

SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH AGRITOURISM IN BEN TRE PROVINCE

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Received: 28/11/2024; Reviewed: 08/12/2024; Revised: 11/12/2024; Accepted: 03/01/2025; Released: 28/02/2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54163/ncdt/395>

The sustainable development of rural areas is a critical goal for many countries, and Vietnam is no exception. Ben Tre province, with its rich agricultural heritage, facing challenges in securing sustainable income for farmers who rely solely on farming. These difficulties have further been aggravated by the impacts of climate change, thus demanding alternative means of livelihood. In recent years, agritourism, which combines agricultural production with tourism functions has been introduced with the aim of promoting sustainable development and implementing the green development strategy of Ben Tre province. This approach is particularly suitable for the three districts of Chau Thanh, Mo Cay Nam and Thanh Phu. By associating economic, social, and environmental aspects of sustainability, agritourism represents an innovative and diversified strategy for rural areas. Developing agritourism is considered a promising solution to generate income, revitalize landscapes and contribute to social values for farmers. Therefore, agritourism could potentially create a sustainable and resilient economic future for the local community of Ben Tre province, thereby helping to preserve the cultural heritage and natural resources of the region. The present study explores the potential of agritourism as a tool for sustainable rural development in Ben Tre province and proposes strategies for its successful implementation.

Keywords: *Agritourism; Sustainable development; Rural areas; Ben Tre province; Climate change.*

1. Introduction

The Mekong Delta is prone to climate changes, such as saline water intrusion and severe flooding caused by rising sea level. The high salinity level is expected to severely damage the paddy fields and the widely developed fruit farms in the central and upstream areas. According to the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) report, the cost of damage in Ben Tre province was regarded as the highest out of the seven coastal provinces (JICA, 2016). Furthermore, despite the potential advantage of agriculture, the income of farmers has remained low, which proves that agricultural economy does not guarantee the living standards of the local people. A report from the General Statistics Office of Vietnam has shown that the per capita income of Ben Tre province in 2021 is only 3,367 million VND per month, ranking in the 9th position in the Mekong Delta. Thus, it is necessary to have a new, long-term, sustainable option for farmers' livelihoods. As agritourism is built on the basis of indigenous factors, the agro-economy, traditional culture, and the natural environment, the agricultural production activities of the farmer could be long-lasting and open.

In this paper, the potential of agritourism was investigated as a tool for sustainable rural development in Ben Tre province. The present study aims to identify the key factors that contribute to the success of agritourism initiatives, including the integration of economic, social, and

environmental components of sustainability. By analyzing case studies and conducting interviews with stakeholders, some strategies have been proposed for the successful implementation of agritourism in the region. Our findings have important implications for policymakers, development practitioners, and farmers seeking to promote sustainable rural development in the Mekong Delta region and beyond.

2. Overview of issues research

Agritourism has been studied by researchers around the world for a long time. Agritourism thrived in the 1980s and 1990s of the last century. Previously, Mormont (1987), Nitsch and der Straaten (1995) and Hjalager (1996) studied how rural tourism in Europe developed over the course of a century with lessons learned. The term *agritourism* is being replaced by *farm tourism*, *rural tourism*, *farm-based tourism* or *green tourism*. Barbieri and Mshenga suggest that an activity developed on the farm with the aim of attracting tourists is agritourism (C. Barbieri, M. Mshenga, 2008, 48). Meanwhile, Hegarty and Przezbórska (2005) emphasize on- and off-farm activities in rural contexts as agritourism. Similarly, Julia Sharpley and Richard Sharpleys show that agritourism is directly connected to the agricultural environment, products, or accommodations. The two authors proposed that apart from farm/farm-based tourism, agritourism also includes cultural events, museums, craft shows, and festivals. Therefore, agritourism is

synonymous with rural tourism (Richard Sharpley, Julia Sharpley, 1997, 9).

