

Obstacles and Suggested Solutions for Developing Agritourism from orchard Owner's perspective in the Governorates of Sulaymaniyah and Halabja/KRI.

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Abstract

This research aims to determine the Obstacles and Suggested Solutions related to Developing Agritourism from Orchard Owners Perspective in the study area. Orchard owners were selected as the participant study population totaled 1,620 in the Sulaimani and Halabja governorates. To Select the sample of research, Morgan Law depending the geographical distribution was used 324 Orchard Owners by used 20% of the study population. The questionnaire was used to gather data, and it was reviewed by some experts to measure the validity. The descriptive statistical methods that were utilized for data analysis by using the statistical program SPSS. The results finding shows the obstacles facing the orchard owner in developing an agritourism were medium to low. As well as the finding, the financial obstacles came in first rank from the respondent's perspective compared to other obstacles, and the (Combating agritourism projects by the rural community) obstacle came at the last rank. Providing financial support, insurance, and long-term loans for the development of agritourism projects is also one of the important recommendations suggested by the orchard owners. The researchers suggested that all the requirements for orchard owners should be provided by the relevant parties in material and moral terms, review the laws, regulations and guidelines related to farms and agricultural land for changing it to an agritourism orchard farm, and promote the agritourism project, with financial support provided by Stakeholders and NGOs for the development and agriculture of their farms.

Keywords: *Obstacles, Agritourism, Rural Development, Suggested Solutions, Orchard Owner*

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a rapidly growing and prevalent economic and socio-cultural activity globally (Raj Sharma *et al.*, 2022). The tourism advancement has caused the emergence of diverse tourism forms (Ayaz, 2012). New tourism forms are revealed by the popular alternative tourism industry. Among these forms of tourism is rural tourism. As a nature-based tourism model, includes Farm Tourism, ecotourism, and agritourism (Allahverdiyev, 2024). Agritourism is one of the newer forms of tourism and one of the fastest-growing global travel trends (Malkanthi and Routray, 2012). And it is not a brand-new form of travel. About a century has passed since it was first used in Europe (Ayaz, 2012). That is characterized by the blending of rural culture and agricultural regions, with playing Crucial role in Sustainable Tourism (Demirezen, 2020). Currently a growing industry worldwide, agritourism encompasses both leisure activities and the experience of agricultural life, which can benefit from the rural scenery, village culture, and agricultural business (Malkanthi and Routray, 2012). Combines farming and tourism to create distinctive countryside experiences while promoting environmental, cultural, and economical sustainability (Ferreira and Sánchez-Martín, 2022; Wen-Ta *et al.*, 2025). The primary source of income and employment for farm owners is still agriculture; therefore, this type of rural farm tourism is typically a secondary activity (Darău *et al.*, 2010). Still searching for one's own identity, agritourism has gone by a number of titles in the few decades since it began: "Agrarian-Tourism, Rural-Tourism, Countryside-Tourism, Farm-Tourism, and Agricultural-Tourism" Various Concepts that all focus on the kinds of Activities tourists do in rural areas and that have a rural aspect (Petroman and Petroman, 2010). Although generally the definition of Agritourism is the Act of drawing

