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**From farming to hosting**

- Perceptions of agritourism among practitioners

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## Abstract

Agritourism practices have been proposed to be one of the economical tools to compensate the declining traditional practices in rural areas. Therefore, farms have started to apply agritourism practices in order to strengthen their business. Previous research has argued that agritourism creates benefits for farms, as well as for the whole community by creating job opportunities and attracting visitors. However, it has also been suggested that there is a lack of research in how practitioners view the practices of agritourism. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis has been to generate knowledge about practitioners' perception of agritourism practices. I have applied a qualitative method design, more specifically qualitative interview, structured observation and documentation analysis. I selected five farms in the region of Halland, conducted nine interviews with 11 respondents. Pictures have been taken to show how the practitioners practice agritourism at the farms. Furthermore, marketing material, such as brochures and websites have been studied to strengthen the argument of how practitioners practice agritourism. The agritourism practices which emerged in the analysis was; product development; public sector engagement; marketing; training; networking; and hosting. The aspect of location and seasonality also affected the practices of agritourism. These practices have been discussed previously by other researchers, therefore I have decided to illuminate the practices in the aspect of opportunities and challenges and their relation to one another. In conclusion whether agritourism practices are an opportunity or a challenge depends on four factors; the financial resources of the farm to invest in agritourism, financial support practitioners receive from the public sector, cooperation among enterprises in the rural region, and finally the personal commitment of the practitioner. Research in this particular area of how to apply agritourism practices in rural regions is vital in relation to theoretical implications as well as practical suggestions to rural entrepreneurs and municipalities.

**Keywords:** farm diversification, rural development, agritourism, perceptions

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<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>CAP</b>	Common Agricultural Policy
<b>WTO</b>	World Trade Organization

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# 1. Introduction: From farming to hosting

Which images come to mind when you think of the word "farm"? The images may often relate to the demanding practices of the typical life of a farmer, an every-day life that starts before the sun rises and does not finish until after the sun has set. This classic image would probably appear in most of our minds when we think of the word "farm". However, the growing global economy and the new agriculture policies have had an impact of the practices on farms worldwide (Sharpley and Vass, 2006). Practices, such as service, recreation, and leisure have become a part of the strategy for farms to sustain their business in today's thriving economy (Beiger and Weinert, 2006). Poon (1994) explains that there has been a growing demand for experiences in rural areas, so evidently, farms have the potential to create tourism experiences which attract visitors, thus strengthen the business in rural areas (McNally, 2001), this branch of tourism is also known as agritourism. Gössling and Mattson (2002) argue that agritourism not only benefits the farm, but also the whole region. The practices create a ripple effect of other local economies, such as public services. Agritourism is proposed to educate the visitors of how a farm operates, the caring of animals, the food supply and production, hence creating a wider societal understanding and support for the survival of our rural communities.

Previous research in agritourism has focused on the motives and reasons for the entrepreneurial development, tax incentives, income, employment, lack of governmental support, and social benefits of meeting different people (McElwee, 2006; Lordkipanidze, Brezet and Backman, 2005; Das and Rainey, 2010). Research has also highlighted the benefits of developing new practice at farms, as it strengthens the local economy, community, natural resource and the cultural heritage (Barbieri and Mshenga, 2006; Colton and Bissix, 2005). Nevertheless, according to Sharpley and Vass (2006) there is a lack of research of how practitioners at farms perceive agritourism. This particular theme is relevant, due to the fact that traditional industries are standing at a cross- road of either phasing out or changing business strategies. The purpose of this thesis is to identify how farms in southwestern part of Sweden practice and perceive the strategy of agritourism. Research in this particular area of how to apply agritourism practices in rural regions is vital in relation to theoretical implications as well as practical suggestions to rural entrepreneurs and municipalities.

### ***Aim of the research***

This study aims to illuminate and explain the dynamics of opportunities and challenges when engaging in agritourism practices and their relation to one another. I have proposed the following two questions to fulfil my aim:

- What agritourism practices are applied at farms?
- How are agritourism practices perceived by practitioners at farms?

### ***Disposition***

One of the reasons why farms have come to diversify into tourism can be found in the political policy framework of the EU and national government. Therefore, the second chapter will explain the agricultural policy of the European Union, which lay a foundation for Sweden's agricultural policy, followed by "Landsbygdsprogrammet 2007- 2013" (Rural programme) of the region of Halland, Sweden. The third chapter will discuss previous research of farm diversification through agritourism, how agritourism can create a sustainable development in rural areas, lifestyle entrepreneurship, and perceptions of agritourism practices. Chapter four presents five farms which took part in the study, followed by an account of methods and study design. This section also outlines how the qualitative interviews with the 11 chosen respondents were conducted, the observations I made while visiting the farms, and what written documents I collected during my journey. In the fifth chapter I will analyze my empirical findings and relate it to the theoretical framework of the perception of agritourism practices. The first part describes the findings related to agritourism products, accommodation, marketing and hosting visitors; the second part refers to the cooperation's among private enterprises, the public sector, training in tourism, and finally how seasonality and location affects the business. The sixth and final chapter draws on these concepts and seek to present an overview of the opportunities and challenges of agritourism, and the dynamics between the two. Each chapter will be introduced by a short summary which reflects upon the outcomes of every chapter.



## **2. Rural Policy within EU and Sweden**

*This chapter gives a background to the development of rural policy within the EU and Sweden. After the Second World War, the state had a period of “generous systems of production- oriented subsidies” which was distributed to the agricultural sector; this period is described as the productivist model.” The model caused environmental issues, constraints in the national budget, and an over production of food supply which resulted in that a new reform emerged, the “post productivist model. The new reform forced farms to focus on producing quality food instead of quantity; the farms would now need to adopt other non-traditional activities in order to sustain their business. Tourism would become a popular method to maintain the farm business. The EU agricultural policy had and still has a major affect on Swedish agriculture policy, especially once Sweden became member of the European Union in the beginning of the 1990s. The “Landsbygdsprogrammet 2007-2013” (Rural programme) is under the jurisdiction of Länsstyrelsen (County administrative board) of Halland and will be further described in this policy section. The report “Landsbygdsprogrammet 2007-2013” argues the importance of encouraging traditional agriculture and forestry industry to adopt new practices. Tourism has been proposed to be a strong tool to create a sustainable development in the rural region.*

### ***The development of the European Agricultural Policy***

In postmodern times, the industrialized world, especially in rural areas, have been strongly affected by a number of problems, such as out- migration, agricultural restructuring, economic decline and loss of rural identity (Wilson and Rigg, 2003; Sharpley and Vass, 2006). After the Second World War, the state had a period of “generous systems of production- oriented subsidies” (Sharpley and Vass, 2006; 1042) which were distributed to the agricultural sector in order to secure the food supply. This period is associated with technological advances, strategic interests and heavy subsidies (Evans, Morris and Winter, 2002; Sharpley and Vass, 2006). Burton (2004; 194) describes this profiling trends of this period as “the productivist model”, Illbery and Bowler (1998; 63) also portray this time as “the industrialization of agriculture”. The industrialization of agriculture is characterized by three elements,

“intensification, concentration and specialization” (ibid, 1998; 63). These three elements created an increased differentiation in the rural regions. For instance, larger farm units were formed, and as a result of economic scale, a decline of jobs in farming became visible. Thus, an overall shift in composition emerged in rural areas (see also Wilson and Rigg, 2003). Burton (2004) and Evans *et al* (2002) explained that the productivist period had created environmental issues, there was a constraint in the national budget, and an over production of food supply emerged. Stemming from these issue created during the productivist period, a new economical phase surfaced, known as the “post- productivist” period (Burton, 2004; 197). Illbery and Bowler (1998; 57) describe when during the “post- productivist” period, the state could no longer subsidize the agricultural sector as before, resulting in that the food production would be produced qualitatively rather than quantitatively (Evans *et al* (2002). Wilson and Rigg (2003) argue that this movement reflects how agricultural production commodified the countryside, meaning that new non- traditional business practices emerged in the rural area, such as tourism.

In the year 1992 The European Union introduced the “Common Agricultural Policy” (CAP) reform. On the global scale “World trade organization” (WTO) was founded in 1995 (SOU, 2003:122; Sharpley and Vass, 2006; Colton and Bissix, 2005; Hjalager, 1996; Wilson and Rigg, 2003). The new European policies within CAP created a framework for a free market the for European farm production, thus enabling farms to follow the demand and supply on the market. Burton (2004) explains how the main aim of the CAP policies where to encourage farms to diversify into other economical practices (also Evans, *et al*, 2002). The diversification meant that the farmer’s dependence on traditional agriculture practices would be reduced, hence, the farmer would in addition become a “shopkeeper, leisure provider, foresters, nature conservers and public custodians of the countryside” (Burton, 2004; 195). McNally (2001) and Lordikipanidse, Brezet and Backman (2005) claim that farm- based tourism is perceived to be one of the most popular farm diversification methods among farms.

## ***The Agricultural Policy in Sweden***

Sweden entered into the European Union in 1995 and was by that a subject to the EU's CAP. In 2003, 1.7% of the Swedish working population worked within the agricultural sector. The employee rate has dropped by 9,000 in the past ten years (Statens Jordbruksverk, 2011;SOU, 2006; 106). Despite the decline in agricultural and forestry, the rural areas are still highly dependent upon the traditional industries (SOU, 2006). The public sector supported with subsidies the declining traditional industries. However, these subsidies came to an end in the 1990's when Sweden's public sector was hit by one of the most severe financial crises that the country has experienced to date. In the aftermath of this, private investment occurred in rural communities. Private sector's investment in rural communities resulted in "new" industries, such as tourism and small scale food production etc (ibid:106). Gössling and Mattson (2002) argue that the structural changes in rural regions have created a political response, which encouraged the new economic activities and farm tourism gained much attention as a tool to strengthen the agricultural diversification.

## ***Rural policy in Halland***

### **Landsbygdsprogrammet 2007-2013**

The "Landsbygdsprogrammet" was founded by the Swedish Government and confirmed by the EU-Commission in the year 2006. Jordbruksverket (Swedish Board of Agriculture) in cooperation with the regional Länsstyrelsen (County Administrative Board) has the main responsibility to identify details of the implementation of the program in all regions of Sweden. The programme focuses on enterprises in agriculture and forestry, and is a supportive framework for improving and enhancing the environment. (Länsstyrelsen, Hallands Län, 2008)



Figure 1. Halland (20110315), accessed on google.com

The report Landsbyggsprogrammet 2007- 2013 argues that rural areas of Halland have plenty of recourses which can be used in a number of ways. Several enterprises within the agriculture and forestry industry have adopted new practices, such as creating and distributing renewable energy, and tourism (Länsstyrelsen, Hallands Län, 2008).

