

## TITLE: Sustainability in agritourism

### 1. Introduction

This guideline is intended to help understand how to develop a sustainable business by following the guidelines of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO<sup>1</sup>) and its five (5) principles and objectives of sustainable agriculture: increasing productivity, employment and added value in food systems; changing agricultural practices and processes and reducing water and energy consumption; promoting environmental conservation; improving livelihoods and fostering inclusive economic growth; increasing the resilience of people; adapting governance to the new challenges.

### 2. Key elements

Farms, educational farms and agritourism tend to develop more sustainable techniques that have a positive impact on biodiversity, the landscape and natural resources. In this sense, they represent an opportunity to reduce the negative externalities of agriculture on the environment, although its performance from an economic point of view is lower than that of traditional forms of agritourism. Their sustainability can be seen as the result of the process of farm diversification towards the development of environment-based service activities.

#### 2.1 Food and diversification

Agriculture is sustainable when it produces food and raw materials without exceeding the limits of the planet, maintaining the ecosystem services on which it depends, such as fertile soils, availability of fresh water and conservation of habitats and species.

The new agricultural revolution is based on three major principles: converting agricultural practices towards greater respect for the natural cycles of agro-ecosystems; protecting and increasing areas of high naturalness, functional to maintaining and increasing biodiversity; and reducing the use of synthetic chemicals through the spread of agricultural practices that do not require the use of pesticides, chemical fertilisers and antibiotics.

One way to achieve this is opting for polyculture instead of monoculture, producing less waste and reducing fossil fuel consumption:

- ✓ Use varieties and breeds that are well adapted to local environmental conditions, rather than breeding for maximum productivity and storage (at the expense of strength and flavour).
- ✓ Rotate crops and grazing. Use plant intercropping and natural fertilisers to keep the soil permanently fertile and to prevent the loss of the top soil layer. Do not let any fraction of the soil lose an irreplaceable amount of nutrients.
- ✓ Keep plants and animals that indirectly benefit from the stability and productivity of the farm.
- ✓ Grow livestock and crops together and establish a mutually beneficial relationship between them.

Your organic and eco-friendly products will create an added value to the quality of your products that become more marketable for specific targets of clients. You should follow the indications of

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fao.org/home/en>



the European strategy of “FARM TO FORK”<sup>2</sup> and short supply chain policies that enable you to develop and produce more sustainable products and food.

## 2.2 Waste

In order to be sustainable, one necessary action is to reduce waste as much as possible. To do this, it is useful to think about and use the 3R's: reduce, reuse, recycle. Through this approach, there is not only the benefit of sustainability, but also great savings in terms of material

- ✓ Examine every bit of rubbish and waste your business produces and ask yourself, "What else could I do with this?"
- ✓ If you cannot do anything with it, think about how someone else in the community can use it. Be creative.

Plastic is one of the major problems of our time: alarming research tells us that at this rate we will soon have more plastic in the seas and oceans than fish. Saying goodbye to single-use packaging is an essential step for any green hotel. Get rid of single-use packages of honey, jam, sugar, cereal, yoghurt, etc., and replace them with glass containers. Choose reusable, returnable containers and loose, unpackaged products, thus avoiding unnecessary waste production. Even in bathrooms, prefer dispensers to single-serving products.



Wasting water is one of the most serious problems on the planet, but each of us can start by adopting a series of behaviours to try to save as much as possible. There are many small but effective ways to reduce water waste, for example, by collecting and reusing rainwater. Thanks to simple purification treatments, you can reuse it for irrigating (vegetable) gardens or for flushing toilets.

## 2.3 Innovation and technology

A fundamental impetus for the modernisation of agriculture in the direction of sustainability can come from new technologies but also from the evolution of regenerative agricultural practices. It is precisely in this direction that Agriculture 4.0, which was born on the wave of innovations previously introduced in other productive sectors, such as manufacturing and industry, is heading. In the case of agriculture, too, it is thus a question of using new technologies, such as the digitisation of processes, the Internet of Things, geolocation and Internet connection. Making the best use of these tools leads to precision agriculture, which makes it possible to use ad-hoc cultivation and plant care methods according to the characteristics of the land and the areas in which they are located, optimising energy consumption, rationalising the use of water and fertilisers even according to real-time weather conditions.

<sup>2</sup> [https://food.ec.europa.eu/horizontal-topics/farm-fork-strategy\\_en](https://food.ec.europa.eu/horizontal-topics/farm-fork-strategy_en)

## 2.4 Energy savings

Farms and agritourisms are particularly well suited to use for their energy production, solutions that exploit ecological and renewable sources to great advantage (smart greed).