In another aspect, E. Curtis (2008) gave an overview of agritourism, showed some results obtained from Vermont and Kentucky and proposed a model for developing agritourism for farms in the U.S. In *Rural Tourism and Sustainable Business*, Hall, Kirkpatrick and Mitchell (2005) provided conceptual thinking and good examples of the correlation between agritourism and sustainable development. In their work *Agritourism*, Sznajder, Przezbórska and Scrimgeour (2009) presented the definitions and diversity of agritourism through various topics such as agricultural economics, rural development, marketing, rural policy, available products and services, and characteristics of the agricultural sector.

George, Mair and Reid (2009) analyzed several factors affecting the development of agritourism in modern life. The study investigated the changes in the consumer needs of tourists as one of the determining factors for the success of the rural tourism program. Next, Phillip, Hunter and Blackstock (2010) proposed a model to define agritourism based on three criteria: (a) the nature of the contact between the tourist and the agricultural activity; (b) whether the product is based on agriculture; and (c) the level of authenticity in the travel experience. Torres and Mómen (2011) showed particular cases of the interface between agriculture and tourism, examined the effects of rural restructuring and analyzed the implications of production and consumption. The work of Sidali, Schulze and Spiller (2011) was a valuable source of information on agritourism, sustainable tourism and the marketing of local food. The authors presented marketing strategies and provided ideas about rural tourism in tourism research. Through debates and practical examples, the authors outlined several ways in which culinary and cultural heritage can be incorporated into agritourism.

Rambodagedara, Silva and Perera (2015) examined the potential of agritourism developing as an additional source of income for the farming community. The objective of the work revolved around the following issues: (1) identifying opportunities to promote agricultural tourism in the farming community; (2) examining the status of agritourism in the farming community and the possible agritourism activities to improve their livelihoods; and (3) finding out the challenges and problems in the development of agritourism by farmers in the current context. Hall, Roberts and Mitchell (2016) presented a historical guide and the establishment of a business in a rural area to fully meet the requirements of providing unique experiences worth the expense of tourists. At the same time, the authors highlighted the main directions of advertising in the national and international markets. Slocum (2017) discussed

three important themes: rural-urban connectivity, agritourism-urban intersections, and strategies for sustainable tourism development. The author has demonstrated that increasing the participation of local and rural communities, especially the poor, in the chain of tourism activities will contribute to the development of the local economy, poverty alleviation and economic and social resilience. Oriade and Robinson (2017) showed how policy issues, community benefits and sustainable development in all sectors in the locality affect agritourism businesses. Thereby, they analysed the opportunities and challenges for the tourism industry and proposed management and marketing strategies for agritourism.

Through the study of domestic documents, numerous efforts have been proposed for the development of agritourism from different perspectives. Particularly in Ben Tre, many research projects on the province's tourism. As for the type of agritourism, Hanh, D.T.M. and Tien, M. B. (2020), with the topic "Studying the model of agricultural tourism in Ben Tre: present and future", have shown that there are four types of agritourism business models in Ben Tre: (1) private capital; (2) whole community participation; (3) one household or a few participating households; (4) outside investors. The authors also proposed two types of cross-linking models in the agritourism business, namely Corporations and Associations. Khanh, H.T.V. (2021) analyzed the situation and solutions of the supply chain of rural tourism services in order to improve the lives of the people here through tourism activities in Cho Lach District, Ben Tre province. This study shows that the supply chain of local rural tourism services would help tourism strategists see the need for economic restructuring, thereby providing more job opportunities for people and improving family livelihoods from rural tourism, contributing to the local budget and increasing income for farmers from business and service.

Overall, the literature suggests that agritourism can be an innovative and diversified strategy for sustainable rural development, linking economic, social and environmental components of sustainability. By promoting agritourism, it is possible to generate income, revitalize landscapes and contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage and natural resources. However, successful implementation requires careful consideration of factors such as community participation, policy frameworks, marketing strategies and supply chain management.

