

INITIATIVES PROMOTING REGIONAL AND TRADITIONAL FOODS IN RURAL TOURISM IN POLAND

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Abstract

Poland is one of the EU member countries with the largest number of farms and the largest number of small farms. Although the number of farms is constantly declining and their average area is slowly, but growing, still the share of farms with an area of 50 ha or more is only 9% of their total number. The average size of a farm in Poland increased from 9.85 ha in 2010 to 10.31 ha 2016. Such a structure of farms causes an understandable tendency to look for farm diversification activities to generate additional, non-agricultural income for farm households. The most popular examples of farm income diversification in Poland include small scale food processing and rural tourism. Especially that farms with high landscape values are often located in the regions with the smallest farms. Small scale processing and traditional, local cuisine that is part of the cultural heritage of a given region together constitute an offer enriching the attractiveness of rural tourism. The aim of the paper is to discuss the activities linked with promoting regional and traditional foods in rural tourism in Poland and present examples of such activities as good practices.

Keywords: *traditional product, rural tourism, direct sales*

JEL Classification: *L66, Q10, Q12, Q13*

1 Introduction

In 2004, when Poland entered the European Union, many agricultural producers were afraid of the competition of more developed countries. However, it soon turned out, that the initial fear and feeling of insecurity became an advantage

(Marcysiak & Prus, 2017; Prus & Drzazdzynska, 2017). High fragmentation of farms and low use of chemicals naturally predispose Polish agriculture for the production of high quality, organic and natural foods, so searched for on the European tables. Since 2004, the food quality policy in Poland has played an increasingly important role. Poland actively participates in the European Union quality policy registering its food products in three types of quality categories, two linked to the relevant region the product comes from Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) and one to the traditional process of production: Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG) (Sieczko & Sieczko, 2011).

The system grants protection to high quality regional and traditional food products. It should be emphasised that Poland ranks first among the, so-called, new member states in terms of the number of the registered regional and traditional products. They are registered in the following categories: Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) and Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG) (“Rolnictwo i Gospodarka Żywnościowa”, 2016).

Between 2007 and now (Feb, 2018), Poland registered 39 products, i.e. 8 PDO, 22 PGI and 9 TSG agricultural products and foodstuffs. In the procedure, i.e. considering applied and published stages, Poland works towards additional 4 products: 1 PDO, 2 PGI and 1 TSG logo, currently applied phase (“Agriculture And Rural Development”, 2018).

According to Sieczko (2010) regional, traditional and local products are linked with culture of the specific regions of Poland. Their production constitutes a chance to improve the economic situation, especially of rural and small town inhabitants, assuring positive environmental, economic and social impact. It also fits into the concept of multifunctional development of rural areas, while assuring sustainable development (Paluch, 2014). As argued by many authors (Sieczko, 2010; Goryńska-Goldmann & Wojcieszak, 2013; Jęczmyk, Maćkowiak & Uglis, 2014; Jęczmyk 2015) regional and traditional foods constitute an important element in the development of rural tourism. It should also be underlined that one of the most popular tools of local economic development is the promotion of sales of local products (Horska, 2013), among others, in agrotourism farms. Agrotourism, in turn, by enhancing the prestige of a village or a community, increases the inhabitant's satisfaction of belonging to a local community, which enhances their participation and prevents rural depopulation (Niedziółka & Kowalska, 2015; Dziekański, 2016; Dziekański, 2017). It also allows to generate non-agricultural income, which indirectly and directly influences rural inhabitants' revenue (Kosmaczewska, 2009; Paluch, 2014).

The objective of the paper is characteristics of small farms cooperation in Małopolska region, in order to increase the attractiveness of the rural tourism offer and the possibility of selling organic and local products from small farms, unable to compete on the market individually. Thanks to working in a group, they can significantly expand their offer for a larger and broader group of customers.

2 Data and Methods

The principal objective of the paper is to attempt to discuss the activities linked with promoting regional and traditional foods in rural tourism in Poland, and present examples of such activities as good practices. In order to achieve the research objective, particular research methods had to be used. The research was composed of two stages - study of the existing literature and empirical research.

At the first stage, the method of literature search was used. As a result, the analysis of the existing literature was conducted in terms regional and traditional foods, entrepreneurship and rural tourism in Poland, using scientific papers, reports and analyses published by, among others, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

In the empirical part, the case study method was used to analyse the collected data. The method assumes a holistic approach to the observation, reconstruction and analysis of the studied phenomena. What is more, it also enables to include the “actor’s” view into the study (Zonabend, 1992). A case study is a summary or a synthesis describing a situation or events which took place, based on the combination of the conducted research and analyses, and the collected data. The objective behind a case study is to present information and experiences to people who have not been involved in the described situation. A case study does not aim at enhancing the reproducing of the existing models or setting universal standards of the best practices but should rather support practitioners and encourage them to search for appropriate solutions in a given situation, using other researchers’ experiences and conclusions (“Studium Przypadku - Poradnik”, 2010).

The case study presented in this paper allowed to draw conclusions regarding reaching economic effectiveness in the activity using local and regional products for the promotion and development of rural tourism. The knowledge achieved as a result of this case study can be practically used when planning similar activities.

