Agritourism in the World and its Prospects for the United States

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Abstract

Agritourism, the practice of combining agricultural activities with tourism, has emerged as a significant trend in rural development worldwide. Agritourism offers a unique opportunity for farmers to diversify their incomes while providing tourists with an immersive experience of rural life. Tourists can participate in agricultural work, enjoy nature, visit local markets, and attend educational seminars. Agritourism can give a deeper understanding of the culture and traditions of the region. However, even more important is the role that agritourism plays in educating the public about the realities of agriculture and its economic, social, and cultural values. The global agritourism market has expanded rapidly in recent years, driven by an increasing consumer interest in authentic, nature-based experiences. IMARC Group (2025) estimates that the global agritourism market will grow at a compound annual growth rate of 10.9% from 2025 to 2033. This growth is attributed to the rising demand for organic and locally sourced products, as well as the desire for experiential travel.

Introduction

Recreation in the countryside has been a popular activity for people for centuries, especially in Europe. Over the centuries, many urban European residents spent part of the year in the countryside to enjoy nature and to have some rest from city life (Loke 2025).

The term “agritourism” originated in Italy in the 1980s, when people would escape the summer heat by going on holiday—villeggiatura/Sommerfrische/summer retreat—to the mountain foothills of South Tyrol. Agritourism has been adapted for use around the world to address issues of farm viability and rural community viability (Lamie et al. 2021). Agritourism has since gained popularity worldwide as a sustainable development strategy, particularly in regions where traditional agriculture faces declining profitability, urbanization, and climate change.

Agritourism began developing in the United States in the 1930s during the Great Depression (Loke 2025). At that time, city residents would look for affordable getaways on farms, where they could enjoy nature and sometimes help with farm tasks, which also helped farmers earn extra income.

As more countries around the world urbanized, interest in agritourism grew as people looked to reconnect with the land and country life. In the 1950s and 60s, traveling became easier and more affordable, which benefited agritourism. “Dude ranches” soon appeared in the American West, where visitors could experience cowboy life and various farm activities (Loke 2025).

In the 1980s, environmental movements heightened interested in learning more about food production and farm practices. Sustainable and organic agriculture also developed at that time. Pick-your-own produce and farm-to-table dinners became popular, as well as educational programs on farms (Loke 2025).

According to Phillip et al. (2021), agritourism has become an important tool for rural revitalization, particularly in Europe, Asia, and Latin America. For example, in Italy, agritourism has been integrated into national agricultural policies, contributing to economic growth and the preservation of cultural heritage (Marques, Ramos, and Santos 2021). Similarly, in countries such as India and China, agritourism has been promoted as a means to reduce rural poverty and promote sustainable tourism (Zhang, Li, and Liu 2022).

Agritourism Waves

Agritourism has gone through several stages of development and activities have varied widely from simple farm visits to complex, multifaceted experiences. Slinkova (2017) finds that over the last century, there were four "waves" of agritourism development in the world (figure 1).

It is important to note that these "waves" do not have very defined boundaries, and in different countries, agritourism develops differently.

