

REGIONAL AND TRADITIONAL PRODUCTS AS AN IMPORTANT PART OF RURAL TOURISM OFFER

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Abstract. Transition to market economy resulted in changing the main objective of agricultural economy but also caused decrease of agricultural income for most of the farms. As a consequence farms have been forced to seek additional sources of income. For a significant part of them rural tourism and accompanying services create such a chance. Growing interest in spending holiday and free time in rural areas and agritourism farms has been seen as partial solution of rural population's economic problems. Traditional and regional products can be a specific part of agritourism product, create regional identity and uniqueness. Paper presents results of surveys conducted in agritourism farms in Czorsztyn, Wadowice, Andrychow and Bochnia Districts and samples of dwellers of Tarnow and Nowy Sącz. The surveys concerned gastronomic activities – board for tourists offered by agritourism farms and farmers knowledge of traditional and regional dishes and products. The survey of town dwellers concerned their expectations towards full- or part-board offered by agritourism farms and also their knowledge of traditional and regional dishes and products.

Key words: traditional and regional products, rural tourism, agritourism, tourism offer

INTRODUCTION

Transition to market economy resulted in changing the main objective of agricultural economy (agricultural policy), an economy once focused on production intensification and growth and now aimed to ensure economic growth and income stability in the farming sector by rising economic effectiveness and production quality. The basic objective of the development strategy for agriculture also changed: the policy for the intensification and growth in agricultural production was replaced by a market policy, i.e. goals resulting from the demand-supply-prices relationship, both in the economy as a whole and in the agricultural and food sector [Tomczak 2005].

The transformation process exposed the development gap between the peasant family economy – prevailing system of agricultural production- and the developmental needs

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and capabilities of the whole national economy (e.g. reduced food demand, export difficulties, openness to imports, etc.). The family agricultural economy in Poland has been experiencing basic adjustment difficulties. Specific conditions for agricultural production in the south-eastern part of Poland, Malopolska region, meaning very small and fragmented farms, hidden and official agrarian overpopulation and unemployment make farmers life rather difficult.

In this region few farms are able to ensure (apart from food for the farming household, although even that part of farms activity is often ceased or stopped) a sufficiently high level of income to meet contemporary needs of farmers and their families. The family farm, considering its character and requirements as a place of work and source of income fails to provide such a level of income. Small farms mean also low competitiveness, small potential to invest, low labour productivity, low incomes, low accessibility to the market, low resistance to unfavourable development conditions etc. For decades small farms in that part of Poland supported their income from non-agricultural wages that had been lost in the beginning of 90. with the industry restructurisation. That dual-occupation population lost their chances of easy obtained jobs and now had to create jobs by themselves. Given the existing level of unemployment in non-agricultural sectors, the scope of jobs available for farmers is extremely limited. Multifunctional rural development and entrepreneurship of farmers seems to be seen by politicians and economists as the best or at least the quickest way of moderating the problem. Family farming in Poland, including the Malopolska region, has some of important assets, such as low labour costs, good ecological quality of the agricultural environment, advantageous location in relation to foreign markets. In combination with excessive labour force and free rooms in often quite spacious family houses favourable conditions for agritourism seem to be obvious. With relatively small costs and the knowledge that for years has been provided for farmers during countless trainings and courses they can start a new activity – farm tourism, agritourism. The obvious advantage of that kind of activity is that the product is produced in the farms but the market is in the towns and cities. With the growing interest of city dwellers, in Poland and other countries, in that kind of spending free time, providing tourism services can be a way of supporting family income, especially on small farms situated in a picturesque part of Poland.

Although agricultural non-food economy (fibres, biofuels, production niches, landscape and environmental protection etc.) seems to be a new way of integrated agricultural economy, the processes undergoing in those directions can still take a lot of time and political decisions. The declining role of agriculture in terms of its functions related to food provisions and the growing importance of agribusiness, something which is already evident in developed countries, is directly associated with an increasingly wide acceptance of non-agricultural functions of agriculture and farms [Tomczak 2005].

In Malopolska region rural tourism has always been an important part of rural population's activity and meaningful source of income. Thanks to the mountains and sub-mountains regions the tourist season has been much longer than for instance at the seaside. Winter sports give additional income if only winter is frosty and snowy enough.

