

THE FARM-HOLIDAYS: A DIVERSIFICATION ATTEMPT OF THE TOURIST SUPPLY. CALABRIA EVENT

Camilla GARRUTI

University of Salerno, Italy

1. The farm-holidays in their temporal and evolutionary aspects

In the current historical phase, marked by a large global stagnation and by a deep uncertainty and mistrust in a satisfactory renewal, in a more or less short term, the profits coming from “the foreigner’s industry” are a real safety valve and an instrument able to create a manifold gamma of correlations with the different economic sectors promoting a concrete program of development.

Indeed tourism, because of the indirect features and the consequent capacity of favouring development moving its own effects to other productive divisions, can play a driving role in local economy.

Even in the Community area, one of the primary premises to built up the so much hoped Europe of progress, culture and citizens, is to recognize in the tourism, more than in any other activity, “a role of interconnection of cultures” not only in Europe but all over the world.

Among the numerous and diversified facets of the tourist phenomenon, the farm-holidays enter as a valid choice to the traditional forms, and as a cultural process directed to recover the deep human values through the re-discovery of man-nature relation. It is perceived as a return to the ancient, natural things, simple life in a bucolic and “idyllic” world, still dominated by friendliness, good host, peace, sounds and fragrances which assume an almost therapeutic aspect on people who run away from the hectic rhythms of the city.

The country, beyond the consumer model and the social disintegration conveyed by the cities, preserves a connective structure not completely destroyed, that can be the recovery point of the social-psychological re-balance for social relationship.

In the rural world exists a sound community structure coming out in moments of particular emergency. We can find these aspects of a different culture, that can provide effective and alternative proposals to the urban world for better human relations: to live together, to feel the others sharing in the community and considering the last as a reality that sets off everyone’s life, but that lives of everyone’s life.

The farm-holidays enter this dimension becoming a proposal of cultural and social maturity, before and more than an economic strengthening in low-income sectors and areas, an aspect that cannot be certainly ignored, but instead must be integrated in a correct scale of values.

It becomes an effective alternative to the traditional tourist forms, at “hard” environmental impact, directed to perpetuate the organization in free-time of relaxation and amusement, the farm-holidays are the means through which we can refer to the age-old experiences to recover some possibilities of personal and social balance tied to obsolete schemes; even if we often hear about “sustainable tourism,” a suitable organization is still far away and *in fieri*, while an effective system of tourist planning consists in involving the inhabitants of the interested zones who can manage the hospitality, the farmers, who for almost spontaneous reasons, will have a greater interest in protecting and preserving the territory.

The farm-holidays, therefore, are a support in those areas where the only agriculture did not assure productivities sufficient for the farms there situated, but are also promoting the growth, in the agricultural world, of new entrepreneurial ideas connected with functions of tourist type and of protection and recovery of the natural environment, the landscape and rural traditions (Agriturist, 1990, pp. 3-5).

Old cottages where the time seems stopped in a mountain and peasant culture that preserves unchanged deep-rooted human values, like quiet, genuine foods, friendliness, slow rhythms, connection with the natural world: these are few simple elements required to guarantee the escape from the frenzy of the cities.

From the economic point of view the farm-holidays are a consequence of the phenomenon of great transformation and of agricultural world re-organization, and is happening in Italy as well as in the rest of Europe. The farm-holidays are the results of this phenomenon of reorganization rising, sometimes, as a form of adaptation in the new conditions produced, but often also as a result of new strategies in the management of the same farm, that decides to open out to the services supply, in a way complementary to the traditional supply of the goods (Citarella, 1997, pp. 331-339).

But agritourism has also the important role to promote new job opportunities in areas similar to the real agricultural activity, starting positive effects on the employment plan and causing substantial advantages also as regards the incomes and induced effects, that can stop the rural exodus and ensure the improvement of handcraft and agricultural products.

The farm-holidays activity, in expansion both in number and in organizative typology, represents, actually, the most innovative form of suburban stay, and owes its success to the necessity of the citizens to recreate a certain feeling with the territory and the natural environment.

It's difficult to estimate now, with accuracy, the dimensions of the farm-holidays phenomenon in our Country because we haven't an official census of the farms acting on national territory and the supply is inhomogeneous enough: there are few zones, in fact, rich of settlements while in most of the national territory the presence of farm-holidays is unimportant (Di Napoli, Macigno, 1996).

The reasons have their roots in a series of historical and technical circumstances like the cultural factors that condition the reasons and availability of the farmer to start the farm-holidays activity, or in some legal dispositions that put bounds practically insuperable, such as, for examples, the respect of the tourist activity complementary to the agricultural one – that must always be the main activity – and the obligation to use in the restoration only food produced directly by the farm, that imposes to the farmer the introduction of cultivations that are not often a good value (Ferro, Pettenella, 1992).

