RURAL TOURISM: A CASE STUDY OF REGIONAL PLANNING IN TAIWAN

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ABSTRACT

Rural tourism has become a new type of agricultural management in Taiwan which helps farmers break through current management difficulties for small farms. It has two major purposes. The first is to provide leisure and recreation for the public. The second is to increase farmers’ incomes.

This Bulletin discusses rural tourism in Nantou county, located in the central part of Taiwan. In 1996, Nantou county completed its comprehensive plan for rural tourism. The plan proposed five major development projects in thirty-five potential tourism areas. Activities include the traditional Chinese tea ceremony, digging for bamboo shoots, handiwork with bamboo, fruit picking, etc. Recreational activities (such as visits to waterfalls and enjoying local foods) are integrated into the rural tourism program.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past ten years, rural tourism has become a new type of agricultural management in Taiwan. At present, there are two different development models. One is for government projects that are supported by the central government. Such projects ask for the opinion of local government and farmer associations, and also consult farmers to see how willing they are to participate. To apply for financial support, a project has to follow the regulations governing rural tourism. The other model is a commercial project supported by a company’s own budget. This usually takes the form of what is called a leisure farm. Although the number of leisure farms in Taiwan is increasing, most of them belong to commercial companies. An additional 31 leisure farms have been planned as government projects, but less than half are in operation right now.

Rural tourism has become an essential part of agricultural development, especially now that Taiwan adopted in 1998 a policy of two days off every other week.

Rural tourism has a positive impact on agricultural development, farmers’ incomes and the standard of living in rural areas. However, one important issue is how to reach a consensus among local government, farmers’ associations, and individual farmers on what kind of projects to promote, and how they should be funded and operated. Rebuilding farmers’ faith in agriculture while Taiwan participates in the World Trade Organization (WTO) is an urgent task right now. We believe that a combination of rural tourism and leisure farms provides a good opportunity for farmers to meet this challenge.

The implementation of rural tourism should use leisure as a way of achieving agriculture development. Agriculture is the first aspect to be considered. This is then integrated with natural scenery, other tourist attractions and local culture. Rural tourism ensures benefits for farmers, but does not focus only on nature and the environment. It is also customer-oriented, and tries to provide an excellent service for visitors.

Keywords: Development plan, environmental impact, exhibitions, leisure farms, leisure programs, Nantou county, rural tourism
PLANNING FOR RURAL TOURISM

Each year, the central government allocates funds for counties that are willing to promote the development of rural tourism. Each county will then consider the planning applications based upon the particular agricultural specialities of that county, and the preferences of local farmers’ associations. Budget allocations are from the top-down. The content of proposed projects is from the bottom-up. However, some local farmers’ associations also propose a corresponding budget to enhance their involvement in planning rural tourism.

The planning process consists of: first, discussion of aims; then the analysis of relevant laws and regulations; thirdly, the evaluation of the potential of different areas and activities for agricultural tourism; fourthly, the selection of important categories and areas for detailed programs; fifthly, detailed development plans for different zones, and finally, an analysis of the economic returns and other benefits. The whole planning procedure is shown in Fig. 1.

Nantou county, located in the central part of Taiwan, will be used as a case study in this Bulletin. Nantou is a typical agricultural county with very little industry. Its resources include high-quality agricultural products, diverse landscapes and excellent water. Furthermore, seasonal changes add to the tourism potential of Nantou county. There are flowers and new leaves in spring, colorful maples in autumn, and snow in winter.

The total area of Nantou county is about 401,600 ha, of which about 134,500 ha are used for agricultural production. More than half the total population is involved in agriculture, including the production of rice, betelnut, tea, tobacco, sugarcane, vegetables, fruits and flowers. In 1996, Nantou county completed a comprehensive plan for rural tourism. This plan integrated many factors, including agricultural specialties, rural villages, and the natural environment. The planning project for the county was executed by professional researchers who spent one year on this task.

Their plan proposed five major development concepts (Table 1) and 35 potential development areas. All areas were divided into three classes. (i.e., A, B, or C according to their priority). Thirteen areas were assigned to class A. In addition, Nantou County is planning to develop rural tourism in four towns and their surrounding areas. Two of these towns, Luku and Hsinyi, already have a range of tourism activities. Around Luku, attractions include a tour of tea-growing areas, visits to cultural and historic sites, and bamboo and edible wild vegetables (Fig. 2). Around Hsinyi, tourists are drawn to plum orchards, vineyards, vegetable and flower farms and tea plantations (Fig. 3). Both towns are now improving their tourist facilities, including walking trails through beautiful scenery (Figs. 4, 5).

The famous agricultural products of Luku are tea and bamboo shoots. Rural villages near the town are full of characteristic old buildings, and there are many kinds of traditional handicrafts. Meanwhile, farmers have been using their farmers’ associations to organize leisure activities such as tours of tea or bamboo growing areas, and banquets with tea and music. Tourists taking part in these tours are able to experience various agricultural practices such as drying tea, tea ceremony, digging bamboo shoots, and bamboo handicrafts. The farmers’ associations also arrange farm stays for visitors.