According to this report, tourism has become a more common tool to improve the rural economy in Halland. It has been noted that enterprises in the countryside have created different leisure experience concepts, such as sleep, eat and explore the area. The enterprises have taken advantage of their natural and cultural recourses by offering overnight stays, guided tours and special events. Additionally, the report highlights the importance of attracting visitors as it enables the enterprises to expand in the market, thus strengthening the rural area and community economically and socially (ibid, 2008).

Moreover, there is a growing demand for organic foods, and this consumer trend has encouraged producers to cooperation the pursuit of marketing their products. Producers and the local food strive to create an identity for their products that associates the food products with the homes and farms in which they are produced. As a part of this strategy, producers have opened their homes for the consumers to visit and experience the production first hand. The creation of this image is believed to a strong tool to enhance the region of Halland to become a “food” region (ibid, 2008).

### **3. Agritourism and rural development**

*This chapter will discuss how agritourism has been applied at farms and how the practices benefit rural development. As noted, agritourism has been proposed to be a popular farm diversification method in order to sustain the businesses and further, evidence show the positive impacts on the whole community for instance by creating jobs, attracting and educating visitors of the area and about the food production etc. Previous research of how practitioners perceive agritourism practices has been highlighted through different themes, such as agritourism product development, the public sector engagement, hosting visitors, the training in tourism, marketing, and cooperation among farm tourism enterprises, location and seasonality. These themes are the analytical toolbox I use for my study. Product development of agritourism has been proposed to be difficult according to practitioners, as they lack information and training on how to develop a product. The public sector has been argued to be one of the main factors for an agritourism business to succeed, as well as cooperation among farm enterprises. Marketing is a key challenge when creating a product, due to lack of experience and knowledge. The issues mentioned above are a few of the aspects which will be discussed in the following section.*

There are many definitions of farm- based tourism activities; however there are distinctions between the concepts (Davies and Gilbert, 1992; Philip, Hunter and Blackstock, 2010). “Agritourism” has often been perceived as a subset of rural tourism, (Oppermann, 1996; Nilsson, 2002; Clarke, 1996) often included in the same box as farm tourism, farm-based tourism and agrotourism (Barbieri and Mshenga, 2008). When grasping a particular phenomenon it is vital to understand the basic definition of the term. This study will use the definition proposed by Barbieri and Mshenga (2008; 168), “Any practice developed on a working farm with the purpose to attract visitors”. For me, as a researcher, is it important to understand the basic definition of the phenomena, as it will influence my standpoint of what type of farms I choose for my study. In this study, I have chosen five working farms which have created agritourism experiences in order to attract visitors.

There is a growing number of farms, more specifically small- scale farms, which are striving to reduce the dependence on the traditional practices as it has become unprofitable (Barbieri and Mshenga, 2008). Andersson, Carlsen and Getz (2002) suggest agritourism practices to be an effective diversification tool to revive the economy of farm enterprises, as well as strengthening the community spirit, managing the natural resources and cultural heritage ( also in McGhee, 2007; Busby and Rendle, 2000; Barbieri and Mshenga, 2008; McNally, 2001; Rozmon, Potocnik, Pazek, Borec, Majkovic and Bohanec, 2009; Gössling and Mattsson, 2002; Barbieri and Mshenga, 2006; Colton and Bissix, 2005). Sharpley and Vass (2006) explain that there has been a strong emphasis on policy for farm diversification, however there is a lack of research alluding to how the process of farm diversification through agritourism is perceived by practitioners.

### ***Farm diversification through agritourism***

Farm diversification has become a common strategy at farms in order to reduce the dependence upon the agricultural production as the main source of income (McNally, 2001). Beyond the economic need for diversification, Sharpley and Vass (2006) high light several other reasons why farm enterprises decide to change strategic direction of their businesses, such as the “physical/geographical characteristics of the farm”; the “Demographic and lifestyle factors”; the “availability and nature of public sector support”; the “perception of tourism as a diversification option” (ibid, 2006; 1043). McInerney and Turner (1991) argue that no matter what size or type of farm, activities of the diversification, has a minor impact on the income. However, McNally (2001) stress that despite the marginal profit from diversification projects, the method is a strategy to out the financial risks. Rozman *et al* (2009; 629) support this particular matter, explaining that tourism is a significant diversification option when working within an “unstable- agriculture- based economy”.

McInerney and Turner (1991) claim that larger farms due to a larger capital base, often have a stronger potential to diversify their business, in comparison to smaller farms. For instance, larger farms are more likely to provide accommodation facilities to their visitors (McNally, 2001). Bernardo *et al* (2008; 15) explain that there are three approaches in which farms can adopt agritourism practices. First category is agritourism as a “supplementary enterprise”, meaning that agritourism is a minor activity which complements the other traditional activities at the farm. Second category is agritourism as a “complementary enterprise”,

meaning that agritourism has an equal share with other traditional practices at the farm. The final category is agritourism as a “primary enterprise”, meaning that agritourism is the dominant economical income at farms. Noticeably, the magnitude of tourism activities may vary depending on the needs of the farms. Davies and Gilbert (1992;57) claim there are three kinds of agritourism products; “day visitors based”, “activity based” and “accommodation based”. The three types of agritourism products will correlate to which business approach the farm has applied, e.g. a supplementary, a complementary or a primary tourism enterprise.

The development of agritourism is not a new phenomenon (Clarke, 1996; Busby and Randle, 2000). Nonetheless, there has been a dramatic increase since the 1970s regarding product development of agritourism. Development of the agritourism product is a reflection of the demand for more genuine experiences of rural areas (Poon, 1994; see also Henderson, 2009; Hjalager, 1996). Colton and Bissix (2005:104) claims that there is a demand to experience “stress relief”, that is associated with the solitude and tranquility of the countryside. Therefore, farms have started to use more of their natural resources to create experience which attract visitors (Nilsson, 2002). Agritourism includes a variety of activities that attract a variety of market segments, such as special events, festivals, overnight stays, tours, corn mazes and self- recreational harvesting (Blekesaune *et al*, 2010; Barbieri and Mshenga, 2008; McKenzie and Wysocki,2008). From this, it can be concluded that agritourism has great potential for farms to sustain their business, as they can use their own resources, and commoditize it for the purpose of attracting visitors. Moreover, Gössling and Mattson (2002) propose that agritourism is a tool for sustainable development in the rural region.

### ***Sustainable development through agritourism***

The concept of sustainable development refers to the attempt to combine and manage environmental and socio- economical issues in an area (Hopwood, Mellor and O`Brein, 2005). Barbieri and Mshenga (2008) emphasize that due to a decline in traditional forestry and agrarian industries, community agencies and governments are searching for solutions to promote sustainable development in rural areas (also in Fleisher and Tchetchik, 2005; Che, Veeck and Veeck, 2005; Gössling and Mattsson, 2002; Davies and Gilbert, 1992, Sharpley and Vass, 2006; Henderson, 2009; Das and Rainey, 2010). Tourism at a farm is argued to diversify the economy in rural regions by providing job opportunities and other public local

sectors, e.g. public transports, banks and post offices. Gössling and Mattson (2002) pinpoint that tourism at farm is more beneficial to the region in comparison to a large tourist enterprise, for instance a hotel since the small tourism enterprise distributes the benefits to other local stakeholders. Davies and Gilbert (1991) argue that by developing accommodation facilities as part of the tourism product, farms can get tourists to stay longer and thus increase spending. On the contrary, Hjalager (1996) stresses that farms based tourism enterprises face challenges, e.g. the small income can prevent a long term financial development for farms. Oppermann (1996) agree on this matter, claiming that farm based tourism can be to a certain degree a good complement to the farms business; however tourism is still a temporary business to compensate the declining profits from the traditional practices at farms.

Moreover, Davies and Gilbert (1991; 58) argue that the image of the countryside reflects the “Healthy living” lifestyle in rural areas. Considering the growing health awareness in our society, previous research has noted the demand for more holidays trips based in the countryside and rural areas. Another aspect within “Healthy living” holidays is the experience of naturally produced food. One reason for the growing demand for naturally produced food is the increasing awareness of mass food productions (Gössling and Mattson, 2002). Meanwhile, Colton and Bissix (2005) address a lack of awareness from the public about the agricultural sector. Hjalager (1996) and Gössling and Mattson (2002) stress that agritourism can become an efficient way to educate visitors regarding the issues and values of farm life and food production. Che *et al* (2005;233) support this argument and claims that farms can provide “edutainment”, an educational product which also entertains the visitors.

The demand for healthy food has supported production of ecological food (Barbieri and Mshenga, 2008; Che, Veeck and Veeck, 2005; Fleischer and Tchetchik, 2005; Bernando *et al*, 2008). The benefits for the farm enterprises are two-fold, they can refine and sell some of their own produce directly at the place of production, and they provide a natural and interesting experience of farm life for their visitors Gössling and Mattson (2002). In conclusion, agritourism practices facilitate a sustainable development in several ways, such as creating jobs in the near area; encourages the aspect of local networking; agritourism experience attract and educate visitors of the life at a farm; the local environments and cultural traditions are maintained; the generated money stays within the rural community.



This in turn, is an incentive for farmers to re-invest in the rural community. However, there are challenges for farms applying the practices of agritourism, especially due to the small income the business generates.

In the report “Landsbygdsprogrammet 2007- 2013” there is an emphasis on the importance to of encouraging rural entrepreneurs to engage in different kinds of businesses. This will revitalize the rural area, maintain the local community spirit and attract visitors (Länsstyrelsen, Halland 2008). Tourism has become one of the common methods adopted by rural entrepreneurs.

