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ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN RURAL AREAS: EDUCATIONAL HOMESTEADS AND AGRITOURISM FARMS

Key words: rural capital, agricultural alternatives, agri-tourism, educational homesteads, rural entrepreneurship

ABSTRACT. The aim of this article is to characterise two forms of entrepreneurship in rural areas that are an alternative to agricultural activity and an additional source of income: educational homesteads and agri-tourism farms. The main research question was what are the reasons for using the offer of educational homesteads and agrotourism farms. A total of 158 respondents took part in the survey. The research was conducted in August-September 2021. Descriptive statistics, Pearson's Chi² and Mann-Whitney U tests of the STATISTICA 13.1 PL programme were used to compile the results. Among the respondents surveyed, more than half of the respondents use the leisure offer at least once a year, more than one-fifth of the men and one-third of the women surveyed try to visit agro-tourism farms or educational homesteads several times a year. Among the most important reasons for choosing the offer of rural enterprises are: „peace and quiet” offered by the rural enterprises' offers, followed by „rural scenery”, „opportunity to learn about local culture” and „family atmosphere”. Respondents spoke highly of the level of service provided in the enterprises they used, but in their free opinions suggested that it would be good to establish cooperation between agritourism farms and educational homesteads: combining relaxation in a rural setting with education in order to benefit as much as possible from their stay in rural areas.

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INTRODUCTION

Today, rural areas in Poland are witnessing an increase in the social and business activity of residents, including the development of non-agricultural business entities. Farms, too, are changing through the introduction of new forms of business activity, including trade and services [Bański 2015]. Rural entrepreneurship is seen as one of the most important elements of the local labor market involving all people living in rural areas, not just those related to agriculture. Entrepreneurship in the countryside is often associated as an activity to seek additional sources of income to supplement income from agricultural activities related to farm labor or non-agricultural activities. However, rural entrepreneurship is always about increasing profitability and raising the standard of living of those in rural areas [Bogusz, Kmita-Dziasek 2015, Tabor 2010]. The main factor that mobilizes farmers to engage in non-agricultural activities, including tourism, is to gain additional income to compensate for insufficient cash income from agricultural production [Dębniowska, Tkaczuk 1997]. The financial motivation may also be accompanied by social goals stemming from the need to share the value of farming and rural life with others. Such an approach has spawned a new trend called socially engaged agriculture, which includes activities that take advantage of the opportunities provided by farming to support therapy, rehabilitation, social integration, lifelong learning and social services in rural areas [Błażejowska et al. 2022].

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The purpose of the study is to characterize possible alternatives for agricultural activities in Poland. Due to the services offered, the selected examples of alternatives can serve as good practices and inspire the development of entrepreneurship in rural areas. The paper presents the characteristics of selected forms of entrepreneurship in rural areas, i.e. educational homesteads and agritourism farms. The basic research question was: what are the reasons for using the offer of educational homesteads and agritourism farms. Then, there are partial results of surveys with people who are interested in the services of a particular alternative to agriculture. The survey included 158 individual respondents using leisure or educational activities. The research material was secondary data and empirical data in the form of the results of an original questionnaire. Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous. The research method used for collecting data was an original survey questionnaire. The condition for entering the study was a declaration of use of the forms of the characterized entrepreneurship. The study period was August-September 2021. The STATISTICA 13.1PL software was used for analyzing the obtained results.

EDUCATIONAL HOMESTEADS

Included in the scope of social farming is the educational offerings of farms, the representatives of which in Poland are educational homesteads. The essence of the activity of educational homesteads is to bring the public closer to the natural environment of the rural farm, to impart knowledge about the origin of food and the hardship of its production, to build a market of conscious consumers. Specific educational goals are realized on the basis of infrastructure and agricultural resources on the farm and its natural and cultural surroundings.

The concept of an educational homestead, along with its market identification in the form of the name “Educational Homestead”, was defined as a result of a nationwide project conducted by the Agricultural Advisory Center Krakow Branch and approved by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in November 2011, and its implementation resulted in the creation of the National Network of Educational Homesteads. The main reason for the establishment of the homesteads was the search for new motivations for farmers to continue farming and the conviction that the farm has a unique potential to conduct attractive educational activities, meeting the need to bring the global public closer to the farmer’s work and the sources of food [Kmita-Dziasek 2014]. Currently, 296 homesteads are registered in Poland within the National Network of Educational Homesteads (Figure 1) [OSZE 2023].

