

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN AGRITOURISM ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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Abstract

Agritourism is one of the strategies available to farmers to improve their livelihoods, with women play an essential role in maintaining, developing and innovating agritourism businesses. The study aims to identify, based on a systematic analysis of academic literature, the impact of rural women's involvement in agritourism, both at the individual and rural community level. At the same time, various restrictions and challenges they face as farmers, entrepreneurs and professional women are highlighted. Agritourism entrepreneurship provides many benefits to rural women, appearing as a catalyst for their socio-cultural and economic empowerment: achieving financial independence, improving visibility and social status, new entrepreneurial opportunities and skills, personal development, etc. The findings indicate that the constraints they encounter are determined by the political-institutional and socio-cultural contexts in which operate. In addition to individual and tourism industry-related factors (which traditionally influences the business potential of all farmers), gender inequality is the most limiting factor for women's empowerment and their entrepreneurial performance. Four main factors are influencing female's empowerment: women's entrepreneurship, education, human capital and social capital. Subjected to discrimination not only from other male farmers, but also from customers and suppliers, women farmers have limited access to essential resources (capital, credit, land, technology), vocational training, education and business networks. They often deal with insufficient decision-making power and struggle to find a balance between managing agritourism operations and domestic responsibilities. Overcoming these barriers and challenges requires policies to promote gender equality, specific support programs and facilitating access to markets and technology.

Keywords: agritourism, women, empowerment, benefits, challenges

All over the world, agritourism is asserting itself as a means of promoting sustainable agriculture, diversifying farm incomes and revitalizing the rural economy (Brandth B and Haugen M.S., 2011). Agritourism encompasses a variety of farm-based activities for educational or recreational purposes (Gil Arroyo C. *et al*, 2013), women making a crucial contribution in maintaining and developing agritourism businesses (McGehee N.G. *et al*, 2007). However, agricultural production management is typically considered a male domain, with most farms being owned by men. (Vuciterna R. *et al*, 2024). Scholars works highlight women's propensity for innovation and their tendency to develop new agricultural businesses (Bock B.B., 2004) and to lead non-agricultural entrepreneurial activities (Gasson R. and Winter M., 1992). For many years, tourism has been perceived as a sector conducive to entrepreneurial initiatives (Nikraftar T. and Hosseini E., 2016) and as a generator of opportunities specifically for women entrepreneurs

(Haugen M.S. and Vik J., 2008). The strategy of farm diversification through tourism provides women with opportunities for socio-cultural and economic empowerment and advancement (Dong H. and Khan M.S., 2023). Women's empowerment is a complex process of changing their abilities to make strategic choices in life, with considerable effects on their well-being (Dewi A.C. *et al*, 2025). The motivation behind the decision to participate in agritourism entrepreneurship depends on the potential benefits and the effort required by rural women to obtain them. Due to the complexity of the agricultural industry and the versatility of tourism activities, numerous barriers and challenges arise, affecting the performance of women entrepreneurs in agritourism. Various studies conducted in different rural regions around the world have highlighted that women's empowerment through agritourism is a path towards inclusive and sustainable development. (Arintyas A. *et al*, 2024; Pécot M. *et al*, 2024; Vujko *et al*, 2024). As agritourism continues to

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expand, understanding its contributions to improving the lives of rural women and the well-being of local communities is increasingly relevant.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

This paper uses an analysis of existing research in the academic literature to investigate the most important and frequently mentioned opportunities and challenges that accompany women's participation in managing agritourism businesses. The analysis includes studies on the emancipation of women farmers through agritourism, on the barriers and challenges encountered, as well as on the positive impact on their lives and rural communities. To capture a broader and more relevant range of these aspects, studies conducted over the last 25 years in rural areas of countries with different cultures, norms and levels of economic development, were included. The present paper draws on research

findings from over fifteen countries across four continents (Asia, Africa, North America and Europe). In this way, heterogeneous socio-economic, cultural and regulatory contexts surrounding agritourism farms were taken into account.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings from the analysis of academic literature support the fact that agritourism can generate various benefits for women involved in agritourism management, although they face several challenges and restrictions. Women's roles in agritourism are multiple and complex (*figure 1*). In agriculture, they range from farming and processing agricultural produce to marketing, while in the tourism sector, women's contribution goes far beyond simply providing of various services (Tristani T. *et al*, 2022).