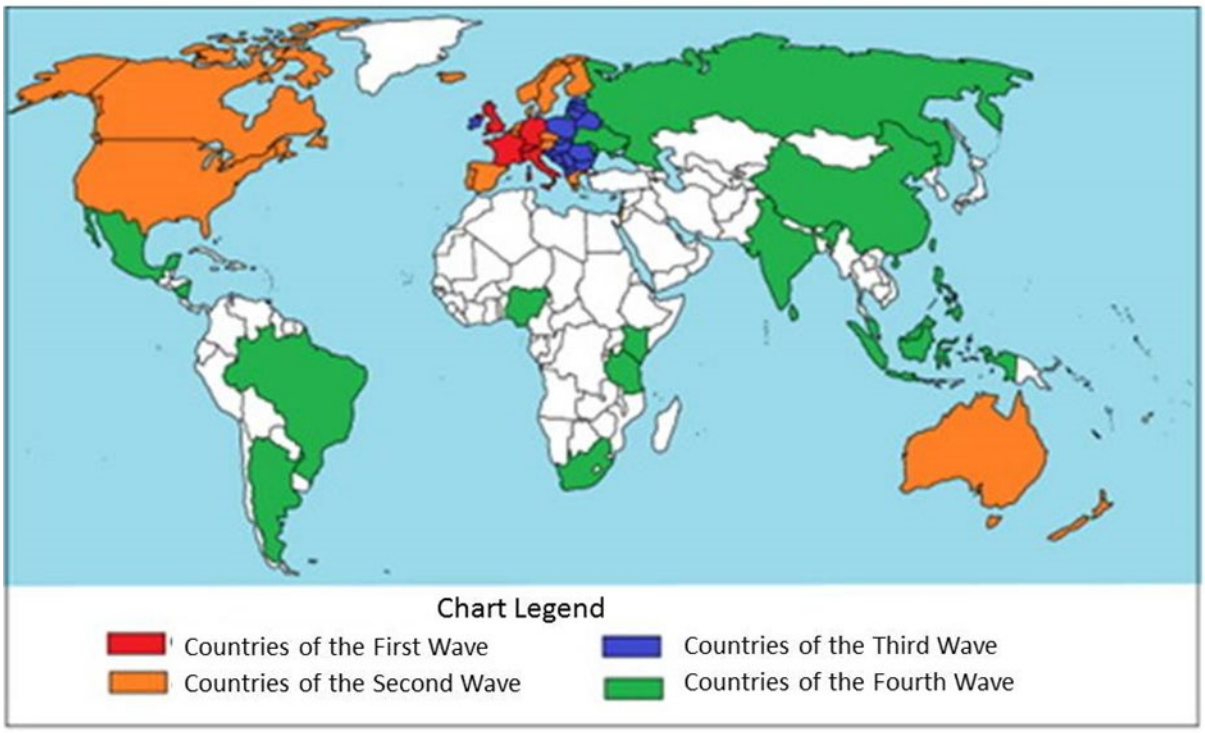

Figure 1. Historical waves of agritourism development across the world.
Source: Vuzlit (n.d.).

Incipient Wave: Pre-1970s (Red in figure 1)
This first wave of agritourism began in Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century. During this period, city dwellers began to come to the countryside to take a break from city life and enjoy nature. Farmers, in turn, diversified and began offering accommodation and food to tourists to increase their income flows.

Early examples of agritourism developed in Western Europe, particularly in regions with established rural traditions in countries such as France, Italy, England, Germany, Spain, etc., where the state provided significant financial and educational support to rural communities. Agritourism there focused on the development of small family hotel businesses in rural provinces with vineyards, olive groves, and orchards. There, tourists not only lived, but participated in agricultural work, collecting fruits, vegetables, and herbs, and cooking. Tourists could also buy food from local producers, taste local wines, and learn about growing grapes and winemaking.

In 1955, France formed the Association of Agriculture and Tourism. Ten years later in 1965, Italy formed a similar association. Today, such associations operate in most European countries. The main goals of the agritourism associations are to establish interaction with tour operators and representatives of the agritourism business and the government to ensure their cooperation, to represent the common interests of rural tourism service providers, to offer strategies for the development of agritourism, and to promote agritourism products, among others.

France is now considered a leader of agritourism in Western Europe. France's main areas of agritourism specialization are wine and gastronomic tourism. In France's coastal area, agritourism is combined with beach tourism.

Growth Wave: 1970s–1990s (Orange in figure 1)
The Growth Wave is denoted as "The Diversification Recognition" (orange) in figure 1. The second wave of agritourism began in the 1970s when interest in rural lifestyles and ecotourism increased significantly. During this period, agritourism began to be seen as a way to preserve rural traditions and support local communities.

In North America, agritourism experienced significant growth during this period of time, especially in the United States, where it was seen as a way to diversify farm income. States like California and Vermont have become leaders in agritourism, offering a wide range of activities such as wine tasting, farm stays, and educational tours (Tew and Barbieri 2012). Canada also has a burgeoning agritourism sector, particularly in regions like British Columbia and Ontario where vineyard tours and farm-to-table experiences are most popular (Dubois and Schmitz 2013).

Diversification Wave: 2000s (Blue in figure 1)
The Diversification Wave is denoted as "The Experiential Agritourism" (blue) in figure 1. The third wave saw a surge in experimental agritourism with a variety of activities. Farmers began offering tourists local wine and food tastings, farm-to-table meals, farmers' markets, and hands-on farming experiences. During this period, Eastern European countries (e.g., Poland, Albania, Hungary, etc.), also began to develop agritourism. Some of these countries later joined the European Union (EU) and have added to the EU's experience in this area. In addition to state support, the development of agritourism in these countries was facilitated by significant financial assistance from EU funds.