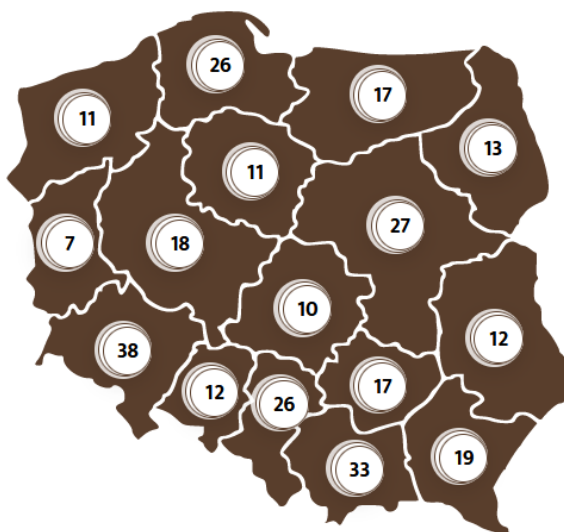


Figure 1. Educational homesteads by voivodeship

Source: based on [OSZE 2023]

Table 1. An offer of educational farms by theme

Themes of the proposed topics	Number of homesteads	Examples of thematic scope – thematic offers of selected homesteads
Regional education	182	Goat's milk and its advantages „From a bucket to cheese”, Education in the field of farm animal breeding
Ecology	191	„Nice herb” – sowing herbs and recycling – secondary use of packaging, Ecology in agriculture
Disappearing professions	134	Felting, How the mole got shorts – or where does linen fabric come from, What was it used for (former everyday utensils of the village), Blacksmith as an example of a traditional profession
Home cooking	145	These herbs are good – the use of herbs in home cooking, What's up in the countryside – we make butter
Food processing	146	„Pumpkin Feast” – cooking pumpkin soup in a cauldron over a bonfire, „Potato Day” – making figurines from potatoes and cooking on a bonfire
Nature	242	Do you love animals? – Meet the alpacas!
Artistic handcraft	153	From a sheep to a hat – that is where wool comes from
Agriculture and farm activities	233	„Maja the Bee” – beekeeping workshops, making and painting a cardboard beehive, With animals for your brother, The horse helps the man
Traditional food	197	The kitchen of our ancestors
Leisure activities	201	Stalking, rural games and activities, walking, cycling, running, swimming, cooking, horse riding
Sports	123	Forest trekking, guesing, volleyball, dodgeball
Traditions and Rituals	142	Miracles wreaths, Rural and idyllic in lavender, Andrew's day

Source: own compilation based on [OSZE 2023]

The largest number of educational homesteads is located in the provinces of Lower Silesia (12.83%), Lesser Poland (11.15%), Mazovia (9.12%) and Pomerania (8.78%). Only 7 educational homesteads were located in the Lubuskie province, 10 in the Łódzkie Province and 11 each in the West Pomeranian and Kujawsko-Pomorskie provinces. In terms of the number of educational programs implemented, homesteads located in the Lower Silesia Region are the most active ones, followed by homesteads from the Mazovia and Lesser Poland regions. Their offerings are varied, example topics are shown in the table below (Table 1).

Based on the analysis conducted on educational homesteads, it can be noted that all homesteads offer their guests recreational, sports, educational activities and contact with nature, and try to introduce the importance of ecology in the modern world. Traditional food offerings are provided by 197 homesteads, 145 have home cooking, recreational and sports activities are offered by 206 educational homesteads. The goal of the more than 134 homesteads is to showcase the now vanishing professions, such as potter and weaver. Information on regional customs and rituals is provided by 142 establishments.

Recipients of these offers can be pre-school children, school-age children (elementary school), school-age youth (junior and senior high school, university students), adults, children and youth without adult supervision, and the elderly. Note that the educational homesteads can be used by an organized group or one can individually join an already existing group.