Hsinyi is well located on the new cross-island highway from the west to the east coast, and lies close to Jade Mountain, the highest mountain in Taiwan. The local culture of the (pre-Chinese) mountain* people, and spectacular local waterfalls are also major tourist attractions. As in Luku, the local farmers’ association has organized a number of tourist activities centred around agricultural products such as Jade Mountain tea, plums, grapes, and bitter tea oil. Leisure programs cover a tour of plum production areas, including plum blossom in the spring, and a display of dancing and music by mountain people. Natural resources (such as forest, waterfalls and hot springs), add to the enjoyment of tourists who come to the area.

* Mountain people: People related to the Malays, living in Taiwan since ancient times, before the arrival of the Chinese. (Ed.)
Aims of planning
- Origin of proposal
- Principal goals of plan

Resource analysis
- Natural environment
- Cultural environment
- Industrial environment
- Recreational environment

Related laws and regulations

Analysis of development of potential
- Agricultural management
- Agricultural characteristics
- Farmers' willingness to participate
- Estimated no. of visitors

Development of rural tourism
- Issues of development
- Important categories (items)
- Primary regions for development

Managing organization, Regulations

Detailed development planning
- Definition of projects
- Planning facilities
- Planning management
- Planning for environmental management
- Planning of transportation system
- Planning for introduction of visitors

Cost-benefit analysis

Executive planning by stage, by zone

Source of funds

Conclusion

Fig. 1. Planning procedure for rural tourism
Table 1
Table 1
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zone</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Facilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Areas for picking wild vegetables, sightseeing</td>
<td>Picking wild vegetables</td>
<td>Explanations and maps on signboards, paths, restrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Areas to experience agricultural life and culture of mountain people</td>
<td>Traditional agricultural activities, tours,</td>
<td>Explanations and maps on signboards, paths, restrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trout fishing</td>
<td>Ecology of trout, fishing, eating of cooked trout</td>
<td>Parking area, landscape beautification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibition of agricultural products</td>
<td>Selling agricultural products, traditional culture of mountain people</td>
<td>Service center for selling agricultural products and traditional crafts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meals made from local specialties</td>
<td>Tasting and knowing how to cook with local special ingredients</td>
<td>Noticeboards, parking area, service center, landscape beautification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmstays</td>
<td>Staying with local people</td>
<td>Noticeboards, parking area, landscape beautification, improvement of accommodation facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterfall areas</td>
<td>Sight-seeing at waterfalls, often with butterflies</td>
<td>Noticeboards, landscape beautification, parking areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural area of mountain people (Buson tribe)</td>
<td>Exhibition of culture, dancing, traditional festivals</td>
<td>Explanations and maps on signboards, exhibition center, museum, festivals, parking areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural landscape area</td>
<td>Climbing, hiking</td>
<td>Paths, noticeboards to signal route and warn of any dangers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heritage area</td>
<td>Heritage interpretation, telling of folk stories</td>
<td>Explanations and maps on signboards, setting out of tourist route</td>
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**PLANNING OF RURAL TOURISM**

While there are some geographic and other differences between Luku and Hsinyi, the planning of rural tourism in each area was very similar.

**Putting up Signboards**

Signboards are necessary to show tourists what attractions are present and how to reach them. They are also needed to provide an explanation at the site. When deciding the position and design of a signboard, we must consider its educational function. Warning signs where caution is needed must be set up, to ensure visitors’ safety.

**Establishing Exhibition Places**

Exhibitions can be divided into dynamic displays and static displays. Some general items suitable for display are characteristic agricultural products, folk heritage, and folk crafts. The type of display is dependent upon the budget and land available.
Fig. 2. Areas with development priority in Luku

- Development area for farming activities
- Development area for tea tours and farmstay
- Development area for bamboo and edible wild vegetables
- Development areas for Cultural and Historical Activities
Areas of plum orchard
Areas of grape orchard
Areas of vegetable and flower garden
Areas of tea plantation

Recuperative farm area

Main development areas
- Cultural activities of mountain people
- Experience of county life
- Farm activities
- Farm stay
- Farm experience
- Hiking
- Sightseeing

Characteristics
Subdivision

Areas of plum orchard
- Enjoying the sight of flowers, tasting plums

Areas of grape orchard
- Picking grapes

Areas of vegetable and flower garden
- Experience of county life

Areas of tea plantation
- Picking tea
- Tea ceremony

Fig. 3. Areas in Shinyi given priority in development
Fig. 4. Proposed tourist route system for Luku Township

Introducing the ceremony and making of the ChiLin Trail

Introducing the history of DongDing Hill and healthy living with tea-making
Fig. 5. Detailed zoning of rural tourism in Shinyi Township
Brochures

A good brochure for tourists provides information about different tourist facilities, including farm inns, restaurants and their prices.

Performances and Competitions

Performances and competitions can reinforce rural culture as well as providing an interesting event for visitors. Some examples are competitions to produce the best-quality tea or plums, the traditional Chinese tea ceremony, tea parties with music, and plum banquets.