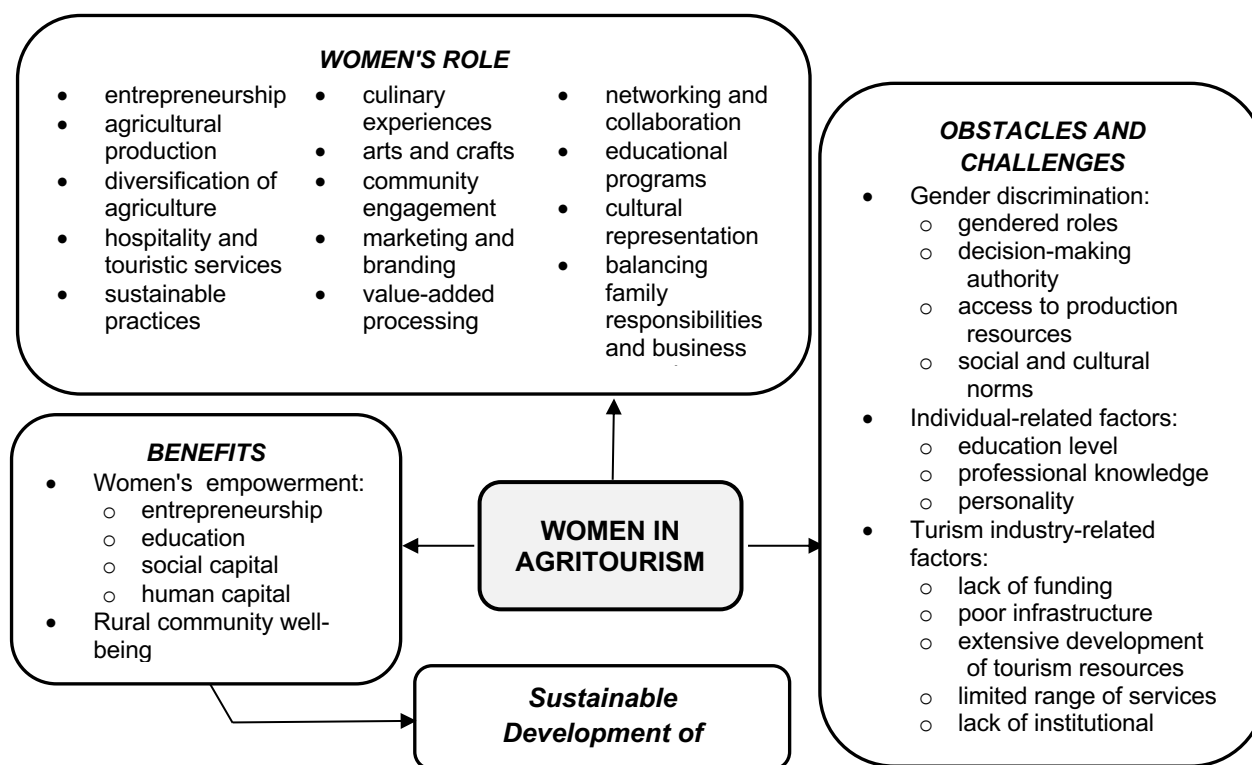


Figure 1: Women's involvement in agritourism

Studies conducted by some scholars indicate that women farmers willingly choose to participate in agritourism, which predominantly involves production and sale of local food, beverages, souvenirs and activities related to hospitality and touristic services (Tristani T. *et al*, 2022; Vuković D. *et al*, 2023; Vujko A. *et al*, 2024). Women entrepreneurs in agritourism have important roles in protecting cultural heritage, safeguarding rural life and original rurality, sharing agricultural knowledge and traditions with tourists (Annes A.

and Wright W., 2015), conserving natural resources and promoting sustainable practices (Rakočević L. *et al*, 2025).

Benefits for women and local community. Agritourism has the potential to achieve the emancipation and empowerment of rural women through entrepreneurial initiatives (Gil Arroyo C. *et al*, 2019; Vuković D. *et al*, 2023). Studies show that female farmers tend to have a greater openness to agritourism than most male operators (Brandth B. and Haugen M.S.,

2011; Giraud C., 2011) and a different way of farming (Annes A. and Wright W., 2015). There are also differences in the perception of success in agritourism entrepreneurship: while women usually prioritize holistic benefits (such as personal satisfaction, preservation of rural cultural heritage, increased decision-making power, etc.), men are more interested in maximizing revenue and profit (Halim M.F. *et al.*, 2020). In less developed countries, and especially in rural areas, women lack financial independence (Alemu A. *et al.*, 2022), with agritourism creating a good opportunity to achieve this goal (Alavion J. and Taghdisi A., 2021). Agritourism enables women to set up and run small rural businesses (craft shops, homestays, guided tours, food services), ensuring greater recognition of their contributions and skills in local cuisine, sale of agricultural products and handicrafts (Rakočević L. *et al.*, 2025). Thus, in addition to revenue from traditional agricultural work, they obtain new and diversified income streams, which boosts their *financial independence* (Gil Arroyo C. *et al.*, 2019). This could lead to *increased decision-making power* for women (Sulaj A. and Themelko H., 2024) and substantial changes in their lives and those of their families, as well as in the local communities (Vujko A. *et al.*, 2024; Dewi A.C. *et al.*, 2025).