AGRITOURISM FARMS ACTIVITIES

Agritourism is an increasingly popular type of business in Europe. It occupies an increasingly important place in rural development. It is of great importance in the rural environment, as it creates jobs, promotes local products, contributes to on-farm income diversification and brings the society together [Kuźnicka et al. 2016, Wojcieszak, Sadowski 2019, Działułyk et al. 2021, Xie et al. 2022].

There are 8,000 agritourism farms, offering 91,000 beds in Poland. The largest number of farms is in the south of the country, in Lesser Poland and Podkarpacie provinces [GUS 2022]. According to estimates, the global value of the agritourism market, which was USD 69.2 billion in 2019, will grow to USD 117.4 billion by 2027. According to the study, the US will lead the global development of agritourism in the next decade, although the activity is also becoming more and more popular in other countries, such as China, India, Italy, Taiwan and Brazil [Agronews 2022].

The vast majority, more than 90%, of agritourism farm owners, say that their main motivation for this type of business is for profit-making purposes. In addition, about

60% of owners indicate a desire to bring the local community closer together, to promote knowledge of farm life and work, and to diversify the activities undertaken on the farm.

At many agritourism farms, guests can not only relax in nature, but also engage in such chores as caring for animals, cooking or harvesting fruit. For some it's work, for others it's an original form of active recreation.

By ensuring high quality and satisfaction of tourists, you can gain loyal clients who will become a regular source of income. As statistics show, as many as 9% of agritourism clients choose to go to the same tried-and-true place every year [KSOW 2020]. Such loyal visitors not only return to their favorite places, but also attract more clients through referrals.

Keeping a loyal visitor is often easier than getting a new one. In turn, a dissatisfied client will effectively scare off other consumers [i-Rolnik 2023].

If a consumer does not use agritourism, it is most likely because most of their vacation experience is with hotels and he simply does not know what that agritourism is all about.

Agritourism is becoming an increasingly common form of recreation, the turning point came during the COVID-19 pandemic [Roman et al. 2022]. The reason for this is certainly the desire to promote a healthy lifestyle, communing with nature in peace and quiet. At the moment, agritourism is a fast-growing industry [Karbownik 2013]. The possible development paths for agritourism could include:

Diversification of offerings: farms want to be both attractive to guests and profitable. That's why it's important to expand the range of your services, to prepare for periods when there are fewer visitors. The common practices are [Roman et al. 2022, i-Rolnik 2023]:

- accommodation in rooms with a higher standard,
- catering,
- food production and sales,
- events, parties,
- workshops for guests,
- educational activities directed at third parties,
- additional paid attractions for guests.

Specialization of agritourism farms: competition in agritourism is growing, so modern farms should find a distinguishing factor. Something that will be their special feature, so that guests will better remember the place. It could be a unique history of the facility, a delectable product from its own kitchen, or an attraction not found elsewhere. Specialization also means ideas for themed stays for guests, such as yoga workshops, weekends for mushroom pickers, a special stay for vegans, etc.

Creation of service packages: modern guests like offers in the form of packages – they have been accustomed to this by hotels, among others. This is, of course, a certain group of consumers, and one farm may offer more than one type of package. Importantly, however, the packages offer a great sense of freedom: “I pay a certain amount for the weekend and

I can do everything". For hosts, on the other hand, the package allows to better balance the cost of guests' stay and saves explaining how much what costs. Packages are also associated with stays within, for example, week-long stays, especially during peak season.

Running own marketing campaign: mature agritourism farms are more likely to rely solely on the channels they operate themselves (their own website, profile on FB or Instagram). Then they have full control over what goes to potential clients and when. "Hanging around on obsolete portals", sometimes using unfair practices against hosts, is a nuisance. What's more, quick communication is important, e.g. letting people know that a date in the peak season has just been vacated.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, more and more Poles prefer to stay in the country, and interest in rural vacations is growing [Roman et al. 2022]. In order to profit from this situation, farms need to become more responsive to client needs, diversify their services and try to reach clients in new ways. One can also see the progressive detachment of agritourism from the countryside and traditional agriculture, and thus the development towards slow style leisure in nature. Clients expect a high level of service with the authenticity of the rural living experience. Agritourism is assisted by such trends as culinary tourism and ecotourism.