### ***Lifestyle and rural entrepreneurship***

Rural tourism and hospitality is mainly characterized by small and often self employment enterprises. This scope and size of the business enables the owner to pursue practices which fall within their lifestyle preference (Andesson *et al*, 2003). For instance, tourism at a farm makes it possible for farms to generate an additional income or even replace previous traditional practices. The offered services, accommodation and an experience, such as stone oven baking, horse riding and other similar activities relates to the lifestyle entrepreneur of the enterprise (Andersson Cederholm and Hultman, 2010;366). A lifestyle entrepreneur, according to Marcketti *et al* (2006), develops small day- to day activities which result into a functioning business. Lynch (1998; 332) point out that lifestyle entrepreneurs are driven by emotional motives, for instance “it allows me to work from home”, “makes me (the host) feel good”, “use of a spare room”, “Meeting interesting people” (also in Gössling and Mattson, 2002). Despite the benefits of leading a lifestyle entrepreneurship, Andersson *et al* (2003) implies that entrepreneurs in rural areas often experience issues with hosting, such as the intense contact with guests, the home being a working place and few visitors during the low season. Furthermore, Shapley and Vass (2006; 1043) claimed that the farming community can meet difficulties when being a part of a “service role”. The issue of how farmers become a part of the tourism product is an interesting aspect, considering that the identities of farmers are changing. The change of identity is an important issue to emphasize upon, as farmers worldwide must constantly find ways to renew their business, which indirectly results in a renewal of their own identity (Burton, 2004).

Rural entrepreneurs have implemented tourism as the practice creates an additional income and complements other traditional practices at the farm. Despite the opportunities agritourism withholds, there are challenges which emerge when implementing the practices in the business.

### **Perception of agritourism practices**

This section will discuss different themes of perceptions of when applying agritourism at a farm. The following themes which have emerged are product development, cooperation, public sector support, marketing, training (Colton and Bissix, 2005; Che *et al.*, 2005), location and seasonality (Sharpley and Vass, 2006), and the aspect of hosting (Lynch, 1998; Anderson *et al.*, 2003). The following themes will be the main foundation of my study in order to uncover the dynamics of opportunities and challenges when applying agritourism practices at farms.

Product development is an issue for practitioners at farms. Agritourism enterprises, like any other tourism enterprise, need to constantly update and differentiate their product and services (Barbieri and Mshenga, 2008). Colton and Bissix (2005) agree on this matter, claiming it is important for the products and services to meet tourist's demands. Nonetheless, farmers or management of the farm often lack experience and knowledge of how to manage a tourism product (Busby and Randle, 2000).

It is argued that practitioners would need more support from public sectors when establishing agritourism products (Colton and Bissix, 2005). Nevertheless, farmers who practice agritourism often lack encouragement from the agricultural industry, which can prevent farms from creating an "economic diversification opportunity" for themselves (ibid 2005; 100). It is proposed that if there is no association, a cooperative approach between farms and government, it will not stimulate practitioners to develop and market agritourism products. In conclusion the aspect of a cooperative approach between practitioners and government is a necessity in order to sustain the business in rural areas (Che *et al.*, 2005).

Sharpley and Vass (2006) address location, which can mean both distance and landscape, to be an important aspect in order to attract visitors to the rural areas (also argued by Oppermann, 1996). A way of attracting visitors could be to create a "product package" (Hjalager, 1996; 110) such as offering accommodation and activities, in this way farms could attract and maintain visitors during a longer period. A way of creating a product package

could be to establish clusters of farm tourism enterprises. Hjalager (1996) exemplifies this by describing how cooperation's among rural enterprises can enhance a united attraction, a "showcase" (ibid, 1996; 110). The farms could together create packages and promotional opportunities for their businesses.

Halme and Fadeeva (2001) support the aspect of cooperation among agritourism enterprises. The cooperation could result in an increased coherency and community spirit, which would create a competitive advantage (Also in Fadeeva, 2003; Halme, 2001). Despite the positive aspects of cooperation among farmers, Colton and Bissix (2005) noted that competition and territorialism often exists within rural areas. The competition and territorialism among farmers can make it difficult to work and prosper together. Nonetheless, Che *et al* (2005) explain that agritourism enterprises felt stronger competition from non agricultural attractions, especially during low season.

Furthermore, Che *et al* (2005) emphasize that it is marketing which prevents agritourism to develop to its full potential. Like many other tourism enterprises, agritourism enterprises must also invest in upgrading their products and experiences, and at the same time communicate to their visitors by using web- based marketing (Barbieri and Mshenga, 2008; McNally, 2001). Fleishcher and Tchetcik (2005) argue that entrepreneurs in most cases work independently and advertise by using different media channels, such as guide books, yellow pages and tourism associations etc. However, marketing often requires knowledge and expert skills, which the individual farm enterprises often do not possess. The main difficulties practitioners experience when applying agritourism practices is the lack of time to wait for expert knowledge and skills to create a market ready agritourism product (Che *et al*, 2005; also in Colton and Bissiz, 2005). Therefore, the concept of collaboration on a regional and national level can be an efficient tool to reduce difficulties with marketing. Through marketing alliances farms can then have a possibility to exchange ideas and experiences, deal with the seasonality issues and attend courses (Sharpley and Vass, 2006; Che *et al*, 2005).

Moreover, Colton and Bissix (2005) and Rozmon *et al* (2009) pinpoint the aspect of training in tourism. Despite the opportunities which agrioturism practices may have, farmers are often not aware of the "value- added potential" (Colton and Bissix, 2005; 106) which is acquired through agritourism. A "resource guide" booklet on how to manage agritourism could be handed out to farmers (ibid, 2005; 107). However, Sharpley and Vass (2006) argue that

practitioners perceive training to be a low priority for their business. Consequently, to establish a successful agritourism business there must be a mutual assistance between farm – based tourism enterprises and public sector (Sharply and Vass, 2006; Colton and Bissix, 2005). However, Rozmon *et al* (2009) stress that to be successful, farm tourism enterprises must conduct a search for market behavior, education, and customized offers.

## **4. Study design and methods**

*This chapter will describe how I conducted my research. In order to answer my research question, I have chosen a qualitative method design, more specifically qualitative interview, structured observation and documentation analysis. I conducted nine personal interviews with 11 respondents from five different farms in the region of Halland, Sweden. During my structured observation I had three themes in mind; product development, marketing and location. The third method was documentation analysis. I selected marketing material, such as brochures and the farms website's. The data has been analyzed through a coding system. Three main themes emerged in the analysis, service development at farms; rural cooperations; and location and seasonality. The collected data has been studied from a hermeneutic viewpoint. The findings and conclusions of this research are subject to my personal interpretation of the world and are not aimed to depict one absolute reality.*

### ***Selection of farms***

The five farms were initially contacted by email with information about the purpose of this study. I then got in touch with the practitioners by telephone, where I explained more in detail about the study. We agreed upon a date for the interview session. I also contacted four more farms but they did not answer to my inquiry. Nine farms were contacted in total, and five of the farms agreed to be a part of the study.

I have chosen five working farms in the region of Halland. The farms, a part from managing tourism, focus on various agricultural practices, such as dairy production, crop production, horse breeding and lamb cattle production. I decided to name the farms depending on their main activity at the farm and my overall impression of the farm. The five farms are the "Four Season Farm", the "Horse Farm", the "Nature Farm", the "Harmony Farm", and the "Sheep Farm". I choose to anonymize the farms due to my aim of this study; to gain knowledge of what kind of agritourism practices are applied and how the practices are perceived by the practitioners.

### **The Four Season Farm**

The Four Season Farm is a family owned agricultural and dairy producing business. The farm today has 55 employees and around 1200 milking cows on the property. A part from the dairy production, the farm also produces crop and food. The Four Season Farm started to practice tourism 14 years ago and today offer their visitors guided tours, different theme events, such as Christmas Fair, Garden products events, Children's week, and "Ko släppet" (An event where the farm sets out the cows for the spring season). The Four Season Farm welcomes visitors all year round. Furthermore, the farm has a café and a restaurant where everything offered is either produced at the farm or in the local area. The farm is also a part of a food network, which is engaged in creating a food image for the region. In October 2010 they opened a hotel with 21 rooms.

### **The Horse Farm**

The Horse Farm is a family run horse farm and its main focus is breeding horses. The farm started practicing tourism 10 years ago and today offer visitors horseback riding and accommodation. The farm has two apartments with a kitchen, offering 9 beds. The Horse Farm collaborates with several networks, a farm accommodation network, the national ecotourism organization and a network of organic farmers. The tourism season is primarily during the summer. The farm has no employees.

### **The Nature Farm**

The Nature Farm is a family farm that used to focus only on dairy production. In the year 2006 the family decided to sell the animals and focus on new practices. Today the farm mainly focuses on tourism and grain farming. The farm consists of a washhouse, cowshed and a large dwelling house. It offers a variety of activities, such as baking in a stone oven, soap workshop, yoga, massage and coaching. The farm has undergone an expansion and renovation, making the facilities useful for staying overnight, to have conferences and other activities. In the spring of the year 2010, the farm expanded with four new cottages and today they offer 16 beds. The tourism season at the farm is mainly during the summertime. The farm has no employees.

### **The Harmony Farm**

The Harmony farm is a family farm which mainly focused on dairy production. In the year 2000 the family decided to broaden their business and apply new practices, such as biodynamic crop production and tourism. The stable for the cows was rebuilt to a stable for horses, and the barn was rebuilt into two apartments for their visitors. The Harmony Farm is part of a farm accommodation network and a regional network. Moreover, the farm strives to become an educational institute and offers a large conference room in the barn. The tourism season is mainly during the summer months. The farm has no employees.

### **The Sheep Farm**

The Sheep Farm has been a family owned lamb farm since 1987. They produce and sell their organic lamb meat. Besides selling their lamb meat, the farm has also opened a restaurant/ café and offers guided tours around the property. The Sheep Farm welcomes visitors all year around. However, the main tourist season is during the summer. The farm is part of a food network, which consist of other rural enterprises in the region of Halland. The farm has 5 employees.

### **Selection of participants**

I selected five respondents from the Four Season Farm because of the size of the farm. I chose respondents with different positions, the CEO, the owner, a farmworker, the event planner and a previous guide. The reason for choosing several respondents from the Four Season farm was to identify different perspectives from the practitioners working directly or indirectly with agritourism. Furthermore I chose the two owners from the Horse Farm, one of the owners from the Nature farm, two of the owners from Harmony Farm and the owner from the Sheep Farm. To conclude, I have chosen five different farms in the region of Halland and conducted nine interviews with eleven respondents. The interviews lasted between one to two and a half hours.

### ***Multi- method approach towards rural entrepreneurship***

A multi-method, qualitative approach grants for a stronger study, since it generates greater nuanes in data. It can be noted that by combing several qualitative approaches, the study will be strengthened (Bryman, 2008). I chose a qualitative method design because of the aspiration the methods have in understanding and then illuminating a certain phenomenon. I knew I would need to use qualitative method, considering the aim of my study is to identify what

practices of agritourism were applied at the farms and explain how the practitioners perceive the practices of agritourism. Several method tools can be applied when applying a qualitative method design (Silverman, 2009; Booth *et al*, 2008). For my study I have chosen three types of qualitative methods which I saw fit for my research questions. The first method was qualitative interviewing as it enables me to ask the respondents about their perceptions of agritourism. The second method I opted for was structured observation, which allowed me to observe and take pictures of the agritourism practices being carried out. Thirdly I used documentation analysis; I here selected the farm's marketing brochures and websites. The three qualitative methods were all useful in order to answer the aim of the study, to identify what kind of agritourism practices were applied at the farms, and how the agritourism practices were perceived by the practitioners.