Rural tourism is a multi-faceted activity that takes different shapes in different parts of the world [Lane 1994]. Part of the universal appeal of rural tourism rests on the ordinary and everyday happenings of a rural community. The conceptual definition

embraces notions of local identity, personal contact, closeness to nature, and access to the heritage and residents of the area.

Definition of farm tourism [Denman and Denman 1990, 1993] refers to rural tourism conducted on working farms where the working environment forms part of product from the perspective of the consumer. Farm tourism, as the definition suggests, is wider in scope than accommodation provision; it covers attraction, activities, and hospitality plus mutually supportive combinations. Although accommodation understood as renting rooms in farmers' houses is the most basic and frequent form of agritourism services, the other forms such as providing meals, offering additional facilities can enrich the offer and provide additional income.

The European Union policy supporting development of rural areas also has been supporting development of rural tourism and agritourism. The financial support is available also to Polish farmers and rural areas dwellers. One of the goals of the regional policy of European Union is protection of regional and traditional products and dishes. Regional products and cuisine are and should be a very important part of regionally-oriented tourism concept.

The importance of what is offered to tourists as food confirms International Culinary Tourism Association (ICTA), a non-profit organization comprised of professionals who represent the world's food, beverage and travel industries. Member businesses include associations, destination marketing organizations, chambers of commerce, lodging properties, attractions, tour operators, special events, food/drink service establishments, food growers, food/beverage manufactures and individuals. Association membership is currently comprised of nearly 500 businesses in a dozen countries. The Association's educational events are produced by ICTA's education and training arm, the International Culinary Tourism Institute. The main goal of the Association is to promote food/beverages a tourism attraction.

The same goal should be a guiding principle of our rural tourism services' providers. In the conditions of strong competitiveness it is more and more difficult to attract tourists. Traditional, regional products and dishes can distinguish tourist offer, attract not only a gourmand but also less sophisticated clientele.

It is also important to protect and preserve traditional ways of production, products themselves and the whole culinary heritage of regions and countries. Growing interest in that part of tourist offer leads to a special kind of tourism – the Culinary Tourism.

The European Union regulations take special care in that matter. In 1992 the European Union created systems known as Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographical Indication (PGI), and Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG) to promote and protect food products.

A PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) covers the term used to describe foodstuffs which are produced, processed and prepared in a given geographical area using recognised know-how. In the case of the PGI (Protected Geographical Indication) the geographical link must occur in at least one of the stages of production, processing or preparation. Furthermore, the product can benefit from a good reputation. A TSG (Traditional Speciality Guaranteed) does not refer to the origin but highlights traditional character, either in the composition or means of production [Jasiński 2005].

Those European systems have three main goals:

- to encourage diverse agricultural production,
- to protect product names from misuse and imitation,
- to help consumers by giving them information concerning the specific character of the products.

The systems protect the names of wines, cheeses, hams, sausages, olives, and even regional breads, fruits and vegetables. As such, foods such as Gorgonzola, Parmigiano Reggiano, Asiago Cheese, Camembert de Normandie and Champagne can only be labelled as such if they come from the designated region. To qualify as Roquefort, for example, cheese must be made from milk of a certain breed of sheep, and matured in the natural caves near town of Roquefort in the Aveyron region of France where it is infected with the spores of a fungus (*Penicillium roqueforti*) that grows in these caves.

There are several categories of products covered by EU Regulations, starting from fresh meat, meat based products, fish, beer up to prepared dishes, ice-creams and sorbets.

Poland has long and creditable tradition of good cuisine, several traditional and specific products and dishes known and served in the whole country. But has also hundreds of products and dishes known and sometimes served only in particular regions of Poland. It is very important to recognize, preserve and market those products for the glory of diversity of Polish cuisine and attracting tourists, also the foreigners appreciating culinary art and regional specialties.

Traditional, regional product and served dishes can be as important to tourists as perfect accommodation, castles, sea beaches or mountains. The best would be the combination of high class accommodation, superb regional cuisine and other tourist attractions.