The involvement of women in agritourism can lead to *challenging traditional gender norms* and promoting greater social equity. In many rural areas, female entrepreneurs in agritourism benefit from *a recognition of their contribution* to the life of the rural community, enjoying an *improvement in their visibility and status*, as well as a *more equitable distribution of responsibilities and opportunities* (Vujko A. *et al.*, 2024). Similar conclusions were formulated by Sharpley R. and Vass A. (2006) based on research conducted in the north-east of England, where rural women are motivated to initiate tourism activities on farms by feelings of *independence* and *professional satisfaction*, gaining *social visibility* by assuming roles and responsibilities that could lead to personal empowerment. Cánoves G. *et al.* (2004) argue that the involvement of Spanish women farmers in tourism promises *personal empowerment* by overcoming the limitations imposed by domestic roles and escaping the status of social invisibility. At the same time, women entrepreneurs in agritourism *create businesses and jobs locally*, increasing female participation in the workforce, which contributes to greater social well-being of their communities and economic stability in rural areas (Gil Arroyo C. *et al.*, 2019).

By providing economic and socio-cultural empowerment, agritourism promotes a *better self-*

perception and identity for rural women (Vujko A. *et al.*, 2024). It can also lead to improved household well-being and children's education, while promoting local community development (Bhatta K. and Ohe Y., 2020).

The study conducted in rural China by Dong H. and Khan M.S. (2023) identified four main factors influencing women's empowerment: women's entrepreneurship, education, human capital and social capital (*figure 1*). They emphasize that promoting *female entrepreneurship* and women's empowerment by improving their access to education and resources have a positive impact on the sustainable development of farm tourism and local economy (Halim M. *et al.*, 2016). Female entrepreneurship in agritourism facilitates financial independence, reasonable distribution of benefits and social harmony. Rural women are strongly attached to the rural environment and possess a deeper understanding of local issues, integrating better into the community and possessing suitable skills for rural tourism-related businesses (Annes A. and Wright W., 2015).

The most important determinant of the economic and social progress of women in rural areas is *education*, the level of which directly influences the quantity and quality of women in the labor force, the expansion of rural tourism and the development of rural communities (Dong H. and Khan M.S., 2023). Many female farmers running agritourism businesses do not have studies in essential fields, such as marketing and hospitality (Artinya A.L. *et al.*, 2024). Education enables women to overcome political and institutional barriers and cultivate self-awareness (Sulaj A. and Themelko H., 2024).

The basis of the *social capital* of women entrepreneurs is the social support provided by family and society, which is conducive to promoting female employment at the local level (Dong H. and Khan M.S., 2023). Essential for starting and running an agritourism business is also *human capital*, which relies on developing women's own advantages. Human capital challenges are represented by the lack of education, tourism-related skills and business knowledge, which reduce women's empowerment. Qualities such as flexibility, attentiveness, patience, willingness to put their knowledge into practice and women's natural affinity for tourism, contribute to amplifying their entrepreneurial potential (Vuković D. *et al.*, 2023).

- **Obstacles and challenges.** Often, women agritourism entrepreneurs face numerous barriers and challenges in conducting their businesses, which manifests itself in each of the three roles she fulfills: farmer, entrepreneur and professional

women (Halim M. *et al*, 2016). The constraints they encountered are determined by the political-institutional and socio-cultural contexts in which operate (Bui H.T.M. *et al*, 2018). Regardless of gender, the business potential of farmers depends on *personal factors* (such as education level, professional knowledge, personality, etc.) and *tourism industry-related factors* (lack of funding and institutional support, poor infrastructure, extensive development of tourism resources, limited range of services, etc.) (Nikraftar T. and Hosseini E., 2016).

Although *financial capital* is a frequently mentioned constraint for women entrepreneurs in agritourism, it is not the most common (Dewi A.C. *et al*, 2025). The most numerous and complex challenges are those associated with *gender inequality*. In this regard, it is important to mention the observation of Winn J. (2005): “in many transition economies, gender-biased privatisation processes have led to redistribution in favour of men, leaving women with insufficient collateral to secure financial resources”. Traditional *gender discrimination* restricts women's ability to start an agritourism business. In many cases, women farmers are not being perceived and accepted as real farmers (Halim M. *et al*, 2016). Due to the lack of innate farming knowledge and physical strength necessary for agricultural work, they are seen rather as “incomplete farmers” (Saugeres L., 2002). Despite the fact that women have long been involved in agricultural production, their participation in farming has always been characterized by *invisibility* (Arintyas A. *et al*, 2024). In the traditional rural society, their positioning is influenced by a patriarchal culture and an agrarian ideology that still persists in many regions, as evidenced by research conducted in rural southern France by Annes A. and Wright W (2015). Another study carried out in France by Giraud C. (2011) concluded that the involvement of women farmers in tourism allowed them to obtain, in addition to extra income and a better expression and capitalization of their skills, a certain degree of autonomy, but this is dependent, however, on the consent of their husbands. Therefore, there is *limited independence* and women find themselves in a disadvantageous position that restricts their entrepreneurial potential. In many rural regions, women do not have adequate *decision-making authority* within the household and are less vocal than men regarding family affairs and the allocation of available resources. (Al-Dajani H. and Marlow S., 2013). The patriarchal structure of agriculture subjects women entrepreneurs to discrimination

from both business partners and associates, as well as customers. (Godwin *et al*, 2006).