### **Qualitative interviewing**

Qualitative interviews are used when striving to uncover normative patterns of behavior, as it reflects upon the psychological motives, social interaction, cultural beliefs, shared knowledge and power relationships (Bryman, 2008). In order to investigate the situation, the researcher must analyze a social setting, formal or informal organization or events. Through the investigation of the situation, the researchers explore the individual's belief, their ways of interaction and routines (Roethe *et al*, 2009).

Qualitative interview with a semi-structured design was a vital method for the aim of my study. The key themes which the research revolves around were identified beforehand, but allowed the respondents to develop their thoughts and arguments on and around these themes freely (Smith, 2010). This was essential in order to identify practitioner's perceptions. The qualitative interviewing will be the main research method supported by structured observation and documentation analysis. To collect the empirical material for this study, I spent 12 days in the region of Halland, with Ringenäs as my base. The interviews took place in at the respondents homes or offices and this was considered important for the study because the respondent is likely to be more opened and relaxed and allow the researcher to make additional observations from respondents' facial expressions, body behavior and general behavior and attitude. Also, the respondents were this way able to present and show me around the property and facilities (Smith, 2010; Bryman, 2008; Booth *et al*, 2008). The interviews have been audio recorded, which made it easier for me when transcribing the



collected data and also helped me to reflect upon what had been said during the interviews (Holstein and Gubrium, 2009; Brinkmann, 2009).

The interviews were conducted and transcribed into Swedish, then later translated into English. I carefully paid attention to preserve the underlying meanings of the information collected during the interviews.

### **Structured observation**

The purpose of structured observation is to observe and highlight a situation (Bryman, 2008). Flick (2009) argues that observation can be divided into two aspects. Firstly, the researcher gains access to the observed object, the field or person. Secondly, is how the researcher's observation goes through a process, it enables the researcher to concentrate on the vital material for the research questions. The advantage of using observation is that it takes place during a longer period, as opposed to an interview which often is a one-off encounter. Observation makes it possible to come in contact with the people and the field within the chosen research objectives (Booth *et al*, 2008). The weakness of applying the observation is that it cannot capture the processes, such as biographies or longer events (Flick, 2009). Observation is a flexible method and a good complement to my other qualitative methods; interviewing and documentation analysis (Bryman, 2008; Flick, 2009).

I conducted the observation by spending additional time at the farm after each interview. As good practice, I created an observation schedule (Bryman, 2008), which included the following themes: *Product development*, meaning what type of experiences were offered, the projected symbols, the activities between the working farm and tourism. The second theme was *marketing*; I looked for visible brochures and signs at the farm and in the surrounding area. The last theme for my observation was *location*, meaning the distance, the geographical position and surrounding areas. Pictures were also taken as part of the observation, and this was a helpful way to visualise and support the arguments of this research.

### **Documentation analysis**

Documentation analysis is a method which focuses on the study of notes, case reports, drafts, remarks, diaries, annual reports, contracts, letter or expert opinions (Atkinson and Coffey, 2009). When using documentation for research, it is important for the researcher to ask “who produced this document”, “for what purpose”, and “for whom”? (Flick, 2009; 257). Certain

criteria which need to be addressed when applying documentation analysis is the authenticity of the material, its credibility, representativeness, and the meaning of the information in the document. Document analysis can be a good addition to my interviews and observation, not as a stand-alone method, as the research can then become limited (Booth *et al*, 2008).

To reach my aim of the study, I chose documentation analysis to strengthen the data regarding how farms practice agritourism and what kind of images do the farms project to the outside world. I studied the farm's marketing brochures and websites. I had the three questions, in mind when analyzing the material, "Who produced this document?", "for what purpose?", and "for whom?" (Flick, 2009; 257). I also had in mind *the meaning* of the material, what each farm tried to describe and visualize through the brochures and websites.

### ***Data analysis***

Once the data had been collected, it was coded and categorized by conceptual themes (Bryman 2008; Smith, 2010). The first theme is *service development at farms*. I discuss how the practitioners have created the agritourism experience, accommodation; marketing and the perception of hosting visitors. The second theme in my analysis was *rural cooperation*. In this section I highlight the cooperation among private enterprises, the public sector and training in tourism. The third theme in my analysis is *location and seasonality*; here I discuss how location and seasonality impacts on the business. Crang (2003; 127) stressed that it is through the analysis that I create interpretations and not answers. From the themes I started to underline keywords which I interpreted as opportunities and challenges. I used color pens, green color for opportunity and red color for challenges. In order to reach my aim of the study, I shed light upon the dynamics of opportunities and challenges between the agritourism practices; product development, public sector engagement, networking, training, and hosting-role. The aspect of location and seasonality is also included; as it affects the practices of agritourism. This discussion will be in the final chapter of this thesis.

### ***Limitations of the Empirical research***

I have conducted my research with a hermeneutic point of view which seeks to establish an understanding of the world around the researcher. Understanding is a way for us to orient ourselves in the situation, a basic function for our own survival. Through understanding we start to explore and explain the cultural science (Grix, 2004). Although the narratives from the

practitioners seek to illuminate their perceptions, the analysis and interpretation is inevitably nuanced by the researcher's own world view.

Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009) pinpoint the importance to be aware of the empirical material which supports ideas and theories, as it may not necessarily reflect upon reality. The empirical material cannot prove or falsify the real world; however it can create an argument for or against the theoretical framework. "Empirical material should be seen as an argument in efforts to make a case for a particular way of understanding social reality, in the context of a never- ending debate" (Ibid, 2009; 304). The empirical material can be a way to project ones understanding of the world.

Whilst conducting my research, I was aware of my own interpretation when listening to the respondent's narratives and my own observations of the farms. My intention with the study was to explore the issue of how practitioners practice and perceive agritourism. It is therefore critical that this piece of research is read and understood as nothing more and nothing less than a contribution to our understanding of a social reality.

## **5. The creation of experiences in rural areas**

*This chapter highlights three main themes of how the practitioners from the five farms manage agritourism practices. The first theme is the service development at the farm , this includes creating products, accommodation, marketing, and hosting visitors. The second theme is the rural cooperation; networking between rural enterprises, public sector engagement, and training. The third theme is how seasonality and location affects the business. The following themes will be the foundation of the final conclusion of which opportunities and challenges emerge when practicing agritourism according to the practitioners. It was identified that the majority of the practitioners did see great potential in practicing agritourism at the farm. However they did experience difficulties as well. Several practitioners mentioned that the first years were challenging when building a proper tourism experience. They explained that today they were aware of the importance of creating their own experiences which reflected upon the farm and their values. Cooperation with other private enterprises or the local municipality was perceived to be important when working with tourism. Several of the practitioners cooperated through a formal or an informal network. Marketing was argued to be one of the most challenging aspects within agritourism practices. Training in tourism was perceived to be a low priority, however several pointed out the importance of having more information on how to attract visitors, especially during the low season. The majority of respondents enjoyed hosting visitors, as they could work from home, meet people and use the facilities for accommodation. However, it was noted that hosting visitors prevented the feeling of “freedom” among several rural entrepreneurs. When asked how location and seasonality affected their business, the majority of them expressed that location did not matter. Nevertheless, the seasonality was an issue, especially for the smaller farms*

### ***Service development at farms***

The tourism activities started quite spontaneously at the farm”, claimed a practitioner from the Sheep Farm. Several practitioners from the farms did not plan to have a tourism enterprise; it was an activity which started to grow slowly. The reason why the tourism activities emerged was when they noted how many visitors came and walked around the farm.

Another practitioner from the Four Season Farm described how when there were many visitors strolling around the farm's park, the staff ran out of the main building with a sign "coffee and cake inside". Once they took notice of the demand for farm experiences, it was then the experience package at the farms expanded. For instance the Nature Farm and Four Season farm created accommodations for their visitors and the Sheep farm created a "lamb safari" tour around their property and reconstructed their old wine cellar from the 17<sup>th</sup> to a café (Figure 2).



Figure 2. The café, the Sheep Farm

These examples support Poon (1994) and Henderson's (2009) view mentioned earlier, that agritourism products reflect the demand for more genuine experiences in the rural areas. Another example was when the Four Season Farm had its first Christmas event or "Kosläpp" (Figure 3) (sending the cows outdoors for the spring season) which attracted many more visitors than expected.



Figure 3. "ko släpp" the Four Season Farm

The practitioners from the other farms also had similar experiences when arranging smaller events. These examples project how the demand for experience in the rural setting has inspired the practitioners to create more activities and events to attract visitors.

Consequently, by managing a café and other activities to attract visitors to the farms has strengthened the overall business. All practitioners mentioned that tourism has great potential to grow at the farm; however the tourism activities were not a *gold mine* for their business. As pointed out by McNally (2001) and Rozmon et al (2009) despite the minor income of the

diversification; the strategy is a way to reduce the financial risks. On the contrary Oppermann (1996) and Hjalager (1996) claim that because tourism activities at farms generate a small income, the activities are only temporary to complement the declining profits in the traditional practices. However, the practitioners from the Sheep Farm claimed, “If we did not have the one (tourism), we could not have had the other (agriculture)”, meaning that if they did not have the café nor the restaurant, less visitors would have come, thus affecting the other traditional business activities. Therefore, despite generating low income, tourism activities was still perceived as a rewarding tool and good complement to the other economical activities at the farms. Arguably, the tourism activities at the farms were a complement to the other traditional practices and not only a temporary activity.

### **The creation of value at farms**

The practitioners had been managing tourism activities for the past 8-15 years. Several of them mentioned that in the beginning they offered experiences which lacked a proper focus. Busby and Randle (2000) pinpoint that many farm managers often lack experience and knowledge of how to manage tourism products. However, it was argued by the practitioners that overtime they learned how to manage tourism products by offering more precise experiences, which reflected upon their farms history and heritage. Barbieri and Mshenga (2008) stress that agritourism enterprise, like any other tourism enterprise, need to constantly update and differentiate their products and services. Practitioners from the Four Season Farm and the Harmony Farm claimed “...You can never stop to develop; you must always try to renew your offerings...” This describes that despite the focus of the offerings, it was important for the practitioners to continuously renew the experiences within their own framework.