3. Approaches and research methods

This study employed a three-stage methodology. In the first stage, a comprehensive literature review was conducted to provide an overview of relevant literature. Qualitative data collection methods such as observations, field trips, semi-structured

interviews and photography were also employed. To survey and evaluate tourism resources, cameras were used to capture images and videos, which were then used to develop tourist information maps. These maps and images helped the researchers and stakeholders design travel programs and tours that corresponded to these resources. Once sufficient data was collected, all team members engaged in in-depth discussions and exchanges to develop high-quality agritourism products and services.

The second stage involved data collection. To gather appropriate information for different audiences, questionnaires were designed and distributed to farmer households, tourists and travel companies. The farmer questionnaire consisted of 51 questions organized into two sections: profile (questions 1-13) and agricultural/tourism activities (questions 14-51). The travel company questionnaire included 33 questions: profile (questions 1-5) and tourism/agritourism business (questions 6-33). The tourist questionnaire was also organized into profiles (questions 1-8) and tourism/agritourism activities (questions 9-29). The questions about general information were designed to gather characteristics of individuals and businesses participating in the questionnaire, such as full name, occupation, gender, age, education level (for the visitor and farmer questionnaires), company name, business field, website and company address. The remaining questions were focused on tourism activities, and some questions used a Likert scale to gather reviews and comments from farmers, companies and tourists. The main scales used in the questionnaires were: 1) Using most of the questions to consider the possibility of developing an agritourism model; 2) The questionnaire was given in the form of an inquiry into the potential of Ben Tre agritourism and the expectations of stakeholders when coming to Ben Tre tourism. Some Likert scale questions were also included: tourists were asked to indicate the appropriate level of agreement with statements related to their expectations for Ben Tre agritourism; tour operators and farmers were asked to assess the potential to develop agritourism, ranging from “strongly agree” to “totally disagree”.

In the third stage, data analysis and treatment were carried out using SPSS. The quantitative results were processed by the SPSS program in several ways: (1) The majority of frequencies (percentage) were used to determine the statistics; (2) Qualitative variables were disaggregated according to characteristics; (3) Percentages by division were used to compare and categorize opinions, thereby identifying tourism trends. The tourist survey was divided into seven groups of criteria: natural resources; high-tech agriculture elements; natural and social environment; cultural and culinary elements; infrastructure; tourism services and prices; and guiding activities and tourist care. The farmer survey was divided into eight factors:

accommodation and security in Ben Tre; ecology, culture and people of Ben Tre; infrastructure in Ben Tre; Ben Tre high-tech agritourism resources; natural landscape and cuisine of Ben Tre; evaluation of services and tourism prices; assessment of traditional culture and profession; and the socio-cultural environment of Ben Tre. The tourist survey was divided into five factors: available tourism resources of Ben Tre farmers; tourism resources in terms of local infrastructure and culture; tourism resources through learning and links; tourism resources through scientific and technological development; and tourism resources related to accommodation.

4. Research results

A survey was conducted among 50 travel companies, 217 tourists, and 142 farmer households, focusing particularly on farmers in Thanh Phu, Mo Cay Nam and Chau Thanh districts. The results demonstrate that climate change has had a significant impact on agricultural production and local livelihoods in Ben Tre province. Notably, only 24.3% of surveyed households reported being unaffected or minimally affected by climate change. In contrast, over 75% of households acknowledged varying degrees of negative impact, with categories including affected (17.9%), greatly affected (35%) and seriously affected (22.9%). These findings highlight the pervasive and severe challenges posed by climate change to the agricultural and rural communities in the region, underscoring the need for effective mitigation and adaptation strategies.

Combining agricultural production and tourism functions provides a dual livelihood option that can improve sustainability for farmers in Ben Tre, especially those in the Chau Thanh, Mo Cay Nam and Thanh Phu districts. The survey of 50 common travel companies in Ben Tre revealed that the majority of respondents believe tourism development provides a new livelihood option (64%) and a long-term sustainable development opportunity for farmers and rural areas (78%). Moreover, they noted that tourism development can generate economic benefits from agriculture (70%), contribute to environmental protection (40%) and help address the impacts of climate change (40%).

