Can Agritourism Revitalize Rural Ontario?

The Case Study of Brock, Ontario

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Introduction

What strategies can ensure the effective implementation of agritourism practices into farming operations? The agricultural and agri-food industry has a prevalent, long-standing history as a successful cornerstone industry in Ontario. This historical prevalence stands true for the central rural township of Brock, Ontario as agriculture and livestock are a driving force in the township's economy. However, throughout the last three decades, agricultural production and the number of farms in Ontario's rural townships have been negatively impacted by vertical integration, globalization, and the intensification of land-based activities (Wicks & Merrett, 2003). This poster outlines a two year research initiative that examines how farm operators can effectively diversify their farming practices through the use of agritourism.

Methods to be Employed

The objectives of this research study necessitate in-depth information-gathering gained from direct in-situ engagement with farm operators, making on site semi-structured interviews appropriate. The study will specifically focus on the defined geographical location of Brock, Ontario where it will draw upon objective details from farmers who have diversified their farming practices through the use of agritourism. The semi-structured interviews will take place from the beginning of September 2019 to the end of October 2019. During this time 12-16 semi-structure interviews will be conducted with male or female participants whom are members of: The Beaverton Agricultural Society, the Sunderland Agricultural Society, or the Ontario Federation of Agriculture.

There will be three major topics covered in the questionnaire survey to farmers:

1. Why farmers decided to diversify their farms through agritourism
2. How agritourism has helped farmers economically (if at all).
3. What strategies farmers use to implement agritourism into their traditional farming practices.

References

Wicks, B. E., & Merrett, C. D. (2003). Promoting rural development through agritourism. *Rural Research Report*, 13(9), 1–8.

The Regional Municipality of Durham. (2015). *Region of Durham Map* [Photograph found in Whitby, Ontario]. Retrieved from <https://www.durham.ca/en/discovering-durham/resources/Documents/StrategicPlan>

Research Objectives

This research initiative will take place from January 2019 to May 2020 with the purpose of providing evidence-based recommendations for implementing and evaluating successful agritourism businesses to municipal government departments and agencies.

This research contains three primary objectives:

1. To determine if diversification through agritourism can revitalize the rural township of Brock, Ontario.
2. To understand what strategies the municipal government is implementing to encourage farmers to diversify their farming strategies through the use of agritourism.
3. To determine if, and to what extent, the research participants in Brock, Ontario view agritourism as a form of farming.

The Importance of Agritourism

Agritourism is a facet of tourism that showcases local producers directly on their farms. It brings together farmers and tourists or tour operators, enabling the latter to come up close and personal with the farming community, agriculture and food production.

Research on the effective implementation of agritourism practices is important because it:

1. Provides an increased and more diversified income for farm operators. This will probably not take the place of current agricultural crops, but it can add a new profit center to the current operation.
2. Increase the value of existing assets because it offers a way for farm operators to increase their revenue without increasing the acreage of their property.
3. Allow farm operators to share their life and promote the value of agriculture. It will also allow farm operators to educate people about rural living, nature, and the agricultural industry, which can lead to improved local policies.