Evidently, entrepreneurs at the farms possess an eagerness to develop tourism activities. According to the practitioners, it is a necessity to use their own resources and image when developing the tourism product, e.g. the animals, old buildings, and rural surroundings. Various stressed that, despite the lack of knowledge and experience when starting the business, it was important to trust and rely upon their intuition.

The practitioners emphasized the importance of providing an experience with *value*. When visitors came spontaneously to the farm; it became evident to them that there was a demand for experiencing the farm, animals and its surroundings. It was then that they started to use

their recourses to create more tourism experience, with a focus on their own *values*. One of the practitioners from the Four Season Farm expressed “everyone has a backpack filled with value”. *The value in the backpack* needs to be used at the right time at the right place. It can be argued that every business has different types of resources in which can be commoditized.

McInerney and Turner (1991) argued that larger farms often have better possibilities to diversify their business in comparison to smaller farm, as larger farms have a broader financial base to create other activities. Noticeably, to a certain extent larger farms, for instance the Four Season Farm and the Sheep Farm, had a greater opportunity to create more leisure activities (e.g. guided tours) on their properties as they had other business oriented activities in comparison to the smaller farms, e.g. the Horse Farm and the Harmony farm. However, the smaller farms are able to create experience within their own framework as well. For instance, two practitioners, one practitioner from the Nature Farm and one practitioner from the Four Season Farm emphasized on “dressing” their experiences with value. For instance the Four Season Farm “dressed” the experience by offering different concepts, e.g. Theater, stay overnight in the hotel and breakfast. The Nature Farm “dressed” the experience by offering stone- oven baking or soap making, stay overnight in the cottage and breakfast. Despite the difference in size between the farms, they both stressed the importance to create experiences by using their own *value*. “Working with your own conditions”, was also expressed by them, having in mind that you have to use the farm’s resources to build your own tourism model/ experience and not offer a theme park experience. For instance the Four Season Farm (Figure 4) and the Nature Farm (Figure 5) had named their accommodation rooms. The Four Season named every room after a deceased cow on the farm, and the Nature Farm named the rooms after the deceased owners since the late 19th and places in the surrounding area. The naming of accommodation displays how the practitioners have used their own *values* to create the *red thread*, which reflects upon the farms history and heritage.



Figure 4. Björkegård 2194. Hotel room at the Four Season Farm



Figure 5. Björket Cottage at the Nature Farm

It can therefore be concluded that despite the difference in size or type of the farms, experience products may vary from minor to major, all depending on the farms resources.

### **Battery of experience**

A practitioner from the Four Season Farm described that many new experiences had emerged during the years, “we have a whole battery of experiences”. The theme of *the battery of experiences* is also reflected in the other farms. A lifestyle entrepreneur, according to Marcketti *et al* (2006), develops small day- to day activities which results into a functioning business, for instance accommodation facilities and an experience (Andersson Cederholm and Hultman, 2010).



Figure 6 Stone oven, The Nature Farm

The practitioner at the Nature Farm can be described as a typical lifestyle entrepreneur, who has expanded the business by offering accommodation and experiences, such as stone oven baking (figure 6), yoga classes and massage therapy. Another example is the Horse Farm which created experiences of accommodation and horseback riding. Accommodation and activities are tools which were used to create a functioning business all year around for the farms. As noted elsewhere in this text, the demand for healthy foods drive organic food production (Gössling and Mattson, 2002) .For instance, the Four Season Farm (Figure 7) and the Sheep Farm have created an experience of producing and severing their own organic food to their visitors. Evidently, the aspect of healthy food has become the essence for their business. The tourism activities has, especially for the two larger farms in this study, the Four Season Farm and the Sheep Farm, become a way of marketing their own products, such as their organic meat and milk.



Figure 7. Lunch at the Four Season Farm



In conclusion the practitioners have created their own *battery of experience*, either a minor to a major activity depending on the farms recourses. The events or activities are tools to attract visitors to the farms all year around. Tourism is also used by the larger farms as a marketing tool for their products.

### **Experiencing the “true” life at a farm**

The practitioners described their tourism experiences to provide a feeling of *back to the countryside*, to experience the genuine life at the farm by letting the visitors see how a Swedish agriculture farm works, see the animals, and eat organic food etc.

It has been argued by Colton and Bissix (2005) that there is a lack of awareness among the public about the agricultural sector. Practitioners from the Four Season Farm and the Sheep farm explained that due to the lack of awareness of the life in rural areas, it was essential to them to attract and educate visitors about the rural area and life at a farm. Noticeably, the farms in the study have created an “edutainment” experience for their visitors (Che *et al*, 2005:233). For instance, the Four Season Farm (Figure 8) and the Sheep Farm have created guided tours around the property. The purpose for starting guided tours was to educate their visitors about the business, the area and their animals.



Figure 8. The Four Season Farm. “The milking carousel is Open for show at 2 pm- 4 pm. Guided tours at the farm at 2 pm. Tickets can be bought in the Farm boutique by the castle”.

Another example, the Four Season Farm has created a “Kunskapsstig” (a path of knowledge) on the farm’s property for the visitors. The “Kunskapsstig” is over a kilometer, and along the path questions and information signs are posted of the farm and its history.

To summarize, the aspect of portraying *the true life at a farm* and the food production is a vital point for the practitioners. Noticeably, they were well aware of the necessity to engage

and educate the general public about the life at a farm, the caring of the animals and the consequences of mass produced foods. Therefore, by using *the true life at a farm* as an experience product is valuable both for the farm and the public. However, it could be questioned to what extent the farms are displaying the “true” life at a farm, because the experience has to also be interesting and entertaining. It can be argued that the farms are not displaying the whole truth of the life of a farm to the visitors, but the semi- truth.

### **Accommodation at farms**

The majority of the practitioners explained that large investments was required and it took several years before they could establish a proper tourism experience (also argued by Sharpley and Vass, 2006). Several practitioners expressed when starting the business; it took approximately three years before they could see any results. Practitioner from the Nature Farm explained that after the three years they stood at a crossroad of either shutting down or investing more in the business. They decided to invest more in the business and it resulted in four new cottages to offer more accommodation for visitors (Figure 9).



Figure 9. The cottages. The Nature Farm

The investment in accommodation reflects the decision the practitioners made to strengthen their tourism experience. Practices of agritourism have become an opportunity for all practitioners in the study, especially as a way to reconstruct old buildings and sheds into accommodation facilities. The Four Season Farm used their old workshop and created it to a small hotel with 21 rooms (Figure 10)



Figure 10. Farm hotel, The Four Season Farm

The Harmony Farm (Figure 11) and the Horse Farm (Figure 12) also reconstructed old buildings and sheds into rooms for their visitors.



Figure 11, Apartments, The Harmony Farm



Figure 12, Apartments, The Horse Farm

Colton and Bissix (2005; 106) claim despite the opportunities which agritourism practices may have, many farmers are not aware of the “value- added potential” which is acquired through agritourism. However, the practitioners in the study did notice the “value- added potential” agritourism had once the products were established. For instance the practitioners from the Four Season Farm claimed that by creating accommodation facilities, visitors could stay longer and participate in several activities. These example support the argument by Davies and Gilbert (1991) that by developing accommodation facilities, as a part of the experience (product), enables visitors to stay longer in the area. Thus, the creation of accommodation facilities increased the value the farms and its offered experiences.

While the other four farms offered accommodation to their visitors, the Sheep Farm did not offer accommodation. When asked why the farm did not offer accommodation, the practitioner explained that it would be too much work to accommodate their visitors, in addition to all the other activities they had on the farm. They claimed that they offered enough activities considering their capabilities; taking care of their animals, producing their own meat, having a boutique; and offering food and guided tours to their visitors.

McInerney and Turner (1991) claim that larger farms, due to a larger capital, have often a stronger opportunity to diversify their business, in comparison to smaller farms. McNally (2001) agree on this matter, pointing out that larger farms are more likely to provide accommodation to their visitors. Evidently, the reconstruction of old buildings into accommodation facilities has had great potential for both the smaller to larger farms in the study. It can be argued that smaller farms are more dependent on the income from accommodating visitors than larger farms, as larger farm often have other business oriented activities, as noted in the example above at the Sheep Farm.

In conclusion, the practitioners perceived accommodation to be an important foundation for their business. Accommodation had a “value- added potential” (Colton and Bissix, 2005;106) for their tourism business. By creating accommodation facilities the farms could offer visitors more activities at the farm and in the nearby area. The practitioners also meant that by creating accommodation facilities’, old building and sheds could be used rather than only costing money to maintain. It could be argued that the smaller farms are more dependent on offering accommodation to visitors than larger farms, due to the fact that larger farms often have other source of economical income.

### **Farms relationship with tourism**

The five farms relationship with tourism can be related to the three approaches proposed by Bernando *et al* (2008; 15). Tourism at a farm can be a “supplementary enterprise”, a “complementary enterprise” or a “primary enterprise”. Agritourism enterprise at the Sheep Farm, the Harmony Farm, the Nature Farm, and the Horse Farm is a “complementary enterprise”, while the Four Season Farm used tourism as a “supplementary enterprise”. Tourism, as a “complementary enterprise” varied between 50- 80 % of the overall business of the four farms, while the Four Season Farm estimated the tourism activities to 3 % of their overall size of the business. It was clear that despite the differences between the sizes of the tourism enterprises; the practitioners expressed how tourism had become an important foundation for their business, apart from the other traditional activities at the farm.

Four of the farms, the Four Season Farm, the Harmony Farm, the Horse Farm and the Nature Farm offer “accommodation based” tourism products, while Sheep Farm is “day- visitor based”. Moreover, all of the five farms offer “activity based” tourism products. However, the larger farms, the Sheep Farm and the Four Season Farm offered more activities for their

visitors than the smaller farms (Davies and Gilbert, 1992; 57). Therefore, larger farms have a greater opportunity to create experiences at the farm, around the animals and the estate (also argued by McInerney and Turner, 1991). Despite the differences in size and in type between the five farms, there were many similarities regarding what image the farms wanted to project to their visitors.