Agritourism can provide three main benefits to destinations: (1) increased motivation for tourists to choose a particular destination; (2) local economic development; and (3) preservation of the cultural identity of local agricultural practices. According to the survey results, travel companies consider the benefits of farmers' participation in agritourism to be significant, including promoting agricultural products (chosen by 86% of respondents, accounting for 26.5% of companies that completed the questionnaire), increasing income (62%) and helping visitors gain a better understanding of agriculture and rural culture (68%). The specific survey results for this topic group are as follows:

Table 1. The benefits of agritourism

The benefits of agritourism	Responses		Percent/ Cumulative totals
	Frequency	Percent	
Accelerating income	31	19.1%	62.0%
Promoting the products and agricultural products of the province	43	26.5%	86.0%
Helping visitors better understand agriculture and rural culture	34	21.0%	68.0%
Creating financial resources and protecting natural resources	20	12.3%	40.0%
Creating opportunities for economic development to spread in the community: accommodation, shopping	25	15.4%	50.0%
Other	9	5.6%	18.0%
Total	162	100.0%	324.0%

The survey findings highlight three primary motivations driving travel companies (accounting for 95% of responses) to collaborate with farmers in developing agritourism. Specifically, 35% of respondents emphasized Ben Tre’s predominantly rural and agricultural landscape as a key factor, 30% identified the potential to effectively utilize idle labor resources and another 30% underscored the opportunity to capitalize on natural resources for tourism development. Furthermore, the survey identified the three most significant factors contributing to the advancement of agritourism in Ben Tre as perceived by travel companies. Food services emerged as the leading factor, cited by 70% of respondents, followed by the availability of agricultural products (52%) and the presence of craft villages (46%). These results underscore the importance of integrating local resources into agritourism strategies to maximize its developmental potential.

The survey results highlight the key criteria that influence visitors’ preferences for agritourism in Ben Tre, with nature and food emerging as the most significant factors. Specifically, 69.4% of respondents emphasized the importance

of experiences associated with nature, while 59.7% identified food as a major attraction. Other factors, such as accommodation (38.9%), entertainment (21.3%) and transportation (19.4%) were considered less influential by visitors. These findings underscore the central role of natural and culinary elements in shaping the appeal of agritourism, reflecting visitors’ expectations for authentic and immersive rural experiences.

Table 2. Factors of agritourism development

Factors of agritourism development	Responses		Percent/ Cumulative totals
	Frequency	Percent	
Accommodation	21	11.3%	42.0%
Food and beverage	35	18.8%	70.0%
Agricultural commodities	26	14.0%	52.0%
Craft villages	23	12.4%	46.0%
Festival	19	10.2%	38.0%
Health tourism, resort	21	11.3%	42.0%
Eco-tourist spot	23	12.4%	46.0%
Other	18	9.7%	36.0%
Total	186	100.0%	372.0%

The analysis of tourism activities in Ben Tre reveals that visitors predominantly engage in experiences centered around agricultural settings and riverine landscapes. Among the surveyed activities, the most frequently mentioned was enjoying local fruits and products, which attracted 68.2% of respondents. This was followed by visiting islands and isles (59%), participating in boat trips along rivers to explore the islands (53%), canoeing along canals (50.7%) and engaging in activities such as planting and caring for trees (40.1%). Additionally, activities such as visiting historical and cultural sites (61.3%), enjoying forms of Southern amateur music (44.7%) and harvesting fruits (40.1%) were also notable preferences among tourists. Other activities, including purchasing local agricultural products and souvenirs and fishing, were less common but still contributed to the diversity of visitor experiences in Ben Tre. These findings underscore the appeal of integrating natural and cultural resources into the region’s tourism offerings

In the context of agritourism, cuisine based on agricultural production is a significant highlight of Ben Tre province, particularly in the Chau Thanh, Mo Cay Nam and Thanh Phu districts. Food-related programs and agricultural activities are the two most popular choices for tourists when visiting Ben Tre, accounting for 76.3% and 45.6% of respondents, respectively, (Table 3).