Souvenirs:

Clothes or hats with a local logo can be a good souvenir for rural tourists. Local handicrafts are also a valid tool of promotion, and earn extra income for local people.

Promoting Recreational Routes

A tourist route which passes tourist farms and other attractions should be designated for visitors. Railroad stations, bus stations, bus stops and shopping areas can be used for the promotion of rural tourism, with posters and photographs, in order to attract visitors.

The planning of rural tourism in Luku and Hsin yi covers natural and cultural resources, land use, willingness of farmers to participate, potential number of visitors and adjacent recreational spots. After analyzing the above items, planning budgets were assigned for different areas and periods of time. An environmental impact assessment was also carried out. Both townships qualified for leisure agriculture development by the central government. The first and second development stages have been completed in both townships. Because of the positive response from local farmers, tourism not only increased the profitability of agriculture, but has also provided the general public with new recreational outlets.

In Luku, tea is the major crop and occupies the largest area of agricultural land. Other important crops include bamboo shoots and wild celery. With its mild weather (annual average temperatures are 23°C), Luku township offers recreational opportunities all year round. Shinyi is located in the central mountain range, and its peak tourist season is during the summer.

As in most of Taiwan’s agricultural communities, the farmers’ association is the most important organization, both in Luku and Shinyi. In each town, the farmers’ association was used as the executive organization for developing and promoting rural tourism. Tourism farms with accommodation are becoming common in both areas.

The reasons why these two townships have been so active in the development of rural tourism are as follows:

- Both have a well-organized farmers’ association, with a good financial foundation and full support from farmers.
- Both have natural resources which attract tourists from the city, including forested mountains, bamboo forest, waterfalls, hiking trails, and cultural monuments. They are quite different from other recreational areas, and provide a diversity of recreational experiences.
- Farmers’ associations choose high-profit items and integrate supporting programs. For instance, local tea markets and exhibitions of tea, community celebrations, religious ceremonies, and farmers’ fairs for promoting products are used as part of the rural tourism program.
- There are well-organized structures for administering rural tourism (Fig. 6). Each township has its own operating committee to integrate all activities related to rural tourism (Fig. 7). The committee is divided into different section for restaurants, farmstays etc. These committees help farmers plan and operate efficient tourism farms.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF RURAL TOURISM

As in most countries, rural tourism in Taiwan is varied, reflecting diverse local resources and customs. Each type of leisure agriculture has a different impact on the environment.
Fig. 6. Main organizations involved in management of rural tourism

Citizen Farms

In this type of farm, city dwellers share a small plot of land and cultivate it during weekends and holidays. It allows urban people to share in farming activities and enjoy the country landscape. Citizen farms should follow production methods which protect the environment.

Sightseeing Farms

Sightseeing farms emphasize participation in the agricultural production experience and recreational activities. There is a comparatively sight impact on the environment. However, it is important that farmers practice low-pollution production methods such as organic farming, in order to guarantee the safety of visitors.
**Educational Farms**

Agricultural production, farming life, and the experience of rural culture are key points in educational farms. Such farms have little impact on the environment. However, they should pay attention to the safety of recreational facilities.

**Health Farms**

Health farms are where city dwellers stay to recover their health, often after an illness or operation. The main attractions are the natural landscape and farm accommodation. The safety aspect of sight-seeing, including warning signs where appropriate, should receive careful attention. In order to preserve the beauty of the landscape, ecological and related aspects should be considered when developing physical facilities or cutting forest.

Rural tourism does not encourage development on a large scale. On leisure farms where tourists share agricultural work, it is important for managers to use chemical pesticides and fertilizers carefully. A better way would be to implement organic agriculture. As to the disposal of sewage and other wastes, managers should follow the regulations of environment protection, to avoid environmental pollution caused by too many...
The implementation period is usually five years. The government also provides low-interest loans for farmers to develop tourism farms, provided they can meet all the regulations.

CONCLUSION

Rural tourism is becoming popular in Taiwan among both farmers and visitors. It is becoming a new type of agricultural management for farmers. In view of the impact on farm incomes from international free trade, it is important to help farmers increase the profitability of their farms, as well as improving the quality of rural life.

Looking at the effect of rural tourism in Nantou county, not only has there been a development of tourist farms around Luku and Shinyi, but also local communities have been revitalized. The potential of rural tourism to attract visitors is strong, especially now that Taiwan is implementing a policy of two days off every other week. In future, the 35 recreational spots of Nantou county will be connected into a complete network which will integrate farmers, rural villages, and agriculture.

DISCUSSION

Mr. Hong was asked how priorities were decided when development areas are given a priority (A, B or C). On what basis is this decided? Is it the local resources which are the deciding factor, or the profitability, or is there some other factor? Mr. Hong replied that there are three considerations: the local resources (including the landscape, special products and the transport network); farmers’ willingness to participate; and the extent of support from local farmers’ associations.

Several participants were interested in the professional researchers who had carried out the task of preparing the county’s rural tourism plan. One participant asked whether they acted as consultants, to give advice to local planners, or whether they were hired to do the whole planning project. Mr. Hong replied that they were hired on an annual contract which was funded by the central government.