tourists or Tourists to an area or Areas used mostly for agricultural activities in order for ordeals of a variety of agriculturally oriented Services and Products, the term has many synonyms and definitions under various contexts (Malkanthi and Routray, 2012). And can be defined by visits to vegetable, fruit, or vine farms; tulip-filled clearings; and a unique kind of vacation that takes place in the farm's natural setting (Petroman and Petroman, 2010). Have become increasingly important for various economies around the globe. Due to evolutionary economic and social changes, many non-agricultural activities have been displaced in rural areas, allowing residents to seek employment in more productive economic sectors. The phenomenon of the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries is small-scale rural and agritourism, which began as an off-farm diversification and a move from agriculture to tourism. Later, it evolved to carve out new market niches and opportunities within a growing market (Sznajder and Przezbórska, 2004; choo, 2012; DeLay *et al.*, 2019). Agritourism is a very useful strategy that can help with marketing, managing agricultural resources, generating extra revenue for both locals and farmers (Malkanthi and Routray, 2012), and generally support a rural economy's sustainable growth (Litheko, 2022 and Ciolac *et al.*, 2020). Even though it is a fact that agritourism has a lot of potential and is said to have many advantages in each of the three sustainability aspects, this business endeavor is not without its difficulties. Specifically, during its initial stages, farmers may not be able to access these activities due to major Obstacles that could impede its Growth and Sustainability (Kline *et al.*, 2007 and Yang, 2012). Developing Agrotourism presents a variety of problems and difficulties for various farming communities and geographical areas. Among these, starting an agrotourism business is difficult for them right now, especially since the responsible stakeholders aren't as supportive. However, other farmers who are interested and capable of entering the sector have found it tough and a significant barrier due to the lack of appropriate links (Rambodagedara, 2015). Further, Lack of government funding and support, financial difficulties, ignorance, restricted access to resources, poor road infrastructure, raw material shortages, environmental issues, and legislative and regulatory obstacles all pose obstacles to the growth of agrotourism. The expansion of agrotourism is also hampered by legal obstacles and seasonality. Additional challenges include inadequate training for workers, gaps in marketing, unenthusiastic farming practices, lack of awareness, lack of knowledge and skills, etc. These barriers prevent agrotourism from reaching its full potential in the rural community (Sharpley, 2006; Valdivia *et al.*, 2007; Barbieri and Mshenga, 2008; Yang, 2012; Rambodagedara, 2015; Mandy *et al.*, 2019; Oladeji *et al.*, 2020; Adamov *et al.*, 2020; Pratt *et al.*, 2022). A proactive with a long-term strategy is needed to address these issues. Operators of agritourism can put visitor management techniques into practice (Kuo and Chiu, 2006). Nevertheless, the farmers must adopt business strategies to mitigate these hazards due to their impact to income (Shih *et al.*, 2018). A cohesive strategy bolsters the sector's resilience and guarantees its ongoing capacity to generate significant, enduring effects for communities and tourists globally (Wen-Ta *et al.*, 2025). By tackling current obstacles and adopting creative practices and strategies, it is possible to position agritourism as a key component of sustainable tourism and a driver of rural wealth. Iraqi farmers Don't observe agritourism as a vital reason for the tourism to perform in this way. In fact, agritourism is growth as farm owners become interested, Iraqi horticulturists' lack of knowledge and experience is also a major barrier to agricultural output, which is necessary for agritourism in any nation (Abdullah *et al.*, 2022). The Kurdistan Region has served as the epicenter of agriculture. In recent years, the agritourism initiative has gained significant importance, as it includes activities related to agriculture and tourism within the agricultural and tourist regions. The Kurdistan Region's economic infrastructure will profit from this sector, which will be a factor in diversifying the region's revenue streams because of its good climate, high rainfall, arable terrain, and captivating tourist destinations. By working on various tourism projects in the Kurdistan Region, such as Halabja and Sulaimani, which have sizable agricultural and tourism areas, we can draw both domestic and foreign tourists to these areas. Economists typically consider this sector and form of economy to be the oil of the twenty-first century. likewise, Because of its wealth of natural resources, the Kurdistan area is one of the primary productive sectors (Kalhory *et al.*, 2022). One factor that makes farmers weak and unable to embrace agritourism is the dearth of sufficient study on the subject. Thus, even though farmers are comprehending of the advantages of agricultural tourism, they lacking the necessary finances to get started. These limitations can all be viewed as impediments to the growth of the agritourism sector (Oladeji *et al.*, 2020). This study follows the development of agritourism by looking at the obstacles and opportunities of suggested solutions affecting its expansion today. With an attempt to find out the obstacles faced by orchard owners and Suggested Solutions for developing agritourism in the sulaimani and Halabja governorates in Kurdistan. In General, the current research attempts to answer these following questions:

1. What is the level of obstacles to developing agritourism from orchard owners' perspective in the Sulaimani and Halabja governorates?