Table 3. Agritourism activities you want to experience when traveling to Ben Tre

Agritourism activities you want to experience when traveling to Ben Tre	Responses		Percent/ Cumulative totals
	Frequency	Percent	
Agricultural-related programs	98	21.9%	45.6%
Foods	164	36.6%	76.3%
Accommodation service	63	14.1%	29.3%
Agricultural education	53	11.8%	24.7%
The sale of agricultural products	70	15.6%	32.6%
Sum	448	100.0%	208.4%

According to the survey results, the prices of goods and services at destinations in Ben Tre are considered relatively affordable compared to neighboring provinces. Goods are attractively displayed with clearly listed prices and there is no evidence of solicitation or price bargaining. Cost is one of the key factors that make agritourism appealing to tourists. The survey findings indicate that the majority of tourists (85.6%) rated the cost of agritourism as reasonable. A smaller proportion of respondents perceived the costs as high (5.6%) or low (8.8%). These results highlight the competitive pricing as a significant advantage of agritourism in Ben Tre, contributing to its ability to attract visitors and enhance their overall travel experience.

One of the distinctive features that attract tourists to Ben Tre is the local community. Survey results reveal that 69.6% of tourists express high satisfaction with the simplicity and authenticity of the local people, considering it a key positive aspect of their visit. This perception is echoed by travel companies, who emphasize the enthusiasm, hospitality and honesty of the locals as notable advantages of farmers' involvement in agritourism. Additionally, farmers' participation in agritourism is seen as valuable for several reasons. Their enthusiasm and hospitality are highlighted as the most significant attributes (27.3%), followed by their honesty (22.7%). The availability of the natural landscape (18.2%) and farmers' passion for agricultural cultivation, along with their ability to preserve and share traditional culture (13.6% each), further enhance the appeal of agritourism in Ben Tre. These characteristics underscore the essential role of the local community in creating an authentic and welcoming experience for visitors.

5. Discussion

Harnessing Ben Tre's rich ecosystems for sustainable agritourism development

Ben Tre province, which is graced by the alluvium-rich waters of the Ba Lai River, Tien River, Co Chien River and Ham Luong River, is well-recognized for agricultural and agritourism development, particularly in Thanh Phu, Mo Cay Nam and Chau Thanh districts. The abundant resources, along with a significant emphasis on land, play a pivotal role in driving agricultural productivity. According to the Statistical Yearbook of Vietnam 2021, approximately 57% of its natural land is used for agriculture expanse, thus making agricultural activities the mainstay of the local economy. The agricultural landscape is diverse, ranging from orchards, paddy fields and shrimp farming to suit the agro-ecosystem conditions of each region.

Ecosystem of paddy fields: Thanh Phu districts provide a paddy ecosystem for vital services such as food and livelihood provision. Furthermore, paddy fields contribute to air purification, offer potential for untapped tourist services and support land reclamation attempts.

Ecosystem of orchards: Ben Tre province boasts the Mekong Delta's largest area of green-skinned pomelo plantation and holds 'the coconut plantation expanse of the country. The diverse array of fruit trees presents an attractive investment opportunity for agriculture-related tourism. Chau Thanh district witnesses an 8029-hectare coconut cultivation area alongside a 7845-hectare orchard. Similarly, Thanh Phu district encompasses around 8125 hectares of coconut trees, of which over 752 hectares follow organic practices. The largest coconut gardens are located in Mo Cay Nam district's ecosystem, with an estimated 16830 hectares and 4760 hectares of which are certified organic. Moreover, an additional 2110 hectares of the district is dedicated to other orchards. Orchards serve as providers of various ecosystem services, encompassing food, drinks, livelihoods, furniture, fine art, air purification and cultural experiences such as ecotourism, community-based tourism, and participation in festivals. They also contribute to land reclamation and support agricultural production.