For several reasons Poland does not have wine production, wine cellars, famous cheeses production, oceans' seafood that could be the magnet for tourist. France seems to be the country with long and rich tradition in that matter – the whole country has some specific traditional local products (from wines and ciders to fish and shellfish, chesses and meat dishes) served in local restaurants, pensions and farms accepting tourists. Local, regional, traditional products are and always have been an important part of marketing strategy, all tourists' guides include suggestions for gastronomic stays, traditional culinary feasts and markets. Wine-testing is included in all organised tours and visits to the country.

Poland should also do all that should be done to register our regional, traditional products. By now only two products – oscypek and bryndza have been undergoing the process of the EU registration.

Holidays in farms with vineyards have become very popular all over Europe, it is an important feature of an educated, successful person to know about wines as much as possible. A visit in a specialized vineyard where the grapes are transformed into a precious and delightful liquid seems to be the best and rather quick way to learn how to evaluate, serve or drink wine.

To have an offer of that kind the Malopolska region has to wait some more years if the project or vineyards' revitalisation is successful. But even now we have in Poland famous, regional drinks with a very long tradition – especially meads and tinctures, if not mention vodkas. That kind of tourism attracts also more and more Poles.

Our culinary heritage is not less rich or differentiated. The problem is, for decades we have not pay attention or care to preserve it, to teach young generations or use it in our

tourist marketing. Tourist “consume” landscape, rural atmosphere, quiet environment but not enough have been done to let them know and taste local products, traditional dishes and drinks – that part of consuming is also very important, can attract people and increase income of providers. In the last three years a lot has been done to popularise the idea of local, regional traditional products, to recognise and locally register those products in particular regions, mostly as a first step of the EU registrations. But even now this process can help and give additional meaning to tourists’ board in local inns, restaurants, agricultural farms. Part of the process of revitalisation of traditional cuisine and products are competitions organised by the Rural Housewives Circles, Extension Advisors and other rural organisations, seminars and conferences, training and courses supported with the EU funds [Byszewska 2005; Gašiorowski 2000].

GOALS AND METHODOLOGY

The survey of 110 agritourism farms conducted in the second part of 2006 and beginning of 2007 in four provinces (Wadowice 30 farms, Andrychów 25, Czorsztyn 32, Bochnia 23) concerned several issues of such activity. Among them were questions concerning knowledge of traditional, regional products and dishes and their utilisation, serving for tourists, planes in that matter, participation in regional products and dishes competitions and so on.

The survey was also conducted among dwellers of Tarnow (56 persons) and Nowy Sącz (60 persons). They were asked several questions about spending free time, tourism habits, agritourism, and also about traditional and regional products, knowledge, expectations as part of tourist product.

Similar surveys were conducted in 2005 and 2006 in different provinces and towns in the Malopolska region [Tyran 2006] but results to some degree could be, in authors’ opinion, comparable.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

All together 110 farms were surveyed, 68 of them (71%) provided full board, 9 only breakfasts, the rest – 23 farms (21%) guaranteed access to kitchens for self preparation of meals. Women running the farms and feeding tourists were using their own vegetables and fruits, also in processed forms – jams, juices, desserts, and so on. Some of farms (about 50%) served also their own dairy products, meat (poultry mostly), bread or batter. Much higher percent than in the previous surveys declared knowledge of traditional, regional products and dishes (100%), all farms providing meals declared to some extent serving traditional products and dishes (at least once during a guest stay on farm). Women running the agritourism farms (70%) declared taking part in Rural Housewives Circles activities of which some concerned traditional regional cuisine, exchange of recipes, discussion on propositions of traditional dishes prepared for local competitions “Our culinary heritage” as an elimination to higher level competition – for instance in a district.

Traditional dishes have also been served during Agritourism Fairs organised every year by and at the Agricultural University in Cracow. Last one was organised on April 14–15, 2007 in the Congress Centre and Students Club “Arka”.

The whole set of projects, seminars, printed materials promoting recognition, “revitalisation” and appreciation of regional products and dishes in the last years have been much more active and successful in the rural areas than in the urban areas.