From the most recent surveys about farm-holidays we have deduced the typical agritourist profile: people of about 30-40 years, of middle-high annual income, but more and more middle-aged people, elderly and very young people approach this type of farm holidays.

In most cases (50%) the stay takes place with the family and has a 10 days length.

Among the reasons for this kind of choice, the “cultural interests” get a pre-eminent role and this explains very well why Toscana and Umbria are the top in the national list, and thanks to their gifts of art, religious tourism and culture play a role of absolute level to guarantee a strong tourist presence, while Alto Adige, a leader in the sector, has an independent and separate configuration, because of its perimeter geographic position in the alpine arc, and of its peculiar historical connotation.

Infact Trentino Alto Adige, since from the half of Sixties, has had a pilot role in the national agritourist experience thanks to its particular legal statute pointing also at the substantial flow, above all for ethnic factors, of tourists coming from Austria and Germany, which must be considered as guide nations in the recent history of European farm-holidays.

France and Great Britain can be, instead, considered the forerunner of two distinct forms of farm-holidays phenomenon characterization, with a very rich tradition behind: the Anglo-Saxon one has a very familiar mark, the French one is endowed with a greater entrepreneurial class¹.

Italy discovers this form of tourism about the half of the Sixties, through the rich Altoatesina tradition and in the typical agricultural units spread all over the province of Bolzano, called “masi” and renovated to offer a most comfortable reception.

The farm-holidays activity was introduced in our Country by farmers and men of culture who had examined and studied the phenomenon in different European Countries, supported, in their aim, by a spontaneous request that was gradually increasing in a society that was slowly

¹ The farm-holidays was born in France about the half of the Fifties when born the “Federation Nationale des gites ruraux”, with the aim to offer an organizative support to the rural tourism phenomenon that had reached a certain expansion. Lozato, 1999, pp. 123-126.

leaving behind the war ruins and was setting towards the economic “boom” (Germini,1990, pp. 3-5).

It is not simple to establish the actual dimensions of the farm-holidays phenomenon in Italy, because we haven't still a national and an official census of the farm-holidays and, therefore, in order to estimate it we must refer to slightly exact data that we can find in the regional registers of the tourist operators, in the lists of the Communes that authorize the practice of the farm-holidays structures and in the agritouristic guides.

And indeed the trade associations – Agriturist, Terranostra and Turismo Verde – respectfully related to Confagricoltura, Coldiretti and Cia, can state in a certain official way as the farm-holidays are a steady rising phenomenon and about 1% of the national farms have started a farm-holidays activity.

Only a few regions are carrying out reliable surveys about farm-holidays and an office expert in the field has not been put in action at the Ministry of Agricultural Politics.

Remarkable differences have been found, nevertheless, between one region and the other both in the number of the structures, and beds and presences: high values of density index have been found in Valle d'Aosta and Trentino Alto Adige, where the number of farm-holidays compared with the total of the farms is high because of the nature of the territory and of the structural weakness of the typical agriculture of the mountainous areas; the same happens in Toscana and Umbria, where the hilly landscape and the typical local products are elements of greater fascination, also connected with the possibility to integrate country holidays with other forms of tourism in the two regions.

An interesting evolution is occurring in Liguria, Basilicata, Lazio, Molise and Calabria, in cultural, productive and environmental contexts more favourable from the point of view of farm-holidays; these regions are showing they have the capacities, on one hand to satisfy the tourism demands in a natural environment, protected and defended from all sorts of pollutions and, on the other hand, to plan out a set of complementary enterprises like the sports activities which promote the direct contact with nature, hiking and cycling, canoeing and other aquatic sports, archery, golf.

Moreover the farm-holidays have their natural ally in handicraft, through the recovery and exploitation of some products aiming at realizing an actual integration between city and country, two expressions of our civilization based on values and *modus vivendi* often very different and widely diverging.

A basic requirement to the development of the farm-holidays activity development and to the quality supply is also, no doubt, the professional and formative aspect of the rural entrepreneur who, giving impulse to an “economic phenomenon”, will count on valid and effective communicative and promotional enterprises, dropping more or less veiled spontaneous forms.

All the same, on second thoughts, today it is certainly positive the farm-holidays supply increase in our Country, with 34.727 farms, thanks both to European Union financing through the FEOGA, the projects LEADER, aiming at the development of the weak rural zones, and to the various regional interventions which have however, actually, favoured the biggest and most organized enterprises, and therefore in a better position to take the legislative opportunities.