Cultural norms and legal systems can influence women's involvement and success in agritourism. Khazami N. *et al* (2023) found that Tunisian rural women show a strong desire to get involved in agritourism entrepreneurship, but social and cultural norms constitute a significant obstacle. The persistence of stereotypes and predetermined *gender roles* in Tunisian society determines their under-representation in the tourism industry of this country (Alavion J. and Taghdisi A., 2021). The situation is different in most South American countries, where the tourism industry has a higher proportion of female entrepreneurs than other sectors (Surangi H., 2022).

Compared to their male counterparts, women entrepreneurs involved in agritourism have *limited access to main resources* like capital (Bruni A. *et al*, 2004), land, tools and technology (Meinzen-Dick R. *et al*, 2011), which prevents them from increasing their production, improving economic performance (Ragasa C., 2012) and developing their businesses (Still L.V. and Walker E.A., 2006). Women entrepreneurs appear to suffer from a *lack of credibility* among male farmers (Gundry L.K. *et al*, 2002), often encountering difficulties in collaborating with them and accessing business networks (Halim M. *et al*, 2016). Furthermore, this limits their access to information, professional training and opportunities to enter new markets and establish strategic partnerships (Still L.V. and Walker E.A., 2006). In this regard, Barbieri C. and Mshenga P.M. (2008) showed that the economic performance of American agritourism farms managed by women is, in general, lower than those managed by men. This statement is consistent with the results of Permani R. (2021), which highlights that Indonesian female farmers typically earn over 33% less than men in similar roles. Anthopoulou T. (2010) argues that this situation is generally valid for the entire agricultural sector, being the result of significant gender inequality in terms of access to technology, inputs, land, human and social capital, property rights and decision-making power (Pehu E. *et al*, 2009).

Unequal land rights are, also, an important obstacle for women farmers in countries governed by legal systems permissive with gender inequality. (Ogunlela Y.I. and Mukhtar A.A., 2009). Even though the law allows women to inherit agricultural land, there is a tendency for farmers to leave their inheritance preferentially to male descendants, as Salamon S. (1995) concluded after a study conducted in the USA.

Barriers to rural women's agritourism career opportunities may include not only limited education, socio-cultural norms and restricted access to vocational training, but also *physical constraints* and *language limitations*, as observed by Trisanti T. *et al.* (2022) in Indonesia.

In addition to these aspects frequently mentioned in the literature, Halim M. *et al.* (2016) identified that women farmers who provide agritourism in North Carolina (USA) are particularly concerned about: *lack of reliable staff*; *lack of institutional support*; *optimizing business development* while maintaining the desired quality; *keeping the farm in the family* and continuing the agritourism business by descendants.

As professional women, another challenge for female farmers engaged in tourism activities is to achieve a *balance between professional activity and traditional family duties*. Many times, rural women are subjected to pressure from family members, especially their husbands, to prioritize family obligations and household work over professional activity (Bruni A. *et al.*, 2004).

Globally, studies have emphasised that women's participation in agritourism business is hindered by significant challenges. In order to promote the empowerment of women and their success in agritourism entrepreneurship, a multidirectional approach to these challenges is needed. By providing financial support, educational programs and initiatives for increasing women's access to resources and their role in decision-making, a favorable framework can be ensured, in which women can fully exploit their potential and available skills.

CONCLUSIONS

Agritourism entrepreneurship provides many benefits to rural women, appearing as a catalyst for their socio-cultural and economic empowerment. The constraints and challenges they encounter are determined by the political-institutional and socio-cultural contexts in which operate. These are manifested in each of the roles that rural women fulfill: farmer, entrepreneur and professional woman. Key benefits include achieving financial autonomy, increasing decision-making power, challenging traditional gender norms, improving livelihoods and social status, gaining new entrepreneurial opportunities and skills, personal development, contribution to rural sustainable development. Gender discrimination is the most restrictive factor for women's empowerment and their entrepreneurial performance. This generates a series of shortcomings and inconveniences such as: limited independence; inadequate decision-making

authority; limited access to resources, information, training and markets; unequal land rights; lack of credibility, etc. Overcoming these barriers and challenges can enhance agritourism's impact on rural development. That requires policies to promote gender equality, specific support programs and facilitating access to markets and technology.

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