
Economic Impact	.379**	0.000	Significant
Cultural Impact	.236**	0.009	Significant
Environmental Impact	.547**	0.000	Significant

Legend: Significant at p-value < 0.01

The development of the agritourism programs cannot be denied that it directly impacts socially, economically and environmentally, with the various initiatives implemented in agritourism site it enriches the life of the farmers or the employees. At the same time, it influences sustainable practices that help preserve natural resources. As to the farm owners and the surrounding small business, they would be given an opportunity to participate in a particular market, providing job opportunities to the local people, thus, improving the status of the local community and develop local areas (Khairabadi et al., 2020). Moreover, the involvement of the different stakeholders related to the development of the sustainable initiatives for the agritourism sites has to be monitored and should include educational campaigns, not only to attract employees and customers to adopt sustainable practices but also to ensure locals what they can gain in participating in these various conservation programs (Kipkorir et al., 2022). The employees, customers, and the local people that takes part in agritourism acquired skills and knowledge that fosters growth to the local community (Arizo, et. al., 2022).

4. Conclusions and recommendations

The implementation of programs in agritourism sites in terms of program development, training program, and program facility is evident in the province of Bukidnon confirming that the local government agencies such as Department of Tourism and the Department of Agriculture are working to implement the development of the different programs to improve agritourism businesses, training programs for the agritourism site in the province, and for the improvement of the site's program facilities. The implemented agritourism programs have impacts on social, economic, cultural, and environmental. Locals enjoyed improved living standards due to increased

income from agritourism. Agritourism also acts as a platform, for interaction between diverse groups, such as tourists, local residents, farmers, and entrepreneurs which strengthens collaboration within the area. Sharing experiences, stories, and perspectives can foster understanding and appreciation for different cultures and backgrounds. Cultural exchange occurred as residents interacted with visitors. The environment also benefited from sustainable practices like organic farming used by agritourism businesses. There is a significant relationship between the degree of implementation of programs applied to agritourism destinations in terms of program development, and training program and its agritourism program impacts is evident to social, economic and environment while a significant relationship between the degree of implementation of programs applied to agritourism destinations in terms of program facility was observed and its agritourism program impacts to social, economic, culture, and environment.

Agritourism destinations and the attached local agencies may encourage everyone, whatever the gender or the educational attainment and especially the youth to participate with the agritourism programs and initiatives that highlights the positive impacts of agritourism for a sustainable future. Collaboration with educational institutions to promote agritourism as a practical career path and at the same time a good educational opportunity is also encouraged. The government may help agritourism destinations flourish specifically in program development and training program by helping farmers negotiate for a better price of their products and clearer training goals and objectives to achieve desired output from the agritourism owners and employees. The agritourism owners and the management may also encourage exploring new offerings and experiences to attract a wider audience and cater to evolving preferences of the customers and integrate sustainable practices into program development and facility management to ensure the long-term viability of agritourism businesses in Bukidnon. Agritourism operators should foster community involvement in agritourism activities to make sure that the programs are related and aligned with the needs of the locals and the community. Collaborating with the local businesses and promote partnerships that benefits the agritourism destination to widen and improve their economy. Agritourism destinations can also encourage cross-cultural communication through incorporating language learning opportunities into agritourism activities. Encouraging eco-friendly materials throughout their operation for the conservation of the natural resources. The sharing of best practices among agritourism businesses in the province and provide resources can be a great help for wider adoption of sustainable methods. Agritourism destination with the collaboration of the government may tailor agritourism programs and facility improvements to the specific needs and preferences of the different age groups. The educational attainment and civil status may also be considered such as providing basic skills programs for individuals with less formal education and prioritizing training programs for married individuals especially with children that enhances their skills at the same time balancing family responsibilities. Agritourism destinations and the government may develop agritourism programs that addresses the needs and interest of the local communities which includes considerations of social, economic and environmental impacts. Comprehensive trainings may also be conducted that relates to cultural sensitivity, giving emphasis on the importance of respecting cultures in general, traditions and values. Trainings for program staff and local stakeholders like DOT, DA, LGU or any local private organizations focusing on sustainability practices and effective communication. Further research may be conducted related to the preferences of the tourists in visiting agritourism destinations in the province. This may also be used as a reference to help DOT and the local government to craft its own policy brief related to agritourism.

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