RESEARCH RESULTS

On the basis of the empirical research carried out, the objective presented in the initial part of this paper has been achieved. The survey included 119 (75.3%) women and 39 (24.7%) men. The age structure was as follows: those under 30 years of age – 43 people (27.2%), 31-40 years of age – 45 people (28.5%), 41-50 years of age – 39 people (24.7%) and those over 50 years of age made up a group of 31 respondents (19.6%). As for the place of residence, the largest group, accounting for 38.6%, were residents of larger cities with up to 150,000 residents, followed by residents of smaller cities with up to 50 thousand residents – 32.9%. residents of cities with more than 150 thousand residents made up 28.5% of respondents. Almost 3/4 of the surveyed group of respondents had university education, more than 20% of respondents had secondary education. Among those using the offerings of educational and agritourism farms, more than 55% of respondents were white-collar workers, 21.6% were self-employed, 12% were students, 11.4% of those surveyed were pensioners.

The COVID-19 pandemic opened up opportunities for faster development of microtourism – short trips that are local or regional in nature, allowing for increased frequency of travel [Balińska, Olejniczak 2021]. The offerings of tourism and educational enterprises have been recognized. Table 2 shows the frequency with which respondents use the offer of agritourism farms or educational homesteads.

Table 2. Frequency of visiting agritourism farms or educational farms by a group of surveyed respondents

Frequency	Female N = 119		Male N = 39		Mann-Whitney U Test	
	N	%	N	%	Z	p
Several times a year	43	36.13	8	20.51	2.37	0.018*
Once a year	68	57.14	25	64.10		
Once every few years/or less often	8	6.73	6	15.39		

* Result statistically significant at $p < 0.05$

Source: own elaboration

More than half of the surveyed respondents try at least once a year to take advantage of the offer of either recreational (agritourism farm) or educational (educational homestead) offered by farmers engaged in additional activities. 1/3 of the surveyed women and 1/5 of the men visited the rural areas “several times a year”. According to the interviews, these were family trips to agritourism farms. Trips to educational homesteads were organized as part of integration or trips organized by the National Rural Network (KSOW) or Local Action Groups (LGD).

Among the reasons for using the services of agritourism farms and educational homesteads listed in Table 3, only when evaluating “rural scenery” were statistical differences significantly observed between men and women in the surveyed group of respondents. Other aspects influencing the decision to use the proposed recreation offer in rural areas were equally highly rated. The highest-rated variables among both groups were “peace and quiet” ($F = 4.42$, $M = 4.49$) that accompany a stay in the countryside, followed by “rural scenery” ($F = 4.38$, $M = 3.59$), “opportunity to learn about local culture” ($F = 4.22$, $M = 4.21$) and the “family atmosphere” of the host facility ($F = 4.13$, $M = 4.10$).

The package of services offered by rural community initiatives that are an additional source of income for farms, such as agritourism or educational homesteads, received at least 1/3 of very high marks among respondents. Analyzing Figure 2, however, the offer that educational homesteads has was better rated (10% more “high ratings” compared to agritourism farms). This is due to the fact that the offer of educational homesteads is more diverse (see Table 1), thematic, the topics of activities are tailored to the age of participants. Clients of educational homesteads usually have their stay planned in detail, when clients using agritourism farms have a lot of free time at their disposal (if there are no other attractions nearby besides the charming landscape, and the host offers nothing besides accommodation and food). In free statements, respondents often mentioned that “it would be a good solution to establish cooperation between agritourism farms

Table 3. Reasons for using the services of an agritourism farm or educational homestead