Sustainable Wave (2010s–Present) (Green in figure 1)
This fourth wave prioritizes sustainable practices, environmental protection, and social responsibility. The emphasis is on supporting local communities and preserving agricultural heritage. In this wave, agritourism spread to Asia (e.g., India, China, Taiwan, etc.), the tropics (e.g., Malaysia), Africa (e.g., Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa), and South America. These countries often practice the creation of large private or state tourist centers aimed at promoting rural tourism resources or the creation of large agri-parks that help in the development of agriculture on the national level and, at the same time, generate income from tourism. Ukraine and other former Soviet Union countries have also begun developing agritourism during this period. There, people are more interested in rural culture and lifestyle (e.g., traditions, crafts, architecture, cuisine, animal husbandry, and gardening).

Agritourism contributes significantly to the economies of rural areas by providing farmers with an additional source of income. By diversifying income sources, agritourism helps farmers mitigate the risks associated with fluctuating commodity prices and unpredictable weather conditions. Barbieri, Tew, and Sotomayor (2020) highlight that agritourism can increase farm revenue by up to 30%, depending on the scale and type of activities offered. Additionally, it creates employment opportunities in rural areas, reducing the need for migration to urban centers.

IMARC Group (2025) finds that the global agritourism market size is growing (figure 2).

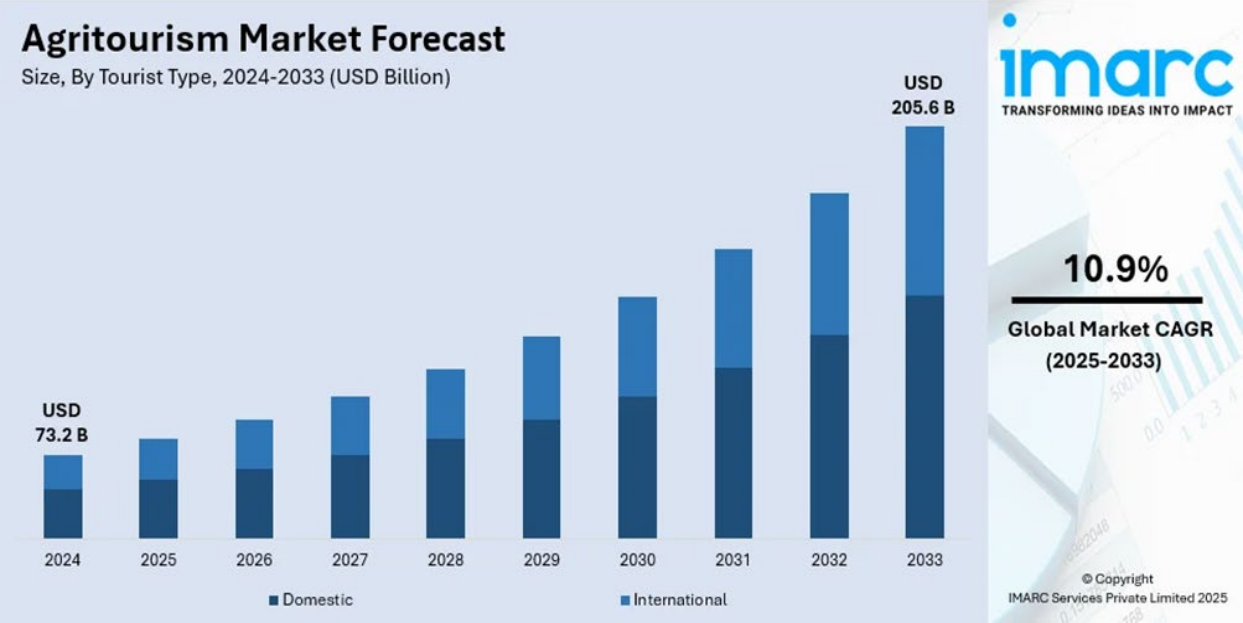

Figure 2. Agritourism market size and trends, 2024–2033.
Source: IMARC Group (2025).