The Calabrese farm-holidays reality: problems and prospects.

Calabria is a region rich of incomparable beauties, with natural, historical, artistic and archaeological resources, able to give a wide range of proposals for a touristic development of extensive work and high quality, as well as good potentialities for the taking off of regional-productive and economic reality.

Travelling and touring in Calabria, through fascinating historical-cultural and naturalistic itineraries, means, today, to rediscover the charm and peace of old historical centres; at the same time the region is sunny along about 800 km of coasts on the Jonio and Tirreno, and shady on the Pollino, Sila, Serre and Aspromonte massifs where we can be surprised by karst phenomena of great naturalistic importance.

The region sees just in the tourism the most effective and valid instrument to reverse the demagogic processes of the welfarism and putting itself in the centre of the national attention claiming a role in a greater accordance with its naturalistic heritage and its millenary history.

We must also underline that the limited internationality of the local products is the cause and the effect of the poor presence of Calabria in the tour operator programs and in the international guides, while on a national scale we mustn't undervalue some main conditionings which can be considered as real paradoxes of the calabrese tourism, because they testify, at the same time, the great potentialities and contradictions.

The first paradox is the seasonal nature, as the concentration of arrivals and presences that occurs in the summer time, with the greatest use of the resources in August.

The second paradox is owed to the statistics, as proved by "Primo rapporto sul turismo in Calabria", that reveals as the actual tourist movement is 6,2 times higher than the official statistics.

The third paradox is given by the image, because Calabria is perceived by people almost exclusively as a seaside region ("Rivista Oasis", 1997) while it is a prevalently mountainous area with some great area-parks as Pollino, Sila and Aspromonte.

So many negative and positive conditionings are, at the same time, the strength and the weakness of the hospitality system in Calabria

The Calabrese tourist market can be defined "of proximity" as it is characterized by a strong impact of the Italian and local element, with the dominance of the seaside tourism, strongly concentrated in space and in time (Incamicia, 1996, pp. 28-30).

Such conviction is confirmed by the fact that the 46,7% of Italian arrivals is made up by residents in Campania (16,9%), in Latium (14,1%), in Sicily (13,2%), in Calabria itself (11,5%) and in Puglia (11%). At the same time the first three regions of origin, with the 46,5% of the presences, are Campania (21,5%), Latium (14,9%) and Puglia (10,1%).

Against a prevalently extra-hotel tourism, almost exclusively joined to tourist villages and camping, - about 65% against the national datum of 6,6% - and of "open-air" kind that finds their added value in the natural environment quality, farm-holidays accommodations are showing a strong increase especially in the last years and are acquiring more and more large parts of market.

Calabria is, among the public administrations, the region that invests most in tourism, preceded, in 2001, only by Latium, thanks to the financing for Giubileo, by Sicily, Emilia-Romagna, Trentino Alto Adige and Campania (Bollettino Ufficiale Della Regione Calabria, 2000, pp.123-141).

The Region is present in the tourist sector through the Regional Operative Program (P.O.R.), aiming at the accomplishment of individual objectives at a European level of an integrated development of the territory.

The 2000-2006 P.O.R. identifies Calabria as the Southern area with the greatest structural delay with negative repercussions in the tourist field. In fact the tourist stagnation is largely imputable to the lacking and unsatisfactory qualifications of the main structures of the sector and of the primary links; it is difficult to accede the cultural, artistic and geographic patrimony, but we must add the lack of professionalism, of an entrepreneurial culture and of a network among the local operators in order to support the promotion and arrangement of tourist plans.

A particular attention has been payed to the rural development of the inland areas intervening to arrange and to improve the green spaces and, to enjoy the habitat, as well to equip the farms for the farm-holidays activities, the little handicraft and the direct selling of the agricultural products.

A so diversified plan of specific interventions cannot ignore the reinforcement of the facilities, the road conditions, and the electric and water distribution systems.

The exstimated funds are therefore assigned to the co-financing of plans that will have a direct and significant impact on the Calabrese economy, that must be intrusted to the competence and seriousness of organisms of great experience and of high professionalism, in

order to promote the economic launching of the whole territory, contributing to the growth of the quality of life.

The farm-holidays in Calabria are not an important economic factor yet, but they can become because it is what hundreds of agricultural entrepreneurs want as they have acquired a great awareness of the cultural, social and economic value that they represent. More than a thousand farms have entered the regional register (A.R.G. and S.S.A., CIA/Critelli, Mangone, 1999, p. 167) reaching the few pioneers who had spontaneously started following the information wave arriving from other European countries.

It is a considerable result, therefore, a consequence of the numerous promotional initiatives in these years.