Selected features of the advantages of agritourism farms and educational homesteads		Female N = 119		Male N = 39		Mann-Whitney U Test	
		N	%	N	%	Z	p
Peace and quiet	1	-	0	1	2.56	-0.33	0.738
	2	3	2.52	1	2.56		
	3	26	21.85	5	12.82		
	4	8	6.72	3	7.69		
	5	82	68.91	29	74.37		
	μ	4.42		4.49			
Close contact with nature	1	3	2.52	1	2.56	-0.59	0.557
	2	30	25.21	7	17.95		
	3	37	31.09	14	35.89		
	4	27	22.69	7	17.95		
	5	22	18.49	10	25.65		
	μ	3.29		3.46			
Family atmosphere	1	-	0	1	2.56	-0.52	0.600
	2	10	8.40	1	2.56		
	3	26	21.84	11	28.21		
	4	21	17.65	6	15.38		
	5	62	52.11	20	51.29		
	μ	4.13		4.10			
Rural scenery	1	4	3.36	6	15.38	3.05	0.002*
	2	8	6.72	4	10.25		
	3	12	10.08	5	12.82		
	4	10	8.42	9	23.08		
	5	85	71.42	15	38.47		
	μ	4.38		3.59			
Possibility of contact with animals (e.g. mini zoo)	1	2	1.68	5	12.82	0.79	0.427
	2	16	13.44	5	12.82		
	3	18	15.12	3	7.69		
	4	12	10.08	6	15.38		
	5	71	59.68	20	51.29		
	μ	4.13		3.79			
Opportunity to learn about local culture	1	5	4.20	1	2.56	0.37	0.711
	2	7	5.88	1	2.56		
	3	14	11.77	8	20.51		
	4	24	20.17	8	20.51		
	5	69	57.98	21	53.86		
	μ	4.22		4.21			

* Result statistically significant at $p < 0.05$, 1 – absolutely not important, ... 5 – very important

Source: own elaboration

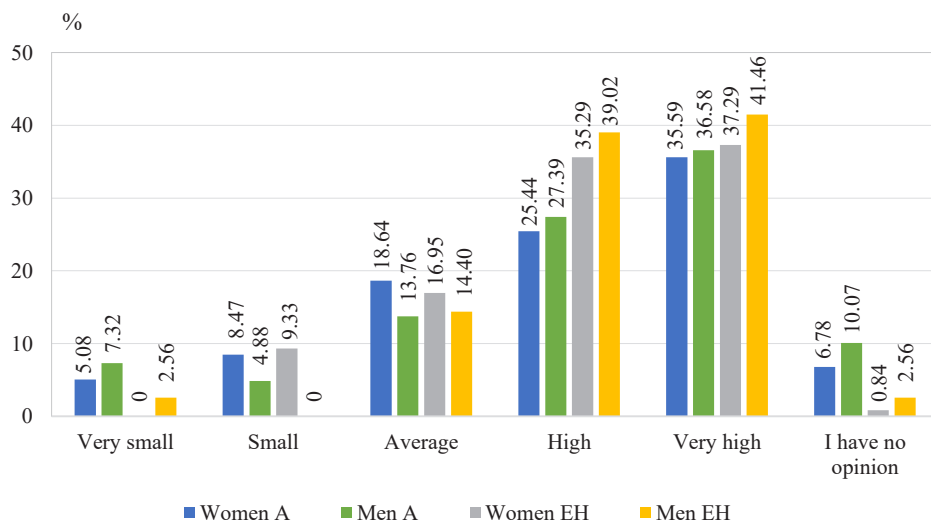


Figure 2. Evaluation of the services offered by agritourism farms or educational homesteads (for agritourism farms (A) $\chi^2 = 8.81$, $p = 0.184$, for educational homesteads (EH) $\chi^2 = 5.79$, $p = 0.215$)

Source: own elaboration

and educational homesteads, in order to enrich the experience, to make the stay in the countryside more attractive”.

Today’s leisure market is extremely demanding. Therefore, it is necessary to create original agritourism offers that will attract both individual clients as well as schools and kindergartens. An offer consisting of accommodation and, in some cases, food, is definitely not enough, especially in areas that do not have many tourist assets, and so owners have to create an attractive offer themselves. Preparing an interesting agritourism offer requires more commitment, ingenuity and knowledge from the owners. These need not always be capital-intensive ventures. The cultural heritage of the countryside, combined with nature and the agricultural landscape, which is a daily life for villagers, can be a major attraction for visitors to rural areas, including foreign tourists [Woźniak, Lechwar 2008]. However, it is necessary to look at them through the eyes of the client, not the resident. An interesting suggestion is to combine the offer of agritourism farms with the opportunity to participate in workshops offered by educational homesteads. According to Mehdi Rezaei et al. [2021], visitor participation in “agritourism” and „educational homestead” ventures can lead to the promotion of mental health through the activities offered and contact with nature. Unlike a simple visit to green spaces, „agritourism” activities can promote