IMARC Group (2025) reports that the global agritourism market size reached US $73.2 billion in 2024; and, looking ahead, they expect the market to reach US $205.6 billion by 2033. This increase is driven by growing consumer interest in sustainable tourism, rising demand for organic and local farm-to-table food, government support for rural development, and consumer interest in health-focused holidays.

The agritourism market in Europe is also growing, due to its diverse landscapes and rich agricultural heritage. In 2024, Europe accounted for 47.02% of the world's agritourism market, making it the largest (IMARC Group 2025).

Europe is the leader in the agritourism industry due to its rich agricultural history, robust rural tourism infrastructure, and support for sustainable practices. The leaders in this sector are France, Spain, and Italy, offering unique experiences, including cheese-making lessons, vineyard tours, and olive oil production tours. In Italy, for example, the agritourism sector is worth billions of euros annually, with more than 24,000 farms offering agritourism services (ISTAT 2021). This income helps stabilize rural economies and supports the sustainability of small farms.

The EU promotes agritourism through infrastructure improvements, local farm activities, and subsidies for rural development.

The European Union has actively promoted agritourism as a tool for sustaining rural economies and preventing depopulation (European Commission 2020). Sustainability programs and organic farming are significant motivators, as eco-aware tourists prefer places that emphasize environmentally friendly activities.

It is possible to observe the development of the agricultural tourism market in various regions around the world. Asia is witnessing a rapid rise in agritourism, with countries like Japan, China, and India at the forefront. In Japan, "green tourism" emphasizes the preservation of rural culture and promotes environmental sustainability (Oguchi 2003). Japan attracts both domestic and international tourists with its focus on agritourism, which includes flower and sake festivals. China has seen a boom in

agritourism, driven by the government's rural revitalization policies, which encourage urban residents to visit rural areas and engage in agricultural activities (Xu et al. 2021). In India, agritourism is growing as a niche market, with states like Maharashtra offering farm stays and tours that attract domestic and international tourists (Jadhav 2020).

An analysis of the agritourism market in Latin America shows that Brazil, Argentina, and Costa Rica are the leading countries in providing eco-agricultural experiences, including coffee plantation tours, cattle ranch holidays, and tropical fruit picking.

Here, agritourism projects are supported by regional governments and global organizations to promote economic growth in rural areas. For example, Costa Rica's "green tourism" strategy combines ecotourism and agritourism, significantly increasing the country's gross domestic product (GDP). Along with traditional farming and original cooking practices, tourists also seek cultural immersion by IMARC Group (2025).

Growing interest in sustainable and cultural tourism is driving the growth of agritourism in the Middle East and Africa. In Africa, agritourism is still emerging and has significant potential to contribute to rural development and poverty alleviation. In countries like Kenya and South Africa, agritourism initiatives have been used to empower women and to provide education on sustainable farming practices, contributing to local economic development and supporting small-scale farmers (Manyara and Jones 2007). Organic farm tours and desert farming experiences are becoming increasingly popular in the Middle East, especially in the United Arab Emirates, to attract wealthy ecotourists (URB 2023).

In the United States, agritourism has been gaining momentum as a viable strategy for rural development. A recent study by Chase, Stewart, and Schilling (2023) reveals that agritourism in the United States generated $1.26 billion in revenue in 2022 on more than 28,617 farms. Furthermore, agritourism has a significant growth potential in the coming years, which Chase, Stewart, and Schilling (2023) attributes to several factors, including increasing consumer interest in sustainable travel, the rise of the "locavore" movement, and government support for rural development initiatives.

In 2024, the United States accounted for about 66.00% of the total agritourism market in North America. Strong demand for domestic travel supports the popularity of activities such as fruit picking, farm stays, and wine tours. A report from the World Food Travel Association found that food tourists spend an average of 25% more per trip than non-food tourists (Dahanani 2024). This highlights the economic potential of farm-to-table tourism as consumers become increasingly aware of the impact of their food choices.

Beyond the economic benefits, agritourism fosters social and cultural exchange and allows urban visitors to gain a deeper understanding of agricultural practices and rural lifestyles, thereby bridging the urban-rural divide. According to Tew and Barbieri (2022), agritourism strengthens community ties by encouraging collaboration among local stakeholders, including farmers, tourism operators, and government agencies, which enhances rural development.