### **Marketing agritourism experiences**

The words and images which were used in the marketing material (brochures and website) was *stress free, close to nature, the countryside, good service, feel free, home, farm life, animals, the birth of a calf, a meeting point, natural home-made food*. The brochure from the Nature Farm expressed "You are a special person, and we wish to do everything to make your stay enjoyable, we want to offer you a personal service". The Four Season Farm expressed in their brochure "We offer you an eventful stay with our many different concepts including wonderful food and an overnight stay". Colton and Bissix (2005;104) point out the essence to market the *experience* of the rural area, such as the "tranquility" and "stress relief", which is clearly portrayed in the practitioners marketing material.

Several practitioners narrated the importance to portray the true and genuine experience at the farm in the marketing material. One of the practitioners from the Four Season Farm also explained how important it was for their farm, a "modern food enterprise", to also represent *the future*. The practitioner meant *the future* by emphasizing the technological aspect of the farm, the farm machinery. The farm should not only display the rural area as old fashion, but also as part of the future. The practitioner further explained how the machinery could be the link to unite the two. Noticeably, the majority of the marketing material displays typical images of rural areas (e.g. "stress free", "silence") while the Four Season Farm emphasized on technology which reflects the future.

The majority of the practitioners have managed marketing on their own by using different media channels, such as website, blogging, tourist agency, and networks. Fleischer and Tchetcik (2005) argue in most cases entrepreneurs work independently when advertising their business through different media channels, such as guide books, yellow pages, tourism associations etc. The practitioners highlighted the need to engage in several media channels to reach the visitors. The blog, according to one of the practitioners, was a strong tool to explain

what was happening *behind the scenes* at the farm. They explained, despite working with tourism for the past 8-15 years they had difficulties working with marketing. Che *et al* (2005) argued that marketing often requires knowledge and expert skills which the individual farm enterprises often do not have. The practitioners from the Harmony Farm and the Horse Farm bought a marketing service for a large amount of money when creating their website; however it resulted in an impersonal website. The majority of them stressed the necessity to be critical towards different marketing organizations, and overall they thought marketing was also expensive. The practitioners expressed concern with the challenge of which media channels to select to reach the appropriate segment group, as well as draw conclusions from the results of the marketing activities. It is the barriers in marketing which prevents agritourism from developing into its full potential (ibid, 2005), which was clearly stated by the practitioners.

Evidently, the practitioners have used similar words and images in their marketing, *the genuine farm life, stress free, animals, and healthy food*. Noticeably, the similar words in the marketing material can raise an issue considering that the farms want to project a unique experience. Consequently, the experience fall within the same category, this can create a competition among rural enterprises. Furthermore, there was awareness among them of the necessity to use several media channels, such as a website, blog, tourist agency and other cooperation's. Marketing was one of the most challenging aspects when working with tourism, especially when managing it on their own. This can be a critique towards the local municipality in which has a responsibility, according the "Landsbygdsprogrammet" to support rural enterprises. However, the practitioners were also critical towards buying expertise and advice from marketing organizations. It can be argued that if the local municipality would also engage in marketing cooperation among rural entrepreneurs it could cause conflicts, considering the different perspectives among the entrepreneurs and local municipality.

### **Hosting visitors**

The practitioners stressed the importance of high quality in their products and services. For instance, the practitioner from the Nature Farm claimed that the three key words to a successful business are "a comfortable bed, good breakfast and a high quality service". When asked the question why quality was important to the practitioners, they answered that visitors are picky and expect the best service and experience for their money. Colton and Bissix (2005) claim it is important for the products and services to meet the tourist's demands. The

practitioners from the Sheep Farm and the Four Season Farm measured the quality by asking the visitors. For instance, inside the café at the Sheep Farm was a guestbook. A visitor expressed in the guestbook their gratitude “Thank you for nice service, the good food and the good coffee, we will be back in spring” (Figure 13).



Figure 13. A guestbook The Sheep Farm café,

One practitioner from the Four Season Farm had posted on the staff- billboard “Say hello to the visitors”. The practitioner explained that the staff needed to be reminded to take care of the visitors, because if the service was not of high quality, the visitors would not return. Noticeably, the practitioners understood the necessity to offer high quality experience to attract and maintain visitors. Practitioners from the Sheep farm and the Four Season Farm said it was tough to find the “right” personnel when working with tourism and service. The practitioner from the Sheep Farm distributed a book about hospitality to the employees. They felt it was important for the staff to have an understanding of how to be a good host, as the staff also functions as guides.

Furthermore, the practitioners enjoyed hosting visitors. The practitioners were pleased to meet people and share their story with others. It was then clear how seriously they took their role as a host. Several of them from the smaller farms, the Harmony farm, the Nature farm and the Horse farm, explained how fundamental it was to give the visitor *personal time*. This, support Lynch (1998) which points out that lifestyle entrepreneurs are driven by emotional motives which reflect upon their interest and own values. Giving attention to a visitor was considered to be essential for them, both personally as well as for their business. Practitioners from the Harmony farm and the Nature farm stated that by giving the extra moment to a visitor, they could create a *home feeling* atmosphere for their visitor, in comparison to a standard

impersonal hotel in the city. The creation of the *home feeling* could be argued to be a reflection upon the values of the practitioners.

Practitioners from the Harmony Farm and the Horse Farm claimed, despite the positive aspects of hosting visitors, at times it was challenging to be *everything* and being *everywhere*, they had to manage the guests, animals, and the estate on their own. They explained that when working with tourism; meeting people, you are automatically on an emotional and financial rollercoaster. The emotional rollercoaster meant that the practitioners enjoyed meeting people, however it was demanding at times. The financial rollercoaster of working with tourism relates to the low season. Practitioners from the Harmony farm and the Horse farm did mention the loss of their own “freedom”, as they had to stay on the property to manage the visitors. This argument support Andersson *et al* (2003) statement, explaining that lifestyle entrepreneurs in rural areas often experience issues, such as the intense contact with the guests, the home being a working place, and few visitors during the low season. Nonetheless, the practitioners in the study pointed out the opportunities when working within service, “you can work from home”, “meet interesting people”, “use a spare room”( also pointed out in Lynch, 1998).

The question of identity was also raised by several practitioners. Practitioner from the Nature Farm, a former dairy farmer, described the difficulties in becoming a tourism entrepreneur, “I went from being a farmer, following a fixed price regulation on milk, to being a tourism entrepreneur and deciding my own prices and experiences”. The practitioner explained that changing business activities and becoming an independent entrepreneur had an impact on identity. It has been argued that the farming community meets difficulties when being a part of a “host role” (Sharpley and Vass, 2006; 1043). A few of the practitioners from the Four Season Farm mentioned several of the employees had experienced difficulties working with service, for instance a farmer felt uncomfortable when milking the cows and having visitors observing him. The issue of how farmers become a part of the tourism product is an interesting aspect, considering that the identities of the farmers are changing (Burton, 2004).

In conclusion the practitioners enjoyed working within hospitality. It was noted that they understood the necessity of offering high quality experience. They measured quality by asking their visitors. Practitioners, especially from the smaller farms mentioned the pleasure of working from home; however it also had a strain in their personal life. Evidently, the aspect of



identity is important, considering that the farmer not only loses their identity when changing career paths, but also loses the connection to a certain community and cooperation by becoming a part of another sector. Therefore changing career paths is not necessarily an easy task and it could be questioned whether changing careers could only be a short-term method.

### ***Rural cooperations***

Networking and cooperation was perceived by several practitioners in the study to be essential for their business. All practitioners were involved in networks, either in a farm accommodation network, a food network, or a regional network.

### **Collaboration among enterprises**

Through cooperation's practitioners could exchange experience, help each other when being overbooked, or dealing with general questions. Practitioners from the Sheep Farm and the Nature farm mentioned that they had become close friends with the people in the same network as they understood each other's lifestyle. The practitioner from the Nature Farm described how it was important, especially as a small farm tourism enterprise to cooperate with others, as you could get isolated when only interacting with visitors. The practitioners claimed it was good to be engaged in a marketing group to strengthen the cooperation and image of the region; however it was expensive to be a part of the network. These examples support Halme (2001) and Colton and Bissix (2005) which claimed that cooperating with other enterprises and public sector could result in an increase coherency and community spirit, thus creating a competitive advantage.

Several practitioners mentioned it was important to cooperate as it strengthens the spirit of entrepreneurship in the local area. Cooperation inspires others to continue to explore the business opportunities (also in Fadeeva, 2001). The practitioners from the Harmony Farm described how the regional network every year created a so-called "theme day". Hjalager (1996; 110) stressed a way creating a product package could be to create clusters of farm tourism enterprises and create a united experience, a "showcase". The aspect of a "showcase" among rural entrepreneurs could be found in the regional network. The network invited visitors to different farms. The intention with the "theme day" was to present the farms, in hope that the visitors would return another time. By creating a "showcase" among the different farms benefited the rural entrepreneurs in the regional network. The practitioners from the Harmony Farm explained the regional network was managed by small farm/ tourism

enterprises and not by a tourist agency or local municipality. Evidently, the lack of support from the local municipality or the tourist agency can create a challenge, also contradicts how the political policy (e.g. Landsbygdsprogrammet 2007-2013) emphasis on supporting rural enterprises.

Colton and Bissix (2005) noted that competition and territorialism often exists among nearby agritourism practitioners. The competition and territorialism among farmers prevent rural entrepreneurs to work and prosper together. However, according to the practitioners in the study it was more the hotels in the city that were the main rivalry, rather than the rural enterprises in the nearby area. This raises a clear issue, as the hotels can affect the business of the rural entrepreneurs, thus preventing job opportunities in the rural area (also argued by Gössling and Mattson, 2002).

In conclusion, the aspect of cooperating with other enterprises was perceived to be important for the practitioners business. Another issue is that the hotels in the cities were perceived to be the main rivalry as it affects the rural entrepreneurs business. The farms where involved in formal or informal networks, which helped them to meet other entrepreneurs, enabling them to exchange experience and support each other.

### **Public sector involvement**

The report “Landsbygdsprogrammet 2007- 2013” (Länstyrelsen, Hallands Län, 2008), emphasizes the importance to support enterprises working within the agriculture- and forestry industry. The report supports the actions to improve the environment, landscape and diversification among enterprises. According to the report, tourism has become a more common practice to enhance the economy in the region of Halland. Furthermore, the report highlights the importance of attracting visitors to the area as it enables the enterprises to expand in the market, thus strengthening the rural area (Länstyrelsen, Hallands Län (2008). Barbieri and Mshenga (2008) claimed that community agencies and governments are searching for solutions to promote sustainable development in rural areas. Agritourism has been proposed to be one of the solutions to revive the rural economy, also because it encourages the aspect of local networking, illuminates culture and traditions, and the environment. Arguably, Länstyrelsen (County Administrative Board) in the region of Halland have witnessed, according to the report Landsbygdsprogrammet 2007-2013, the potential rural/farm/ agritourism has for rural areas.