Nearly all city dwellers (116 persons) associated the term “traditional products” (92%) but asked about examples, the most often they indicated, like in the previous surveys, “oscypek” (kind of hard cheese), and “śliwowica łącka” (strong plum vodka made in Łącko region). About 48% was able to add other examples such as “bryndza podhalańska” (kind of soft cheese), “karp zatorski” (carp produced in Zator province) – probably thanks to the TV programs mentioning attempts of registering those products according to the EU rules.

Traditional regional dishes were even less recognised. Examples provided by respondents were dishes known and treated as traditional in the whole Poland, for instance: barszcz czerwony (red beetroot soup), bigos (dish prepared from pickled cabbage and meat) and flaki (soup made of tripe).

This means that during nearly last two years the knowledge about regional products and dishes has significantly improved in rural areas, they are more often served in agritourism farms, persons running such farms try to improve their skills in that matter. The products and dishes are more often prepared and included in culinary proposition of agritourism farms and rural inns and restaurants. City dwellers need much more education to know, appreciate and demand those unique products and dishes.

CONCLUSIONS

Rural tourism and agritourism are growing industries in several countries and present a number of opportunities for rural dwellers and farmers in those countries, ranging from seasonal to year-round activities, to enhance the profitability of farming operations accommodation should be enriched by very specific food served as a part of the tourism offer. Of course there are several other components necessary for successful operations, but this article is devoted to the role of traditional, regional products as a part of agritourism offer.

If rural tourism, agritourism should consist a meaningful part of income it must win the competition with other needs and products offered to city dwellers.

Our everyday life, rush and duties, quite often makes us rather poor connoisseurs, that hardly have time or care about preparing “slow” food. We mostly eat our meals at home and try to prepare them as quickly as possible. This also causes that our expectations about food as tourism clients are rather low and blurred and mostly describes as “healthy, fresh, ecological, rural, differentiated, regional (although research confirmed that term “regional” is not clear to investigated city dwellers).

Domestic and European Union activities connected with promotion of traditional and regional products have been much more successful among the rural population, which was proved by the survey and personal discussions with persons providing agritourism

services, also in the areas included in the previous surveys. Practical knowledge was obtained through participation in culinary competitions of traditional, regional products and dishes.

Much more has to be done to familiarize city dwellers and teach them to appreciate traditional products and dishes, especially as they very often can be equated with “slow” food winning more and more enthusiasts.

Products and dishes registered as traditional in particular districts of Poland or in EU should be also associated with best quality, uniqueness, be the pride of our country. If connoisseurs can travel to France because of its food and beverages we should do as much as possible to promote our culinary heritage as part of tourism offer.

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PRODUKTY REGIONALNE I TRADYCYJNE JAKO WAŻNA CZĘŚĆ OFERTY TURYSTYKI WIEJSKIEJ

Streszczenie. Rosnące zainteresowanie spędzaniem wolnego czasu na obszarach wiejskich stanowi szansę dla obszarów atrakcyjnych turystycznie, w tym również dla gospodarstw rolnych, na wytworzenie dochodu poprzez świadczenie szeroko rozumianych usług turystycznych. Badania wykazują, że wyżywienie jest ważne dla osób przebywających na wypoczynku. Tradycyjne produkty i dania regionalne stanowią część niepowtarzalnej oferty turystycznej lub same w sobie być magnesem przyciągającym klientów. Unia Europejska stworzyła systemy chroniące tradycyjne produkty regionalne. Polska posiada szeroką gamę produktów regionalnych i tradycyjnych – należy zadbać o ich rejestrację oraz wykorzystanie w ofercie turystycznej. Badania przeprowadzone wśród właścicieli gospodarstw agroturystycznych w powiatach czorszyńskim, wadowickim, andrychowskim i bocheńskim wskazują na rosnące zainteresowanie, znajomość i zastosowanie produktów i dań regionalnych w ofercie dla turystów. Badania mieszkańców miast – Tarnowa i Nowego

Sącza wskazują na dość słabą znajomość produktów i dań regionalnych, ale wyrażali oni gotowość poznania tego rodzaju produktów.

Słowa kluczowe: produkty regionalne i tradycyjne, turystyka wiejska, agroturystyka. oferta turystyczna

Accepted for print – Zaakceptowano do druku: 10.08.2007