Calabria has great potentialities in the farm-holidays sector: on one hand, because of the extraordinary variety and environmental wealth of the territory, on the other hand, because of the traditional culture of the Greek hospitality, that often makes the Calabresi to prefer the human reasons more than the commercial aspects of hospitality.

Considering the data of farm-holidays in Calabria in 2000², the speed of the development of the phenomenon in the region stands out clearly, if we consider that in two years only the farm-holidays number passed from 980, in 1998, to 1065, in 2000, even though the number of those actually authorized by the communes to practice the activity is inferior, as it can be understood by the following table.

FARM-HOLIDAYS IN CALABRIA

Provinces	Farms with municipal concession	Beds	Restaurants
Catanzaro	29	401	18
Cosenza	42	495	35
Vibo Valentia	10	104	7
Crotone	11	111	5
Reggio Calabria	14	145	11

Source: A.P.T. of Catanzaro

The farm-holidays belong to a young sector that has recently begun to work in Calabria with principles of entrepreneurial and professionalism, and, therefore, next to really laudable realities that are just as good as existing structures in regions with greater farm-holidays tradition, there are others that, maybe, at the beginning of their activity are run with a lack of professionalism even if with enthusiasm and spirit of friendliness³. In the last years the Calabria Region has begun to take an institutional interest in the farm-holidays, enacting the regional law n. 22/88, even if the modest means, the scepticism of the possible operators and the short presence of a farm-holidays “culture”, have slowed down the efforts and circumscribed the initiatives in one way or another (Turismo Verde in Calabria, 1990, pp. 5-6).

Actually we don't have official data that report exactly when the farm-holidays in Calabria were born: all the same, we can affirm that this phenomenon started in the eighties, with the introduction of the first law and the first promotional actions. We haven't official data, as regards to the demand, but the arrivals and presences of the Italian tourists are remarkably superior to the arrivals and presences of the foreigner tourists.

Among the five calabresi provinces, the supremacy, both in terms of farms, beds and refreshment stands, is due to Cosenza (42 farms; 495 beds e 35 refreshment stands) and to Catanzaro (29 farms; 401 beds and 18 refreshment stands).

The farm-holidays, like all social and economic activities, show points of strength and weakness, lights and shadows; the good ones must be emphasized, supported and increased, -

² Data provided by A.P.T. of Catanzaro.

³ Supplement at n. 100 of “La rivista del Trekking” (speciale Calabria), Parma, Piero Amichetti Editore, S.r.l., 1995, p. 17.

the others – faced and reduced, if we want to point at a promising perspective for the future of the rural world.

There is no doubt that the positive aspects and the most tempting potentialities in the sector are bound particularly to the landscapes, the cultural traditions, the variety of the typical products and handicraft activities; these elements make Calabria a region of a great attractiveness of tourist flows that, if used and protected, can give rise to a strong and widespread radial development on the regional territory.

On the other hand the most important matters to face in a survey of the contingent and structural difficulties can be summarized in this way:

- Farms classification bound to the quality of farm-holidays product.
- Professional training.
- Identification mark of the farm-holidays, to guarantee and protect their actual activity.
- Adjustment of financing to complete all the initiatives planned before by the farmers.
- Support to the farms to win new tourist market, through serious marketing actions.

If the Region helps with suitable supports the efforts done by many farmers, who have realized structures of extraordinary beauty exclusively with their own funds, without any public contribution, the farm-holidays will be able, in a short time, to become in Calabria, a sector without anything to envy the other regions indicated as models in this field.

From a direct survey at the most significant Calabresi farm-holidays, a different “reality” has come out, with potential resources, that, if they are fairly exploited and brought out, will allow the revitalization of poor areas and will represent a propulsive flywheel of social-economic development for the whole Calabrese agriculture.

It has been done a lot, but a lot remains to be done, all the same, the farm-holidays in Calabria have almost become an important reality and the operators of the sector trust in the P.O.R. Calabria as means to reinforce the division and guarantee a further growth.

The farm-holidays in the statute of the community and national regulation.

The regional laws, anticipating the “statutory” law of 5th December 1985, n. 730, have been able to identify the aims, limits and capacity of farm-holidays, including them in a development program supported by stimulation and promotion. In fact, just the Regions are called to work in this sector, in accord with their statutes, with the trends of the community agrarian politics, and with the regional instructions of development.

The aims, more or less explicitly declared by the legislative directions, in an agricultural-tourist union, get at, on one hand, bringing out the rural area, expanding also the connections with the urban reality, and on the other, at providing the agricultural operators with the possibility of supplementing their incomes, promoting at the same time the staying in the rural areas.