The agritourism market benefits from seasonal events such as pumpkin patches and corn mazes, which attract significant participation from families and groups and strengthens agritourism as a dynamic segment of the US tourism industry.

Rural areas are becoming increasingly popular for their peaceful atmosphere and as a way to escape from city life. Agritourism provides an opportunity to relax both mentally and physically. Initiatives to educate about ecotourism and farming techniques attract schools and young audiences—key trends in the US agritourism market.

Agritourism in the United States

Agritourism is developing in many US states, including California, Texas, South Carolina, Oregon, and Iowa, among others. Here, tourists visit the countryside, take part in farm work, pick berries, fruits, and vegetables themselves, learn about farm products and farming practices, participate in the on-farm events and festivals, purchase farm products, and much more.

California

California is one of the leading states in agritourism, with its diverse agricultural production. California produces more than one-third of the United States' vegetables and two-thirds of its fruits and nuts and has an extensive tourism industry, which goes from vineyards offering wine tours to small organic farms hosting u-pick events. This growing trend combines education, recreation, and conservation to offer a fresh perspective on rural life. California farmers have embraced agritourism as a critical component of their business model. California's Department of Agriculture and Cooperative Extension programs help farmers start and expand their agritourism business (California Bountiful TV 2024).

Agritourism has been booming in California for the past two decades. The state's 2016 agritourism law simplified regulations and allows small farms to host events and tours without costly permits. These changes and the farm-to-table movement have transformed rural areas into vibrant destinations.

The University of California's Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources reports that agritourism generates more than $100 million annually, providing significant support to small farms and rural economies. Agritourism supports more than 10,000 jobs in California statewide and helps small farms diversify their income.

Wine Country: Napa and Sonoma Valleys are synonymous with wine tourism. Visitors walk through vineyards and participate in grape tastings. Castello di Amorosa offers tours of its medieval-style castle, and Sonoma Canopy Tours combines tastings with environmental education.

Central Valley: Known as "America's Salad Bowl," this region offers fruit picking at Tanaka Farms (Irvine), and sunflower mazes at Dixon Corn Maze.

Coastal Farms: Harley Farms Goat Dairy (Pescadero) lets visitors milk goats and sample artisanal cheese, while the Monterey Bay Aquarium partners with local fisheries to offer sustainable seafood tours.

Seasonal Festivals: The Gilroy Garlic Festival and the Apple Hill Fall Harvest are regular.

Workshops: Olive oil blending goes on at Figueroa Farms in Santa Barbara have oil blending workshops, and Point Reyes Farmstead have cheesemaking workshops.

Furthermore, many farms are implementing regenerative practices, such as water-efficient irrigation at Frog Hollow Farm in Brentwood, that attract eco-conscious visitors.

Texas

Agritourism in Texas is growing with an emphasis on its potential to diversify rural economies, increase agricultural sustainability, and bridge the gap between urban and rural communities. Capitalizing on growing consumer demand for authentic, experiential travel and local food systems, agritourism in Texas offers significant economic opportunities for farmers and ranchers. This includes the growth of "ag-entertainment," seasonal attractions, and the integration of digital marketing strategies.

Texas agritourism revenues are expected to continue to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 8%–10% from 2025 to 2033 (IMARC Group 2025). This translates to projected revenues in the range of $400 million to $600 million by 2033, with the number of visitors anticipated to reach from 8 million to 15 million annually. These projections highlight the significant economic potential of Texas agritourism and also brings up the need for strategic development and support to ensure sustainable growth and maximize the benefits for rural communities.

South Carolina

The South Carolina Department of Agriculture has programs that promote agritourism, including the SC Agritourism Association and the Agritourism Passport Program.

Oregon

Travel Oregon promotes agritourism experiences across the state. The Oregon Food Trails program helps cultivate partnerships between culinary and agricultural businesses, strengthens local food economies, and creates unique experiences for visitors and locals alike.

Iowa

The Community and Economic Development Unit at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach has partnered with the Iowa Economic Development Authority/Iowa Tourism Office to create and expand Iowa agritourism businesses that provide interactive visitor experiences on their working farms or in rural settings. Agritourism Entrepreneurship Business Education Tours is a new state program initiated to grow quality, on-farm experiences in Iowa (ISUEO 2023).