2. What are the solutions that are Suggested by orchard owners for the developing agritourism in the Sulaymaniyah and Halabja governorates?

Objective of Research:

1. To determine the obstacles to developing agritourism from the orchard farmer perspective in the Sulaimani and Halabja governorates in general.
2. To arrange the items of the obstacles facing orchard owners to developing agritourism in the Sulaimani and Halabja governorates.
3. To identify the Suggested Solutions of orchard owners to promote agritourism development in the Sulaymaniyah and Halabja governorates.

II. MATERIAL AND METHODS

Research methodology: in this research, a descriptive Research Design was employed. Finding out more about a population, circumstance, or phenomenon is the aim of the descriptive research design (McCombes, 2019 and Sakinaa *et al.*, 2023). Given these, the research design utilized a quantitative approach to effectively meet the objectives of the research. The application of this study could help evaluate the obstacles to developing agritourism. The research objective is to determine the obstacles faced by orchard owners and Suggested Solutions for developing agritourism in the Sulaimani and Halabja governorates in the Kurdistan region of Iraq.

Research Area: This research was conducted in the villages around the tourist areas in two governorates of the Kurdistan Region (Sulaimani and Halabja), as it has its own rich arable land and orchard farm.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques: The orchard owners make up the research population. The study's sample size of 1620 orchard owners were chosen by simple random sampling from the target population. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), 324 respondents who took part in the study made up the final sample, which was chosen to represent 20% of the study population. To represent the Large research population, this selection method was employed.

Techniques for Data Collection: The structured questionnaire served as the primary tool for data collection, and respondents were informed about the research objectives and their rights as participants. The Likert-scale questionnaire was used as a tool consisting of three parts: Initial part included the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents, and the last part concerned the four parts, including knowledge, application level, obstacles, and Suggested Solutions, but this research focused on two of them, which consist of 58 items: The Obstacles part includes of (32) items as it used a three-point scale (More, Moderately, Few); they were given weights (3, 2, 1), and the Suggested Solutions part includes of (26) items related to developing agritourism that include 26 items, as it used a three-point scale (Agree, Moderately, Disagree); they were given weights (3, 2, 1). Validity and reliability operations were carried out following the formulation of the research tool. An instrument's validity is its ability to measure what it is supposed to measure (Salih, 2024). So, to verify the apparent content validity and face validity of the Content, A series Consultations and modifications of the questionnaire was done by the 27 Specialists was Shown the Questionnaire in Agriculture, tourism, management, agribusiness, Rural Development, economics, administration, and geography; their Instructions were to either add or remove the items of Questionnaire. For access to the final questionnaire formulation and verification of its Items validity, On Nov. 11, 2024 a pre-test was conducted on the questionnaire to measure the reliability and to ascertain the accuracy and quality of the convenience sample that was gathered through questionnaire distribution to the respondents who are not part of the study on 30 orchard owners in pishder sub-district. The stability or reliability of this research's scale was measured by using a Cronbach's alpha coefficient, acting as recognized standard to evaluate a measurement tool's dependability (Sabir and Hassan, 2025). The reliability results were 0.81. Consequently, the questionnaire's good validity and reliability were noted, and Reliability is deemed acceptable and adequate if its value reaches 0.70. or more, indicating that if the scale is administered to the same people again under the same conditions and after a period of time, the findings will be similar, which means they are acceptable. After that, the questionnaire is ready for distribution and collecting data, and data was collected from the respondents. Data collected from the respondents on Feb. 27, 2025. Analyzed collected data After Opened, and Tabulated by using the statistical

software for Social science. The descriptive statistics tools, such as frequency count, percentage, and mean, were computed to ascertain the distribution of the study variable.

III. RESULT FINDING:

1. To Determining the Obstacles to develop agritourism from orchard owner's perspective in general:

The results indicated that the numerical values obtained from respondents were categorized based on the extent and length of each category. The highest numerical value recorded was 96 degrees, while the lowest was 50 degrees. This classification seeks to determine the total degrees of obstacles to developing Agritourism from the perspective of orchard owners, as clear in TABLE 1.