Ecosystem of estuaries and mangroves: The abundant freshwater resources of Ben Tre province is considered excellent for the aquatic processing industry in Mekong Delta. The various water salinity levels, ranging from freshwater, brackish, to salty water, form a diverse environment for a wide range of animal species, unlocking substantial agritourism potential. The estuaries in Ben Tre province serve as ideal locations for coastal fishing, primarily concentrated in high seas, coastal areas and estuaries. Mangroves play a pivotal role in regulating the microclimate of coastal and riverside regions and support extensive and intensive shrimp farming. In 2022, an estimated of 3500 and 450 hectares in Thanh Phu and Mo Cay Nam districts is dedicated to shrimp farming, mainly focusing

on cayfish in coconut garden ditches. The district also features an area of 1000 hectare for fish farming. Chau Thanh district boasts an estimated 300 hectares for aquaculture and cage farming. The ecosystem of estuaries and mangroves provides ecosystem services, including food, livelihoods, transportation, freshwater supply, wood, air purification, salinity reduction, alum formation, small retail services, undeveloped tourist services, cultural practices tied to beliefs and festivals, erosion control and agricultural support.

Ecosystem of tidal flats and sand dunes: Among the model group districts, only Thanh Phu possesses an ecosystem of tidal flats and sand dunes, presenting favourable habitats for mollusks, invertebrates and mangroves. The services provided food sources, livelihood support, air purification and wave impact reduction.

Ecosystem of sand dunes: Thanh Phu's sand dunes area houses a dense population engaged in agriculture and aquaculture. Crops such as watermelon, soybeans, green beans, peanuts and tapioca thrive in this region. Moreover, aquaculture activities, including clam and shrimp nurseries, take place in the sand dunes. Notably, the Tu Quy mango cultivation area spans 390 hectares in Thanh Phu, further strengthening the mango value chain. The ecosystem of sand dunes offers valuable services, such as food, livelihoods, freshwater supply, nurseries, air purification, reduction of wave impact and support for agricultural production.

Benefitting from its natural geography and the services provided by its ecosystems, the three districts of Ben Tre present favourable conditions to explore and develop agritourism. Alongside its natural tourism resources, the cultural heritages, such as historical, architectural and cultural monuments and traditional craft villages, add more allure to attract tourists, contributing to the growth of local agritourism. Ben Tre's cultural heritage holds immense value, encompassing historical, cultural, scientific, architectural (artistic), educational and economic significance. The established and developed craft villages within the three districts also play a significant role in agritourism development, offering sightseeing opportunities and hands-on experiences for tourists.

The potential for agritourism in Ben Tre presents an opportunity for economic growth and development in the region. The development of agritourism can provide new jobs and income opportunities for the local population, particularly in rural areas. Additionally, agritourism can help to preserve and promote local culture, traditions, and heritage, contributing to the sustainable development of the region. The promotion of agritourism can also lead to the conservation and protection of natural resources, as it incentivizes sustainable land use practices

Promoting sustainable agritourism: A catalyst

for economic, environmental and social well-being

Agritourism, with the ability to attract tourists to rural areas, extends beyond its agricultural aspect and contributes values to the local economy. Tourists engage in agricultural activities and various services available in rural settings, thereby generating network externalities that promote additional commercial activities. This self-sustaining development cycle strengthens the local economy and supports the agricultural industry. Efe and Öztürk (2014) emphasize on how agritourism creates a new consumer market for farmers, increasing their average income through the sale of agricultural products and services to tourists, thereby contributing to the industry's sustainability.

The influence of agritourism on the environment is noteworthy, driven by practices that promote resource reuse, recycling of materials and reduction of food waste. Emphasizing eco-friendly agritourism practices attracts environmentally conscious tourists and farmers play a key role in preserving rural landscapes, cultural heritage and native flora and fauna. Implementing clean and organic farming practices adds to conservation efforts and responsible tourism endeavors, thus playing a significant role in promoting sustainability and responsible tourism. From social perspectives, agritourism provides employment opportunities for family members, ensuring the continuity of traditional farming practices for future generations. The trans-generational continuity of family farms is an imperative element of agritourism. It enables farmers to maintain and renew their farms, leading to sustainable rural societies. This, in turn, prevents excessive migration to urban areas in search of livelihoods (Rodríguez, 2019).