It should be noted that, despite the political emphasis of encouraging rural enterprises to apply non- traditional practices, several practitioners said that a dialogue with the local municipality was not efficient. Lack of encouragement can create an obstacle for the development of agritourism products (Sharpley and Vass, 2006). The practitioner from the Horse Farm claimed to have suffered from the lack of support from the local municipality, for instance no support in marketing. However, the majority of the practitioners had received subsidies through the Landsbygdsprogrammet for their accommodation facilities. They further pointed out that the local municipality did not understand the aspect of working on a farm. It is proposed by Che *et al* (2005) that if there is no association, nor a cooperative approach between the farms and government, it will challenge the practitioners to develop and market agritourism products. Several practitioners from the smaller farms, the Horse Farm and the Harmony Farm, suggested that the local municipality could invest more in a united marketing program for all small farm tourism enterprises. However, the majority of the practitioners explained that in the end it is all about your own interest and engagement if you want to develop your enterprise.

The local municipality of had awarded several farms, the Four Season Farm, the Sheep Farm and the Harmony farm for developing their farm enterprises, and its focus on organic food production. Several of them pointed out that they did perceive that the public sector did appreciate what their business had achieved, for instance by creating jobs and attracting visitors to the rural region. This supports the argument by Henderson (2009) and Gössling and Mattson (2002) that tourism at a farm is beneficial for the whole region, by educating visitors, creating job opportunities in other local sectors, e.g. public transports, banks and post offices. Therefore the practices of agritourism have a positive affect for the rural entrepreneurs as well as for the region.

In conclusion a continuous communication did not exist between the farms and the local municipality, which raises an issue, considering how the political policy of rural development is emphasizing the importance to support rural enterprises. However, the practitioners did obtain subsidies in order to reconstruct old sheds and buildings to accommodate more visitors. Several of them had received a prize for their enterprise and engagement in the rural region. Despite lack of continuous communication between the farms and the local municipality, the

financial support from the public sector displays an engagement in the rural region and the farms.

### **Training within agritourism**

The practitioners learned new things about tourism by reading, travelling on their own, studying other enterprises strategy, networking, and by EU lead projects etc. Two of the farms, the Harmony Farm and the Horse Farm, were part of a farm accommodation network and had received a guidebook and attended courses. Colton and Bissix (2005:107) stress that by creating a “resource guide” booklet on how to manage agritourism, more farmers could apply the practices. However, Sharpley and Vass (2006) argue that practitioners view training in tourism to be a low priority for entrepreneurs. Various practitioners in the study meant it can be good to attend different courses to develop oneself as an entrepreneur and one’s business; however training was a low priority. All practitioners agreed by claiming that “in the end it all comes down to you and how you want to develop your enterprise”. This displays how the practitioners take the matter in their own hands when seeking knowledge of how to develop the agritourism enterprise.

### ***The issues of location and seasonality***

The low season has an effect on several farms, in particular smaller farms, e.g. the Nature Farm, the Harmony Farm and the Horse farm. The low season has a negative impact on the smaller farms because they have fewer activities during the fall and winter season, in comparison to the larger farms. The larger farms, the Four Season Farm and the Sheep Farm, have several business oriented activities, thus, enabling them to not be too dependent on tourism during low season. However, all of the practitioners pointed out that more tourism activities needed to be implemented all year around, rather than just having summer months being busy. They all wanted more information on how to reach and attract visitors during low season months. Despite the comment of wanting to have more tourism activities during the winter months, practitioners from the Horse Farm and the Harmony Farm addressed that they needed the “quiet months” as well to reenergize from the high season. In conclusion seasonality was an issue, especially for the smaller farms in comparison to the larger farms which have other economical activities.

The aspect of location, according to Sharpely and Vass (2006) and Oppermann (1996) was important in order to attract visitors to rural areas. The location can be in this case either a the

actual landscape or the distance. The majority of the practitioners interpreted location to be the distance of the farm in relation to other places, such as the west coast. In this case, location was perceived to not be an issue for their business. When asked why location did not matter, they explained that their offerings were unique and visitors would come despite the distance. However, a practitioner from the Four Season Farm mentioned that if the farm was located further away, for instance from the west coast could be more of a problem. All of the practitioners also claimed it was beneficial to be situated close to the west coast and larger cities. I interpreted that the practitioners perceived that they could have created the agritourism business wherever in Sweden. However, it could be argued that location is important considering that the landscape is a part of the whole agritourism experience. Therefore without an attractive landscape, as well as a good distance to other places the farm would have more challenges in attracting visitors.

In conclusion the aspect of location (distance) was not an issue, but it should be noted the practitioners did not raise awareness that the landscape, which is argued to be a vital aspect for the tourism experience. Nevertheless, it was pointed out that it was beneficial to be located close to the west coast. Hence, location was not the most problematic aspect, it was rather the low season which caused difficulties in attracting visitors.

## 6. Discussion and Conclusion

*The aim of this thesis has been to obtain information and generate knowledge of how practitioners at farms practice and perceive agritourism. Several categories of agritourism practices have emerged; product development, public sector engagement, marketing, networking, training and hosting. The aspect of seasonality and location has also been included as factors which influence the practices of agritourism. The agritourism practices have been discussed by previous researchers, therefore my intention with this thesis was to highlight the dynamics between the opportunities and challenges of the agritourism practice and their relation to one another. I have portrayed my findings in a figure “Practitioners perception of agritourism practices” and contemplate how the practices affected one another. In conclusion agritourism practices will fluctuate between an opportunity or a challenge depending on the four main factors; the financial state of the farm to invest in agrotourism; the financial support from the public sector, the cooperation in the rural area, and finally the practitioners own engagement in creating agritourism activities at a farm.*

Non- traditional practices, such as service, recreation, and leisure have become a part of the strategy for farms to maintain the business in today’s thriving economy (Beiger and Weinert, 2006). Agritourism has been proposed as one of the key’s to revitalize rural areas economy (Gössling and Mattson, 2002; McNally, 2001). Previous research of agritourism has focused upon lack of governmental support, social benefits of meeting different people, reasons for the entrepreneurial development and employment (McElwee, 2006; Lordkipanidze, Brezet and Backman, 2005; Das and Rainey, 2010). Nevertheless, Sharpley and Vass (2006) claim there is a lack of research regarding the practitioner’s perceptions of agritourism practices. The aim with this thesis was to generate knowledge of the dynamics of opportunities and challenges when practicing agritourism at a farm. In order to fulfill the aim of the study, two questions were proposed; what agritourism practices are applied at farms; and how are the practices of agritourism perceived by practitioners at farms?

The agritourism practices which have been applied at the different farms in this study are; product developments (e.g. guided tours, events, accommodation, see the animals, eat food, stone oven baking, riding horses etc.); support from local municipality; networking with other rural enterprises; marketing the agritourism experience; hosting visitors; and training in tourism. Evidently, these practices have already been discussed by other researchers. Therefore, in order to generate new knowledge I have created a figure which will project the practices in the light of opportunity or challenge, as well as how the practices affect one another.

The practices have been categorized into eight elements; product development; public sector engagement; networking; training; marketing; and hosting. The aspect of seasonality and location has also been included in the analysis, as it affects practices of agritourism. The way the categories were narrated by the practitioners has been perceived to be an opportunity, a challenge or an interaction between the both.

<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b> +	<b>+/-</b>	<b>CHALLENGES</b> -
Product development		
	Public sector engagement	
Networking		Marketing
	Training	
	Hosting	
		Seasonality
	Location	

Figure 14 Practitioners perception of agritourim practices

An agritourism product is proposed to be foremost an opportunity, however to a certain extent a challenge as well. Agritourism product (e.g. guided tours, events, accommodation, the animals, and food offerings) is an opportunity as it enables the practitioners to earn an additional income and a complement to other traditional activities, such as crop and livestock. Another opportunity is how old sheds and buildings can be reconstructed into accommodation facilities. Practitioners both from the smaller and larger farms explained the benefits of reconstructing old buildings to accommodate their visitors. The constructing of

accommodation facilities strengthened the whole experience package, making it possible for the visitors to stay during a longer period and take part in other activities at the farms. To welcome visitors to the farms was also important for the practitioners, considering how few people come in direct contact with the farm life and natural food production on a daily basis. By opening the farm to visitors can educate the general public of the true life at a farm, however it should be noted that the farms might only be displaying the semi- truth of the “true” life at a farm, considering that the information must also entertain the visitors. It should also be said that larger farms may use tourism as tool to market their products, for instance meat or dairy. This was noted from the study, the larger farms which had other business oriented activities used tourism as a tool to market the rest of the farm business.

Nevertheless, an agritourism product can be a challenge, particularly in the beginning. For instance the practitioners from the study struggled to create a product in the beginning before they realized how to use the farms own recourses as a tourism experience, for instance the animals. Moreover, a large capital investment was required in order to create agritourism products, e.g. accommodation. The practitioners in the study claimed that tourism was an expensive business, also because it generates a small income. The small income was a challenge, especially for the smaller farms which depended more on the tourism activities, in comparison to the larger farms which had other business oriented activities during the rest of the year. In summary agritourism products are significant opportunities for practitioners to attract visitors to the farms, however it also depends how much the practitioners decide to invest in the product.

A public sector engagement in rural regions can be both an opportunity and a challenge. The involvement by the local municipality can stimulate the rural region in different ways, such as subsidizing different projects, creating regional networks, and marketing campaigns etc. The majority of the practitioners in the study had received subsidies from the “Landsbyggsprogrammet 2007- 2013” (Rural programme), to reconstruct old buildings into accommodation facilities. Despite the subsidies the farms had received from the local municipality, the engagement was also a challenge due to the different perspectives between the involved parties. For instance, practitioners from the smaller farms claimed that the local municipality did not understand the difficulties they had encountered when managing tourism on their own, especially dealing with marketing and seasonality issues. They felt a lack of support from the local municipality for what they were trying to achieve with the business.



Noticeably, to a certain extent the local municipality is engaged in the development of the rural region, for instance through subsidizing reconstructions of facilities. However several practitioners explained that the lack of continuous communication affected negatively their business. In conclusion, the local municipality support can be an opportunity or a challenge depending on the awareness of rural entrepreneur's situation.