TABLE 1. Distribution of Orchard Owner's according to the obstacles to develop agritourism

Obstacles level	Frequency	%	Arithmetic Mean	Std. Deviation
Low (50-65)	30	9.26	63.41	0.830
Medium (66– 81)	179	55.25	74.25	
High (82- 96)	115	35.49	89.85	
Total	324	100	2.71	

In table 1, indicated that the total degree of Obstacles to developing agritourism is middle to high. The highest of the respondent's 39.8% belongs to the (78-88) obstacles Category, and the lowest proportion of the respondents 5.6% belongs to the (50-62) obstacles Category. This result supports the overall obstacles of developing agritourism in general and also indicates the existence of obstacles in different aspects, perhaps referring to the situation faced by orchard owners in the Kurdistan Region and especially the experience of loan, financial, and economic issues. This indicates that the programs and services of the authorities of the agritourism sector have not played a proper role.

2. To Arrangement the items of the obstacles facing orchard owners to developing agritourism according to Relative importance (RII).

The obstacles related to developing the agritourism process are 32 obstacles, obtained means of the obstacle items between (1.92-2.94) degree. And with the relative importance between (0.63-0.97), indicating that orchard owners in the targeted area experience all of these obstacles throughout the developing agritourism process. The Items of Obstacle were arranged according to their Sequence Relative to the orchard owner's numbers who stated that they were suffering from them in descending order, As appeared in TABLE 2.

TABLE 2. Arranging obstacles Items Related to developing agritourism according to Relative Importance (RII)

Obstacles Items	Arithmetic Mean	Relative Importance	Rank
Lack of finance or difficulty in obtaining long-term loan.	2.94	0.97	1
High-cost to invest in agritourism projects.	2.89	0.95	2
Lack of cooperative societies or influential organizations that support and promote agritourism.	2.87	0.95	2
Lack of government support programs to encourage investment in agritourism.	2.89	0.95	2
Lack of skilled and trained Agritourism workers in orchard farm.	2.86	0.94	4.5
Weak coordination between relevant government agencies.	2.84	0.94	4.5
High cost of marketing-related services (design, photography and public relations).	2.81	0.93	6
Lack of laws to regulate tourism projects and their development.	2.79	0.92	7.5
Lack of coordination between agricultural and production needs and tourist reception needs.	2.78	0.92	7.5
Weak tourism awareness among tourists.	2.73	0.90	9
Lack of orchard owners' awareness about the importance of agritourism and how to benefit from it.	2.68	0.88	10.5
Lack of knowledge about Agritourism projects among tourists and rural communities.	2.68	0.88	10.5
Impact of Climate Change on Tourism Activities.	2.60	0.86	12
The presence of competition from other tourist destinations affecting the attractiveness of tourists.	2.56	0.84	13
Lack of defined environmental standards to regulate tourism activities in the orchard farm.	2.53	0.83	14
Weak security and health safety in Agritourism projects.	2.49	0.82	15
Difficulty in obtaining permits for the construction of agritourism projects.	2.45	0.81	16
Weak coordination between different agritourism marketing stakeholders.	2.42	0.80	17
Lack of extension for organizing tourism activities in tourist farm.	2.36	0.78	18
Lack of promotion of agritourism activities as a specialized tourist destination.	2.24	0.74	19
limitation of jobs, activities and events offered by Agritourism farms.	2.20	0.73	20.5
Lack of diversity in recreational activities that attract tourists.	2.20	0.73	20.5