Furthermore, agritourism leverages socio-cultural resources within rural communities, including agricultural practices, festivals, craft villages, music, architecture and traditional cuisine, among others. By celebrating and promoting these cultural elements, agritourism connects tourists with local culture and preserves cultural heritage. It fosters the development of new socio-cultural values and creates a meaningful experience for both tourists and local communities. The success of agritourism products lies in their ability to complement agricultural activities with tourism offerings. Focusing on specific rural activities and highlighting the region's unique characteristics enhance the appeal of agritourism. Scenic landscapes, traditional practices, rural life and harmony with nature form distinctive identities that attract tourists seeking authentic rural experiences.

Overall, agritourism acts as a catalyst for sustainable development, benefitting the economy, environment and society. By harnessing its potential to create a self-sustaining economic cycle and promoting eco-friendly practices, agritourism fosters economic growth while safeguarding

the environment. Moreover, it strengthens rural communities by providing employment opportunities and preserving cultural heritage. By striking a balance between agriculture and tourism, agritourism paves the way for a harmonious and sustainable future for all stakeholders involved.

Diversified revenue sources of agritourism for farmers

Agritourism presents farmers with various revenue sources, each contributing to the overall appeal and sustainability of the industry:

1. Experience and educational services: Agritourism offers visitors unique experiences such as agri-recreation, agri-relaxation, agri-sport, and agri-therapy, enabling direct participation in agricultural processes like cultivation, harvesting, and breeding. This hands-on approach attracts individuals seeking both relaxation and immersive learning experiences in rural settings. These opportunities are a primary draw for visitors (Sznajder, Przebórska, & Scrimgeour, 2009).

2. Culture - agri-food and beverages: Farm tours and visits to the countryside expose visitors to the cultural aspects, customs and local cuisine. These tours provide entertainment and educational experiences, thus allowing visitors to embrace the rich heritage and traditional practices associated with agricultural communities.

3. Agri-accommodation: Specific types of accommodation that align with the agritourism model is offered to maximize its potential. Complementary services should also be developed to enhance the guests' overall experience and allow them to fully engage in the agricultural activities offered by the destination.

4. Trading in green agri-products: Agritourism destinations promote direct sales of agricultural products or locally certified One Commune One Product (OCOP) goods. This trade promotion activity ensures visitors access fresh and high-quality agricultural products, having observed their production process firsthand. The absence of intermediaries and advertising costs results in competitive prices for visitors.

In recent years, Ben Tre has seen promising progress in ecotourism and garden tourism models linked to agricultural experiences, such as Cho Lach and Chau Thanh. Community-based tourism projects with innovative homestay concepts have also emerged, particularly in Chau Thanh district. These developments have successfully attracted domestic and foreign tourists. However, there remains rooms for refining the agritourism model to create an authentic experience that is closely tied to farmers and local rural cultures, thereby enhancing the value chain of services. Currently, tourists often engage in day visits, leading to lower occupancy rates and spending levels. Moreover, some ecotourism products in Ben Tre overlap with

those in adjacent regions, necessitating a focus on distinct offerings.

To ensure the success of agritourism, the role of farmers must be fully acknowledged and evaluated. Several specialized skills training programs tailored to the needs of farmers should be developed to enhance their participation in the tourism sector. This comprehensive approach will facilitate the creation of cohesive and impactful agritourism products that resonate with both tourists and the local community.