human involvement in the natural environment and create conditions for more frequent social interaction. Besides, „agritourism” and „educational homesteads” are a type of activity where people can bring back childhood memories, as many people in cities have their roots in rural areas, which can lead to improved mood [Mahaliyanaarachchi 2015]. In addition, from a rural perspective, such innovative implications can increase farmers’ incomes through diversification policies [Bogusz, Kielbasa 2014].

This study also has limitations related to the lead time. The time of the pandemic was a specific period when the public had a lot of restrictions related to movement. Trips to traditional foreign holidays were replaced by trips to the nearby countryside, farms or educational homesteads.

The future direction of the research is to want to repeat the study in the post-pandemic period and conduct a comparative analysis of the results obtained. Whether there are changes „in plus” or „in minus”.

SUMMARY

The obtained results of the study allowed us to conclude that the alternatives to agriculture selected for analysis, i.e. running an agritourism farm or an educational homestead, fulfill their function. They are viewed positively by potential clients. The results obtained allow us to conclude that the proposed forms of entrepreneurship in rural areas can be a great financial support for the main agricultural activity. Involvement in the establishment of agritourism farms and educational homesteads means not only family involvement in their operation, but also the creation of additional jobs, which are unfortunately of seasonal character.

Increased competition in the market for agritourism services requires continuous product improvement and innovation. It is necessary to introduce greater specialization of agritourism farms along the lines of similar ones operating in Western Europe and to direct the offer to selected groups of clients. Of course, these days the theme of “agriculture” has become a sought-after attraction that must be skillfully presented in the proposed offer. A major opportunity for agritourism and educational service providers in rural areas is the creation of thematic products that relate to the traditions and history of the region, as well as the bundling of services and cooperation in this regard with neighbors and other entities.

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PRZEDSIĘBIORCZOŚĆ NA OBSZARACH WIEJSKICH: ZAGRODY EDUKACYJNE I DZIAŁALNOŚĆ AGROTURYSTYCZNA

Słowa kluczowe: kapitał obszarów wiejskich, alternatywa dla rolnictwa, agroturystyka, zagrody edukacyjne, przedsiębiorczość wiejska

ABSTRAKT. Celem artykułu jest scharakteryzowanie dwóch form przedsiębiorczości na obszarach wiejskich, które są alternatywą działalności rolniczej oraz dodatkowym źródłem dochodu: zagród edukacyjnych i gospodarstw agroturystycznych. Podstawowe pytanie badawcze to, jakie są powody korzystania z oferty zagród edukacyjnych i gospodarstw agroturystycznych. W badaniu wzięło udział 158 respondentów. Badania przeprowadzono od sierpnia do września 2021 roku. Do opracowania wyników użyto statystyki opisowej, testy Chi2 Pearsona oraz U Manna-Whitneya programu STATISTICA 13.1 PL. Spośród badanych respondentów ponad połowa korzystała z propozycji zagospodarowania czasu wolnego przynajmniej raz w roku, ponad 1/5 mężczyzn i 1/3 badanych kobiet starała się odwiedzić gospodarstwa agroturystyczne lub zagrody edukacyjne kilka razy w roku. Wśród najważniejszych powodów wyboru określonej oferty przedsiębiorstw obszarów wiejskich były: „cisza i spokój”, następnie „wiejska sceneria”, „możliwość poznania kultury lokalnej” oraz „rodzinna atmosfera”. Respondenci wysoko ocenili poziom świadczonych usług w przedsiębiorstwach, z których korzystali. Jednak w wolnych opiniach zasugerowali, że korzystne byłoby nawiązanie współpracy pomiędzy gospodarstwami agroturystycznymi i zagrodami edukacyjnymi, czyli połączenie wypoczynku w scenerii wiejskiej z edukacją, aby można było jak najwięcej skorzystać z pobytu na terenach wiejskich.

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