Incompatibility between the needs of production and tourism with the needs of tourists.	2.19	0.72	22
Increased pollution rate due to increased tourist numbers and Tourism Activities.	2.15	0.71	23.5
Lack of promotional tools for agritourism.	2.14	0.71	23.5
Lack of experience in managing projects that combine agriculture and tourism.	2.13	0.70	25
Poor rural infrastructure.	2.09	0.69	26.5
Weak use of smart agricultural technologies.	2.09	0.69	26.5
Lack of appropriate reasons for transportation to orchards farms in rural areas.	2.06	0.68	28.5
Weak cooperation and coordination between orchard owners and tourism companies for agritourism development.	2.06	0.68	28.5
Difficulty in reaching tourists through the use of traditional marketing channels (exhibits, visits, advertising, views and demonstration).	1.99	0.66	30
Combating agritourism projects that affect the traditional way of life by the rural community.	1.92	0.63	31

Also, it can be concluded from the above table that the obstacles (Lack of finance or difficulty in obtaining long-term loans) are the most frequent obstacles, with a mean degree of 2.94 and relative importance of 0.97, followed by the (Lack of government support programs to encourage investment in agritourism, with a mean degree of 2.89 and relative importance 0.95; It cost a lot to invest in agritourism projects, with a mean degree of 2.89 and relative importance of 0.95; and (Lack of cooperative societies or influential organizations that support and promote agritourism, with a mean degree of 2.87 and relative importance of 0.95, Respectively. While the obstacle of (Combating agritourism projects that affect the traditional way of life of the rural community, with a mean degree of 1.92 and a relative importance of 0.63, came last. The study found that lack of financial and readily available facilities is among the obstacles facing the Sustainability of Agritourism Development in research location. this may be due to the high awareness among orchard farmers about these obstacles and their direct impact on agritourism and its development. Based on the above results, it is clear that the issue necessitates a practical approach and ongoing efforts to address the obstacles and challenges, particularly the financial barriers. The research findings have highlighted the existence of these obstacles and their direct impact on the development of agritourism.

3. Identifying the Suggested Solutions of Orchard Owners to Promote Agritourism Development in the Sulaymaniyah and Halabja governorates:

To identify orchard owners' Suggested Solutions for promoting agritourism development, Relative importance was used, which consists of 26 items. Obtained means of Suggested Solutions items between (2.43-2.94) degree. And with the relative importance between (0.80- 0.97). Proposal items were arranged according to their sequence of relative Importance. The research results showed that the most important suggests and proposals for promoting agritourism development were "Government support such as providing finance and financial support to farmers for developing agritourism projects" ranked first with a mean degree of 2.94 and relative importance 0.98; followed by "Provide funding, insurance and long-loan through special planned programs in the field of agritourism by the responsible



authority" in second place with a mean degree of 2.94 and relative importance 0.97; and "Provide incentives and facilities such as tax exemptions to orchard Owners who participate in the development of agritourism" in third place with a mean degree of 2.91 and relative importance 0.96. As for the last three items "Establish an association or union of ideal tourism entrepreneurs for consultation and exchange of information" with a mean degree of 2.49 and relative importance 0.82; followed by "Pay attention to security and safety and deal with emergencies in the tourist farm" with a mean degree of 2.44 and relative importance 0.81; and finally "Collaborate with universities and educational institutions to develop research and initiatives that support agritourism" with a mean degree of 2.43 and relative importance 0.80, ranked last. It is clear from the previous table that the Suggested Solutions of the orchard owners for developing the agritourism sector are many and varied and that all of them are important if taken into consideration because they were determined by the orchard owners because they are in direct contact with the agricultural reality and agritourism and are more knowledgeable about it and thus work to advance the reality of agritourism development in the provinces of Sulaymaniyah and Halabja in particular and in Iraqi Kurdistan in general.

TABLE 3. The Suggested Solutions to Agritourism Development according to Relative Importance (RII).