The regional legislation has gradually become thicker, constituting, especially in the Seventies and at the beginning of the Eighties, a quite homogeneous legal pattern, until the “statutory” law 5-12-1985, n. 730 “Farm-holidays discipline”, that provides a legal statutory of reference for all the regions, included those which had already felt the necessity to have their own regulation.

This law commits to farm-holidays some important aims, such as the re-balance and development of rural territories, the improvement of the life conditions and the staying of the farmers in the rural zones by the supplement of company incomes, a rational use of the rural estate, both natural and building, the environment protection and preservation of the habitat, the improvement of the typical products, the protection of the cultural traditions.

The rules of the national law, that were expected to be discriminating and stimulating, but because of their rather vague content, have helped in nourishing doctrinal disputes and have opened to conflictual interpretations in a sector not specifically regulated, increasing the problems, instead of being decisive instruments for problem solving.

The most regions, in pursuance of the national legislation and the assigned competences, have arranged to make new laws about farm-holidays, giving complete contents to those programmatic and vague trends and producing some significant integrations.

Calabria has regulated the farm-holidays in 1988 by the law n. 22, certainly one of the most complete and suitable among those law already existent in Italy. In fact Calabria could make use of the experience of other regions, that had given to themselves a law before of Calabria that could avoid mistakes and limits that others had committed (A.R.G. and S.S.A., Cia Regional Association for the Agricultural Development Services Management of Calabria, 1997, p. 168.

All the same, not everything seems it's working in the best possible way, in spite of the efforts done in writing the law and the care of Turismo Verde⁴ and CIA⁵ in conforming it to changes.

Among the problems that join the farm-holidays operators and often place the farms in a discomfortful situation, it is necessary to point out:

1) the meagreness of the resources destined by the Region to the investments, planned by the farmers, for the adaptation at their farms receptivity;

2) a legislation that does not longer meet the new necessities of a multi-functional agriculture.

At European level, the first regulation destined to the farm-holidays was given out in the community directive n. 159/1972, that has as object the farm modernization, and that considers the farm-holidays an activity that can contribute to reach the comparable income; farm-holidays are subject of community intervent both in the politics of reforming the agricultural structures, and in the politics of regional re-balance.

Later, some CEE directives provide for a new form of support through territorial programs of integrated development, which consider the farm-holidays as an integration factor of the agricultural incomes and of reviving of the rural environment.

The community financial measures in favour of the tourism in rural zones can be distinguished into two categories: one, quite addressed to the farm-holidays, that aims at the provisions coming from the instructions of the reform for agrarian structures, and another, directed to the rural tourism more widely understood, that includes interventions not only in favour of rural entrepreneurs and of a real tourist operators settled in rural zones, but also of the realization of infrastructures and services suitable to equip and qualify rural territory for its right touristic utilization.

Another signal of interest in the farm-holidays is the FESR reform bill, that provides for CEE loan in order to obtain a better utilization of the regional potentialities in matter of rural tourism.

Also the Mediterranean Integrated Programs (PIM) expressly indicate a politics that rewards the natural productions able to supply a tourist attraction in the countries.

The projects LEADER I and II, are the latest community enterprises, within the European Structural Funds for the period 2000-2006, that are gradually acquiring an increasing importance for the development of fragile rural zones⁶. It is a community enterprise coordinated by the General Management of the Agriculture Committee of the European Communities, a pilot experience that concerns territories of small dimensions, but with a strong identity, where the primary aim is an active involvement of the local populations, enterprises, associations and territorial institutions, in order to achieve a consistent development of the zone in question, in a climate of general social renewal.

The LEADER experience represents a point of arrival for all the European community, through actions aiming at supporting integrate development of particularly disadvantaged rural areas, and at strenghtening the cultural, economic and social balances.

⁴ TURISMO VERDE, constituted in 1981, is the Environment, Territory and Farm-holidays Institute, promoted by The Farmers Italian Congress (CIA), that today assumes a foreground role in Calabria, of the farm-holidays sector promotion and development.

⁵ The Farmers Italian Congress (CIA) is the association of the agricultural operators category, it has arrived in Italy from 1977.

⁶ LEADER means "Liason Entre Actions de Devolopment de l'Economie Rurale", that is "Connection between Rural Development Actions".

To integrate the incomes, to protect and set off the natural environment and the rural culture, to stimulate the territory development promoting new work opportunities, controlling the exodus and giving impulse to the local handicraft and marketing; these are the most significant effects deriving from the farm-holidays activity in Italy and in Calabria region, where they have great potentialities and begin to work through principles of entrepreneurial and professionalism.

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