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# Editorial: Agritourism and local development: innovations, collaborations, and sustainable growth

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## Editorial on the Research Topic

**Agritourism and local development: innovations, collaborations, and sustainable growth**

Rural areas' distinctive recreational value is being diminished by the unregulated effects of human activity, fast urbanization, and massive infrastructure expansion, which are all destroying the natural and social landscapes of rural areas (Fong et al., 2017). Agritourism provides a sustainable substitute that supports international initiatives to address environmental issues and the increasing depletion of natural resources (Paniccia and Baiocco, 2021). Despite being a relatively new tourism market, agritourism has expanded significantly in most developed countries, while agricultural attractions continue to gain popularity in developing nations (Baipai et al., 2022). Agritourism, which is a subset of rural tourism, is an innovative strategy that transforms farms into tourism destinations or diversifies farming activities to offer entertainment, education, recreation, hospitality, and on-farm product sales (van Zyl and van Der Merwe, 2021). Agritourism significantly contributes to sustainable rural development by safeguarding indigenous knowledge and traditional practices while also stimulating economic growth and preserving agricultural heritage. Additionally, it fosters fair and equitable relationships within local communities (Baipai et al., 2024; Ciolac et al., 2019). Beyond these benefits, agritourism aligns with key United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as zero hunger (SDG 2), climate action (SDG 13), and responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), by merging agriculture with tourism (Dionizi and Kercini, 2025; Yusuf and Wulandari, 2023). However, in order to provide these advantages and make a significant contribution to the SDGs, agritourism needs to be planned strategically and in accordance with sustainable development principles.

While agritourism holds significant potential, it often faces early-stage development challenges, such as limited support from national tourism policies and inadequate coordination of various stakeholders, facilities, and resources (Pérez-Olmos and Aguilar-Rivera, 2021). Moreover, in many tourism-related areas, short-term profit usually takes precedence over long-term sustainability and strategic planning, which might have negative consequences (Kazlouski et al., 2020).

If these issues are not effectively addressed, they may hinder agritourism's ability to contribute to the SDGs. To foster its growth and resilience, well-balanced and practical policies are essential, particularly in tackling the crises that impact rural regions worldwide.

Agritourism presents both opportunities and challenges on the path to sustainable tourism. Lately, researchers have been paying closer attention to it, recognizing its potential to address global challenges (Kataya, 2021; Popescu et al., 2023). However, major research gaps exist, notably concerning how to create and operate sustainable models of agritourism and how these models may sustain themselves (Paniccia and Baiocco, 2021). This Research Topic aims to deepen the understanding of different aspects of agritourism and its contribution to local development by discussing the key elements that affect its sustainability, governance, and resilience. The articles address a range of aspects including ecological resilience, policy development, economic sustainability, global standards, and crisis management.

Wu et al. evaluate factors influencing ecological resilience in tourism villages from farmers' perspectives, using Chinese minority settlement areas as a case study. Their study emphasizes how rural tourism has developed unevenly and how this has affected ecological resilience, underscoring the need for more inclusive and balanced strategies. The study also reveals that different types of farmers face unique challenges, emphasizing the importance of tailored sustainability strategies in agritourism.

Agritourism policy development differs across nations, and this shapes the sustainability of the industry within the region. Mangwiro et al. demonstrate the differences in policy development and implementation across six Southern African countries. They emphasize important factors like infrastructure, institutional support, stakeholder engagement, national policy frameworks, and monitoring systems. The authors advocate for a more cooperative strategy, including private-sector-led agritourism groups and interministerial taskforces to improve governance and spur industry growth. Similar challenges exist in Tamil Nadu, where Sennimalai et al. point out that limited public awareness and weak licensing laws are holding agritourism back. They propose the establishment of a dedicated agritourism development committee, alongside educational initiatives and training programs, to formalize governance and equip local stakeholders. A more structured governance approach is evident in Austria, as analyzed by Quendler et al., who examine the country's adherence to global agritourism values while maintaining a distinct local identity. The incorporation of quality standards, marketing strategies, and cross-sector collaboration into the national policy framework demonstrates the importance of aligning global standards with locally adapted regulations. These studies emphasize the importance of institutional support, regulatory frameworks, and policy development in ensuring the viability of agritourism. While some regions face policy gaps in agritourism, others have well-structured governance systems that drive rural development. For long-term success, a combination of clear licensing mechanisms, stakeholder-driven governance, and alignment with broader agricultural and tourism policies is essential.

Sennimalai et al. assess the economic sustainability of agritourism sector in Tamil Nadu, in which their focus is on

heritage preservation and policy barriers such as insufficient licensing and low public awareness. They recommend policy reforms, educational initiatives, digital marketing, financial incentives, and infrastructure improvements to enhance agritourism's visibility and economic viability. Stearns and Singh-Knights identified proactive crisis communication planning as a key attribute in sustaining agritourism businesses. The authors argue that structured planning mitigates financial risks, improves stakeholder coordination, and enhances business resilience. These studies emphasize the importance of structured governance, financial support and adaptive strategies which ensure economic sustainability of agritourism businesses.

Quendler et al. examine Austria's incorporation of global agritourism principles, as promoted by the Global Agritourism Network Committee, to maintain a unique local identity in accordance with international norms. The nation successfully strikes a balance between national policies and international frameworks by promoting agricultural diversity, showcasing local resources, and offering authentic experiences. The study highlights the importance of structured guidelines, strategic marketing, and cross-sector synergies in ensuring the sustainability of agritourism.

Finally, Stearns and Singh-Knights discuss the significance of crisis communication planning in ensuring the sustainability of agritourism enterprises. The authors indicate the presence of many agritourism operators without formal crisis response plans even though they deal with crises frequently. They use case studies, such as Utado's post-hurricane recovery through agritourism and agrotherapy to illustrate how strategic crisis preparedness fosters economic sustainability and community development. The authors also emphasize the importance of agritourism associations in building social capital and improving crisis preparedness. Agritourism operators can enhance business stability, safeguard community livelihoods, and contribute to the resilience of rural economies by integrating structured crisis response strategies.

Collectively, these articles highlight agritourism's potential to drive sustainable rural development through innovation, collaboration, and contextual adaptations. Strategic governance, stakeholder engagement, and adaptive planning strengthen both economic and ecological resilience. Examining policy frameworks, crisis preparedness, and global standards underscores the need for structured support mechanisms and community participation to ensure agritourism's long-term sustainability.

## Author contributions

CM: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. OC: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

The author(s) declared that they were editorial board members of *Frontiers*, at the time of submission. This had no impact on the peer review process and the final decision.

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