Nationally, as noted in a letter submitted to senators by Marge L. Kilkelly of Dragonfly Cove Farm in Dresden, Maine, in 2023, agritourism is an important aspect of the agricultural economy and provides $1.127 billion in value and more than 9 million jobs nationwide. But even more important is agritourism's role in educating the public about the realities of agriculture.

In 1862, when the USDA Act was signed, 90% of Americans were farmers. However, USDA estimated that in 2021 1.3% of the population worked on a farm. Most people today are five generations removed from growing their own food and do not even have an oral history of their families and farming; and yet, every person depends on agriculture for food, fiber, energy, open space, and recreation.

Agritourism is thus a key to helping the general public understand the economic, social, and cultural value of agriculture.

However, challenges remain. Barriers to developing agritourism in the United States include regulatory hurdles, limited access to capital, and the need for specialized training for farmers. To address these challenges, policymakers and industry stakeholders must work together to create a supportive environment for agritourism.

On August 11, 2023, US Representatives Jennifer Wexton (D-VA) and Dan Newhouse (R-WA) introduced the bipartisan AGRITOURISM Act to encourage and promote, in each state, agritourism activities and businesses.

Of particular importance in agritourism is booking resources. Online booking platforms are becoming increasingly popular in agritourism, leading the market with a share of about 51% in 2024 and accounting for about US $37.3 billion in revenue (IMARC Group 2025).

Online travel agent and agency bookings are expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 12.8% from 2024 to 2030 (IMARC Group 2025). Tourists would like to have the ability to easily research, compare, and book farm visits, accommodations, or activities through various platforms such as specialized agritourism websites, apps, and social media. An example of an agritourism booking website for all regions of the world can be found at the following link: http://www.allrural.com.

Agritourism has great potential for sustainable development in agriculture, by:

- Contributing to economic growth by attracting investment in rural areas.
- Promoting environmental awareness and conservation of natural resources.
- Providing additional income to farmers and local businesses.
- Creating new jobs and supporting local economies.
- Preserving rural community traditions and improving the quality of rural life.
- Allowing the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage—tourists can learn about traditional crafts, cuisine, and customs.
- Promoting cultural exchange.
- Supporting environmentally friendly practices such as organic farming and biodiversity conservation.
- Raising awareness of environmental issues and the importance of preserving natural resources, which contributes to sustainable development.

Leading agritourism scholars and practitioners have come together to create the Global Agritourism Network (GAN), a growing network of agritourism professionals. The organization's website can be found at the following link: https://globalagritourismnetwork.org/.

This network was launched online on April 11, 2023, attracting some 271 registered members from 55 countries. Today, GAN represents the interests of 99 countries around the world. All are stakeholders in agritourism—farmers and agricultural producers, researchers, educators, community planners, government agencies, agricultural service providers, development organizations, tour operators, hospitality operators, event organizers, and others.

The creation of GAN marks a new beginning for the global agritourism sector. It now has a unified voice to promote, protect, and for the industry to thrive. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization calendar of international tourism events, May 16 is recognized as World Agritourism Day.

Despite the positive impacts, agritourism also creates some challenges. For example, increased tourist load in rural areas, environmental pollution, and insufficient knowledge on various topics, etc.

Therefore, education is of great importance. We propose including training in the basics of agritourism activities in the university curricula for interested students of all specialties. To do this, prepare a new course, "Agritourism Management," with an

interactive learning system. Training in agritourism will help guide students in choosing their future work. Children of farmers, and not only, will receive a unique opportunity to learn how to organize and manage agritourism on farms, increasing their competitiveness.

This course will also be of interest to extension service specialists. Organizing agritourism training and cross-visits for farmers will allow them to see successful examples of running an agritourism business, get acquainted with innovative approaches, and receive practical recommendations from colleagues. Farmers participating in such programs increase their income by 20%–30% due to improved service quality, attracting new clients and new programs (Kvaratskhelia, Samkharadze, and Kikilashvili 2021).

Conclusion

The future of agritourism appears promising, with increasing interest in sustainable travel and authentic experiences. Technological advancements, such as online booking platforms and virtual farm tours, are likely to further boost the sector by making it more accessible to various audiences.

Agritourism is thus a favorable direction for sustainable rural development around the world. Combining agriculture with tourism offers economic, social, and environmental benefits. Its success depends on the collaborative efforts of the farmers, policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders.

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