6. Conclusion

Agritourism emerges as an ideal solution to strike a balance between the interests of tourists and the prosperity of rural communities. It represents a sustainable tourism trend that fosters economic and social and economic development while reducing the adverse impacts on the environment. Rooted from the agricultural economy, traditional culture and natural surroundings, agritourism holds immense potentials for Ben Tre and combines with its abundant geo-natural resources to become a prime candidate for agritourism development. This study lays the groundwork for the establishment of three agritourism destinations in Thanh Phu (Dong Xanh - 9 Rivers Resort), Mo Cay Nam (MOCAY Farmstay) and Chau Thanh (Burmese Grape Garden).

Nonetheless, research on Ben Tre's agritourism remains limited, particularly in terms of practical applicability, such as model design for farmer households. This study seeks to investigate and shed light on potential aspects and the current state of agritourism development in Ben Tre, offering models that align with the province's unique potential and proposing solutions to ensure positive outcomes for Ben Tre's tourism sector. The findings contribute to the enrichment of the theoretical and practical foundations of agritourism, forming the basis for farmers' participation in tourism from inception to fruition in Ben Tre. Within the constraints of time and budget, the project has focused on constructing pilot models in each district, allowing for reduced interconnection between destinations to foster the development of a community agritourism value chain in rural areas. For wider implementation, it is essential to replicate the community-based agritourism model across numerous farming households within the same village of each district.

In conclusion, agritourism holds the key to unlocking the sustainable development potential of rural areas in Ben Tre. With thoughtful planning and community engagement, agritourism is expected to create valuable economic and social opportunities while preserving the region's rich cultural heritage and pristine environment. As we embark on this journey of agritourism development, our collective efforts will shape a brighter and more sustainable future for Ben Tre and its people.

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PHÁT TRIỂN NÔNG THÔN BỀN VỮNG THÔNG QUA DU LỊCH NÔNG NGHIỆP TẠI TỈNH BẾN TRE

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Nhận bài: 28/11/2024; Phản biện: 08/12/2024; Tác giả sửa: 11/12/2024; Duyệt đăng: 03/01/2025; Phát hành: 28/02/2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54163/ncdt/395>

Phát triển bền vững các khu vực nông thôn là một mục tiêu quan trọng đối với nhiều quốc gia và Việt Nam cũng không nằm ngoài xu thế này. Tỉnh Bến Tre, với di sản nông nghiệp phong phú, đang đối mặt với những thách thức trong việc đảm bảo nguồn thu nhập bền vững cho nông dân chỉ dựa vào hoạt động canh tác. Những khó khăn càng trở nên trầm trọng hơn do tác động của biến đổi khí hậu, đòi hỏi phải có các giải pháp thay thế về sinh kế. Trong những năm gần đây, du lịch nông nghiệp, một hình thức kết hợp giữa sản xuất nông nghiệp và chức năng du lịch, đã được đưa vào ứng dụng nhằm thúc đẩy phát triển bền vững và thực hiện chiến lược phát triển xanh của tỉnh Bến Tre. Hướng tiếp cận này đặc biệt phù hợp với ba huyện Châu Thành, Mộ Cày Nam và Thạnh Phú. Bằng cách gắn kết các khía cạnh kinh tế, xã hội và môi trường của phát triển bền vững, du lịch nông nghiệp đại diện cho một chiến lược đổi mới và đa dạng hóa cho các khu vực nông thôn. Việc phát triển du lịch nông nghiệp được xem là một giải pháp đầy triển vọng nhằm tạo thu nhập, tái tạo cảnh quan và đóng góp vào các giá trị xã hội cho nông dân. Do đó, du lịch nông nghiệp có tiềm năng xây dựng một tương lai kinh tế bền vững và kiên cường cho cộng đồng địa phương ở tỉnh Bến Tre, đồng thời góp phần bảo tồn di sản văn hóa và tài nguyên thiên nhiên của khu vực. Nghiên cứu này khám phá tiềm năng của du lịch nông nghiệp như một công cụ phát triển nông thôn bền vững tại tỉnh Bến Tre và đề xuất các chiến lược để thực hiện thành công.

Từ khóa: Du lịch nông nghiệp; Phát triển bền vững; Khu vực nông thôn; Tỉnh Bến Tre; Biến đổi khí hậu.