The aspect of networking with an informal or a formal group is an opportunity for rural entrepreneurs. The practitioners in the study perceived networking to be important for their business. The cooperation enabled the practitioners to exchange experiences and knowledge, in particular in the issue of marketing, seasonality and location. Networking with other enterprises creates a larger tourism experience package in the rural region (Hjalager, 1996). For instance one of the farms had together with other rural enterprises created a "theme day", hence creating an experience package to attract visitors to the rural region. Furthermore, the practitioners claimed that networking also inspired other rural entrepreneurs to accelerate and support the community in the rural region (also argued by Hjalager, 1996; Fadeeva, 2003; Halme, 2001).

Moreover, it was noted that the practitioners perceived the hotels in the cities to be more of a competition than other agritourism enterprises. Hotels usually have stronger financial resources to market and offer a variety of accommodation, therefore creating a challenge for rural practitioners to attract visitors to rural areas. The aspect of hotel business in the city versus rural entrepreneurs raises an issue for rural development. For instance the rural entrepreneurs business has a positive effect on the whole region, for instance by creating jobs, while the hotel's generated income is not distributed to the region (see Gössling and Mattson, 2002). To summarize, networking can be an opportunity to strengthen the marketing and experience package among rural entrepreneurs, especially considering the competition with the hotels in the nearby area.

Marketing agritourism products is foremost a challenge. Nonetheless, it can also be to an extent an opportunity. Firstly, marketing was perceived to be a challenge by the practitioners from the smaller and larger farms, because it was expensive and had a strain on their financial resources. Secondly, marketing was managed by the practitioners who had no experience or knowledge of marketing (also concluded by Che *et al*, 2005). Lack of knowledge and experience created a challenge for the practitioners when striving to find the right media

channel to reach the right segment group. Thirdly, marketing was a challenge for the practitioners, especially in the beginning before they knew what images and values to present to their visitors. Noticeably, marketing can prevent the practitioners in trying to adopt agritourism practices. This raises a critique towards the local municipality (e.g. Landsbygdsprogrammet), which states to encourage rural enterprises in practicing non-traditional practices, such as tourism.

Moreover, marketing can also be an opportunity. For instance two of the farms used the website or blog, to display “behind the scenes” images to visitors. The website or a blog offers practitioners an opportunity to present and promote their own values and images of their agritourism experience directly to their visitors. In conclusion, marketing is mostly a challenge for practitioners when managing marketing; however the marketing tool, e.g. blog, creates an opportunity for practitioners to project life at a farm.

Training in tourism can be both an opportunity and a challenge for practitioners. The practitioners in the study viewed training to be an opportunity as it allowed them to learn more about management and development of agritourism. However, they also claimed that training was a low priority for their business. Several practitioners from both smaller and larger farms mentioned they needed more information on how to attract visitors during the low season. It can be determined that by engaging in training sessions, issues such as seasonality and marketing can be better managed among rural entrepreneurs. However, due to lack of time and that training is costly created a challenge for the practitioners to engage in training. For training in tourism to be more of an opportunity than a challenge for rural entrepreneurs will depend on the practitioners own engagement, interest and economical recourses.

The aspect of hosting visitors is foremost an opportunity, however also a challenge. The majority of the practitioners in the study perceived hosting visitors to be an opportunity, because they could work from home, meet different people, reconstruct old buildings and sheds to accommodate visitors. Nevertheless, several practitioners from the smaller farms claimed that constant interaction with visitors created a strain on their private life, a feeling of losing their “freedom” emerged (also argued by Lynch, 1998). Furthermore, one practitioner experienced a challenge in identity when changing career paths, from being a farmer to becoming a tourism entrepreneur. Arguably, the new career path requires managing new

questions and interacting with a new community, this can be questioned whether a career within tourism can create a long- term business for a former farmers. Finally, the aspect of hosting visitors is mostly an opportunity; however certain situations, e.g. constant interaction with guests can create a challenge for practitioners.

The aspect of seasonality is mostly a challenge for rural entrepreneurs (low season; late fall and the winter months). Nevertheless, seasonality can also be to an extent, an opportunity. The low season is a challenge, especially for smaller farms which are usually more dependent upon agritourism activities. Several practitioners from the smaller farms meant that the low season affected the overall business negatively. The larger farms were also affected by low season, however not to the same extent as they had other agricultural activities to focus upon during the rest of the year, e.g. meat and dairy production. Nevertheless, the smaller farms and larger farms are all affected negatively by the low season due to fewer visitors.

The aspect of seasonality can also be an opportunity. Several practitioners, especially from the smaller farms claimed to need the low season in order to recover physically and mentally after the busy tourism season. To summarize, seasonality is foremost a challenge for rural entrepreneurs.

The location, as in distance, can both be an opportunity and a challenge for practitioners. It was noted that the practitioners did not perceive location to be an issue for their business, as their offerings were unique. It should be noted that the landscape (also a location) creates a strong opportunity for the farms. However, this particular aspect of location being the landscape was not interpreted by the practitioners. Thus, location in this study has been perceived as the distance of the farm in relation to other places. Moreover, location can be a challenge if the farms were located further away from the larger cities. Evidently, the farms would then have to offer accommodation for the visitors. If farms were located closer to larger cities, opportunities are better for attracting many more visitors, in particular on a daily basis. Consequently, location, as in distance of the farms is therefore both an opportunity and a challenge depending on the offered activities, and the surrounding areas.

The purpose of this thesis was to generate knowledge about the dynamics between opportunities and challenges within agritourism practices and their relation to one another. It has been noted that agritourism practice, like the ride on a rollercoaster, has its ups and downs. Research in this particular area of how to apply agritourism practices in rural regions is vital in relation to theoretical implications as well as practical suggestions to rural entrepreneurs and municipalities. Whether the agritourism practices are an opportunity or a challenge will depend on four main factors;

- the financial resources available at the farm to invest in agritourism activities
- the financial support received from the public sector to invest in farm diversification
- the cooperation among enterprises in the rural region
- The personal commitment of the practitioner, which probably is the most important factor

The financial resources of the farm will determine how much the practitioners can invest in the tourism business, for instance by creating several tourism activities and accommodation facilities. As described previously, practitioners must invest a large amount into the agritourism business; while the business per se often generates a small income. The small income can have an impact especially on farms which mainly focus on tourism activities in their business and are affected by low season. Therefore the financial resources are one of the factors which will determine whether agritourism activities are an opportunity or a challenge for farms. Second factor affecting the outcome of agritourism practices is the public sector engagement. Public sector is an important factor in the revitalization of rural economies. Support can come through different projects, such as EU lead projects, training, and marketing. Smaller farm which have less business oriented activities in comparison to larger farms, are in need for more support from public sector. Third factor is the cooperation in rural areas. It can be argued that by networking with other rural entrepreneurs and local municipalities' issues in marketing, training, seasonality and location can be managed by entrepreneurs as a unit, thus affecting the outcome of the product development. Lastly, and probably the most important factor which will determine whether agritoursim practices are an opportunity or a challenge is the practitioners own commitment. Evidently, without the practitioner's own engagement can nothing be created, and this would also impact the whole rural region and community spirit.

### ***Recommendation for further research***

I would recommend continuing research into the area “perception of agritourism” according to practitioners. Research in this particular area of how to apply agritourism practices in rural regions must be carried out to generate more theoretical as well as practical suggestions to rural entrepreneurs and public sectors. Another research theme could be to compare how small and large farms apply agritourism as a farm diversification, and discuss the long-term potential of applying agritourism practices.

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# **APPENDIX 1**

## ***INTERVIEW GUIDE***

**Name:**

**Position / Engagement at the Farm**

**Year at the farm:**

### **Background questions:**

1. What type of Farm is X?
2. Describe the Farms development
3. Describe important events for the Farm and how it has affected the development of the farm
4. What has changed? What are you practicing now that you did not practice 5- 10 years ago?
5. What is tourism for you? Do you have any role model? Why is it important for the farm to provide something to their visitors?
6. How large is the tourism enterprise in comparison to the other business entities on the Farm? Is that a lot? Would you like more visitors?
7. Describe your experience of working with Service

### **How do you perceive the new tourism practices at the Farm X**

#### *Product development*

1. Why do the visitors come to the Farm? What do you do to offer your visitors what they want to see? Do you offer experience? Describe more
2. Does the Farm have a symbol? If yes, what? What does the symbol project? Why?
3. What do you think when you work with the visitors? Why?
4. Is tourism a good business? Does the tourism enterprise integrate with the other business at the farm?
5. Where you encouraged by someone to work with tourism? Are there any demands from the outside?
6. What is a good experience at the farm? How do you make sure your experience are good and attractive? Give examples

7. What has happened on the farm since you began welcoming visitors? Describe important events
8. What are the opportunities and challenges tourism has had on the Farm

### *Marketing*

1. How do the visitors find the Farm? Why do the visitors come to the Farm? Give examples
2. Do you advertise? Why do you work that way?
3. How did you proceed when starting to welcome the visitors? Did you receive any advice? Was there anyone at the Farm who had experience of marketing?
4. What image / picture would you like to project to the visitors? Why?
5. Where you encouraged to market the Farm as a destination? By who? Why these?
6. How is marketing financed?
7. Is there a difference in communication the different business entities on the farm? Why?
8. Describe your experience of the opportunities and challenges when working with marketing

### *Partnership and Communication*

1. Are there similar “Farm and tourism” enterprises close by? Which ones?
2. Do you cooperate with others regarding tourism related questions? Who? Why? How do you cooperate? Are the benefits in cooperating with others?
3. Is the competition difficult? Who do you compete with?
4. Describe your engagement in the community

### *Public Sector*

1. Describe your dialogue/ cooperation with the Public sector, the Region of Halland. How is the cooperation perceived?
2. Does the Farm tourism business obtain any support from the Public Sector? How?
3. Can you feel that the Farm is a part of the “ Landsbygsgprogrammet” established by the EU?
4. Do you see yourself being a part of the rural development? Do you benefit the rural community? How?
5. Is there any other outside encouragement a part from the public sector?

### *Training*

1. Describe how it is to meet the visitors. What is needed for a meeting with a visitor to go well?
2. How do you learn new things? Describe a specific example
3. What do you need more about regarding tourism? How do you learn to know this?
4. What will you need to know in the future? Why?

### *Location*

1. Could you have done the same( Farm and tourism) somewhere else?

### *Seasonality*

1. Describe how it is to work all year around

### *Concluding questions*

1. What would you like to do in the future? What can you do in the future? What do you need to be able to get there?
2. What do you think a farm needs in order to work with tourism?
3. What experience would you share to other farm business in which is about to start or further develop tourism practices?