Generally speaking, an agritourism is a complex that not only provides self-produced organic products, but is a real accommodation facility with catering services. Such a system develops high energy consumption. Photovoltaic systems make it possible to produce electricity by harnessing the sun's heat, which is a real help to the environment. The possibility of using clean energy is therefore synonymous with ecological as are the products within a farmhouse.

Obviously a photovoltaic system is the ideal solution for any type of property, but agritourism in particular can really reap many benefits, not only from an energy point of view, but also in terms of corporate image. If an activity that presents itself to the consumer as a producer attentive to quality, environmental protection and the use of exclusively organic products, also adds attention to environmentally sustainable energy, it most likely makes a quantum leap in terms of image.

In order to improve energy efficiency, the agritourism can choose different types of systems considering actual consumption, location and available space. Obviously, everything is also bound by the available surface area, considering that rooms such as barns, restaurants and stables can be exploited for this purpose.

To support this transition, the Italian Ministry of Agriculture has earmarked EUR 1.5 billion for the 'agrisolar park' measure included in the 'Green Revolution and Ecological Transition' mission, 'Circular Economy and Sustainable Agriculture' component, and aimed at supporting investments in production structures in the agricultural, livestock and agro-industrial sector<sup>3</sup>

The installation of heat pumps for hot water production, and thus the possibility of using ecoenergy also for heating during the colder months, becoming an all-round ecological agritourism.

## 3. Example

The project born in 2010 of the **Sant'Egle** organic farmhouse moves behind personal demands for a sustainable life, respectful of the planet, consistent and ethical with one's daily choices. It is a virtuous project that has been taken as a model by universities, foreign heads of state and ordinary people who want to make a difference. Here is in brief what they do for the planet and what you contribute by purchasing organic products.



**Waste, recycling and land cleaning:** The purchase of packaged products is reduced to a minimum. They carry out and invite guests to separate waste collection and compost on site, reusing the humus to fertilise the organic garden and flowers. They clean woods and roads of illegal waste, and they have created a Creative Recycling project, which gives new life to old abandoned objects, with what they have found.

**Catering:** Only fresh seasonal fruit and vegetables are grown in their own organic garden or purchased from other organic farms at Km0. They only offer dairy products and meat from adult animals raised wild or Km0.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.politicheagricole.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/18486>

**Breakfast:** Everything on the breakfast buffet is produced on the farm or purchased from organic producers in Km0 with the exception of tea and coffee, which are imported.

**Water:** Every tap has a flow reducer to save water. They raise both their staff's and guests' awareness of to the responsible use of water for both washing and laundry. They collect rainwater to irrigate fields and flowers. They offer free natural or sparkling water and do not sell disposable bottles.

**Energy:** Electricity is produced by photovoltaic panels that cover the needs of the entire project and also allow the energy produced to be sold. The whole project is lit by LEDs and has energy-saving timers. All household appliances are Class A++ certified.

**Heating:** A condensing boiler and a solar thermal system monitor satisfy all the project's hot water needs.

**Mobility and Transport:** They have an LPG car for their green trips. Being an area where there is neither a train station nor a good public bus service, they offer free electric charging for all new hybrid and electric cars. They offer ebike hire.

**Noise:** The old farmhouse, dating back to 1600, has large walls that muffle even the sounds of nature. Signs emphasise that in the communal areas the active collaboration of staff and guests is gratefully received to maintain the silence that this place offers.



**Promotion of the area:** They offer a self-produced map made of recycled paper that promotes and disseminates tourist and cultural information about the area. The map is provided free of charge to the local tourist company and proloco.

**Cleaning and laundry:** They use only 100% biodegradable and EM (Micro Elements Effective) products.

**Products and supply chain:** They only produce organic products, processing is done in-house according to organic regulations and protocols. Packaging is 100% biodegradable or recyclable.

**Bio building:** The restoration was done with organic building materials.

**Glamping:** Luxury tents are built with certified wood from sustainable forests, painted with water tempera with natural pigments and lit and heated by the sun.

**ECommerce:** The bags and packaging material are made from recycled and recyclable raw materials.

#### 4. Benefits and potential impact

The benefits and impact you might have from the guideline implementation are:

For the mentor	For the mentee
✓ Providing evidence of the importance of sustainability	✓ Improving sustainable services
✓ Benefit from sharing ideas	✓ Knowing the most coherent options according to your business idea
✓ Creating a community of purpose for expert discussion	✓ Knowing how to make significant savings
✓ Being able to give up-to-date advice on the subject	