Suggested Solutions Items	Arithmetic Mean	Relative Importance	Rank
Government support such as providing finance and financial support to farmers for developing agritourism projects.	2.94	0.98	1
Provide funding, insurance, and long-term loans through specialized programs in agritourism managed by the responsible authority.	2.93	0.97	2
Provide incentives and facilities, such as tax exemptions, to orchard owners who engage in the development of agritourism.	2.92	0.96	3.5
Provide awards and honors to orchard owners and encourage them to submit promotional offers.	2.92	0.96	3.5
The government should play a role in supporting agritourism entrepreneurs to sell and market their products.	2.89	0.95	5
The use of agricultural raw materials is essential for producing local crops and ensuring food security.	2.88	0.94	6
Develop accelerated marketing programs to increase awareness of the benefits of agritourism.	2.87	0.93	7
Offer training programs and workshops for orchard owners to develop their skills in implementing modern practices for increasing their yields.	2.86	0.92	8
Conducting a training course in business administration, marketing and hospitality.	2.85	0.91	9
Expansion of local industries and addition of non-seasonal and unique products to meet market needs.	2.84	0.90	10
Develop linkages between agricultural entrepreneurs and the education sector to learn from agricultural activities.	2.82	0.89	11
Support local institutions to maintain the tourism infrastructure of the region.	2.80	0.88	12



Diversification of tourist farms with (agricultural products, fruits, poultry, livestock, fish, bee).	2.79	0.87	13
Focus on marketing and providing electronic platforms for display and promotion of agritourism products.	2.77	0.86	14
Organize awareness campaigns on the importance of agritourism and its benefits.	2.75	0.85	15.5
Recruitment of agricultural specialists to work on tourism farms.	2.75	0.85	15.5
Improvement and development of infrastructure in rural areas.	2.73	0.84	17
Conduct awareness campaigns on the importance of environmental protection for orchard owner and tourists to the agritourism sector.	2.71	0.83	18
Develop effective promotional campaigns to attract tourists to tourist parks.	2.68	0.82	19
Encourage the use of modern technology in the management of fields to improve efficiency and productivity.	2.67	0.81	20.5
Supporting innovation and sustainability through public-private partnerships.	2.67	0.81	20.5
Development of sustainable agricultural technologies.	2.64	0.80	22
Strengthen cooperation with tourism boards and institutions to organize specialized agritourism.	2.61	0.79	23
Establish an association or union of ideal tourism entrepreneurs for consultation and exchange of information.	2.59	0.78	24
Pay attention to security and safety and deal with emergencies in the tourist farm.	2.57	0.77	25
Collaborate with universities and educational institutions to develop research and initiatives that support agritourism.	2.54	0.76	26

I. CONCLUSION:

1. The Research Results Indicate that the Level of obstacles faced by orchard Owners in the Sulaimani and Halabja Governorates is medium to high. Based on this finding, the researcher concluded that more obstacles, such as infrastructure gaps, seasonal inflation, applying traditional methods, absence of agriculture extension service, financial constraints, and regulatory barriers, are among the obstacles faced by gardeners and continue to hinder the development of tourism.
2. The result showed that the (Lack of finance or difficulty in obtaining a loan) ranked first among all other obstacles, we conclude from this result that low or lack of financial capacity negatively effects the developing of agritourism businesses. This requires encouragement and support from the government and stakeholders in providing financial resources to assist farm owners in developing agritourism operations on their orchard farms.
3. Providing financial support, insurance, and long-term loans to farmers for the development of Agritourism projects is one of the most important Suggested Solution for the majority of orchard owners. Manage and limit constraints due to availability of financial resources.



Recommendation and suggestions:

1. the necessity for an agritourism training program that would improve farmers' skills and knowledge in every aspect of the business.
2. Improving agricultural extension services and developing an integrated agricultural extension plan for orchard farm Owner's, particularly in managing sustainable agricultural operations, diversifying production, promoting, marketing, and expanding agritourism operation and activities, leading to improved income levels for farmers.
3. Future research could look at how agritourism can be used to promote sustainable farming methods and increase tourists' awareness; knowing these dynamics will aid in the development of risk-reduction and agritourism operation adaptation strategies.
4. Enhancing agritourism's capacity to drive sustainable rural development, adapt to shifting circumstances, and meet future challenges.
5. encouraging successful collaboration amongst every partner's, involving Communities, Governmental association, Farmers, tourist, and Commercial investor.

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