3 Results and Discussion

The Polish tourism sector, thanks to the richness of natural and cultural values, offers a solid foundation for the development of tourism products. Their number

and diversity constitute the competitive potential of the Polish countryside and the engagement of people involved in the development of tourism products is a guarantee of success (Bogusz & Tomaszewski 2017). Unique characteristics of traditional and regional food products have an important role in creating and promoting a rich tourism offer. Local food produce gain a growing appreciation of consumers around the world. A constant growth in sales of local food products is observed, especially when it comes to direct sales, including sales in farms which is the shortest form of food chain, i.e. “from farm to fork” (Low & Vogel, 2011).

According to a study by A. T. Kearney (2013), the main reason behind the consumers’ preferences is the belief that “it helps local economies (66 percent)” and, as a second reason, local food offer “a broader and better assortment of products (60 percent)”. Consumers value their relation with a given region, as well as the ways of processing and preserving products, often linked with the region’s culture (Sieczko, 2015).

The production of traditional foods is one of many ways in which farmers can search for additional sources of income. This pertains mainly to small agricultural producers from the south of Poland who increase their chances on the market by benefitting from the region’s potential (Nowakowska-Grunt & Kielbasa, 2017). Mutual cooperation in different areas (production, promotion, distribution) is a very good example of stimulating the activity of rural inhabitants. That is important especially in view of recent research showing that in Poland, apart from a few large food processing companies, there are many small entities with small production scale (Matysik-Pejas, Krasnodębski & Satoła, 2015). The production of traditional foods, therefore, increases the chances of the smallest producers, in particular.

One of the oldest forms of agricultural products distribution logistics, typical especially of small farms and allowing the producers to sell a wide range of agricultural products directly to the customer, is direct sales.

An innovation in terms of direct sales, which may be a good idea for people willing to get involved in such an activity, is the delivery of foods produced in organic farms directly to the households of clients living in big cities.

In 2007, the Association Grupa “odRolnika” (Eng. From the Farmer Group) was founded. From the very beginning, the group is made of eight agricultural producers with organic farming certificates. All of the farms are located in the Lesser Poland Voivodeship, situated in the south of the country, in the geographic area of the Carpathians, characterized by high fragmentation of farms. The aim of the project is: *direct sales of agricultural products from small and family farms in order to assure their further existence* („OdRolnika“, 2017).

The area of agricultural farms varies from 1 ha to 20 ha of arable land, however, the majority of farms oscillates around the average for the Lesser Poland Voivodeship, that is, around 3 ha. They are usually focused on fruit and vegetable production.

The „odRolnika“ project includes the sales of:

- organic foods, produced under the supervision of a certification body,
- traditional foods, produced on a small scale and in an environmentally-friendly way, without the supervision of a certification body,
- products featuring on the list of traditional products, registered in the database of traditional products („OdRolnika“, 2017).

Currently, the group provides the following forms of direct sales:

- online (delivery from the farmer directly to urban inhabitants),
- in a stationary store,
- during organic and local products fair,
- in the farms (during their open days) – the clients can pick their products directly from the field, pick them up from the farm or buy at a sales point located at the farm („OdRolnika“, 2017).

The „odRolnika“ project has been an incentive for many similar initiatives among farmers who wanted to maintain their farms but, due to small farm size, were not able to make their living from agriculture only. The project has also become a starting point for many initiatives such as promoting healthy food in agrotourism farms.

Over time, tourists became interested in the production process, which led to the creation of local products packages. The selected farmers from the Lesser Poland Voivodeship created tourism packages including 10 agricultural farms which host tourists interested in getting to know the local culture and traditions, based on the richness of organic food products.

It should be noted that all the packages were created in cooperation with the Local Action Group Dunajec Biała, which operates in that area. Currently, tourists can choose from 13 packages organised at different farms. The programmes take from one to a few days and include a diverse range of leisure. The packages are designed for both individual tourists and organised groups. Bookings can be made directly with the organiser of the selected offer, as well as in a tourist office (Bogusz & Tomaszewski, 2017). The fact that the packages are offered in the tourist office shows that they are prepared in a professional way.

One of the offers is a two-day package called “The Bean Adventure”. The package includes: a visit to a Galician town, trip to a bean field, participation in

workshops about bean culture and tasting of regional bean specialties. The key of the programme is a feast where all dishes are made using bean (from drinks to main dishes and desserts). The package includes a night at an agrotourism farm as well.

The package is of particular importance because it promotes the “Piękny Jaś” bean from the Dunajec Valley, registered as a traditional product in 2006 by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development („Lista Produktów Tradycyjnych“, 2018). Thanks to the engagement of local producers and farmers, “Piękny Jaś” can be directly purchased as part of the „odRolnika“ project. The bean is also present in the menus of restaurants in Krakow, among others, and every September it has its festival in Zakliczyn. In 2017, Zakliczyn hosted the 18th bean festival.

Local rural leaders do not want to stop there and, with the help of the Association Grupa “odRolnika, they launched the Local Product Centre (Centrum Produktu Lokalnego) in Rzuchowa. The idea behind the Center is to promote local products and, therefore, improve the quality of life in rural areas by satisfying social and cultural needs of rural inhabitants and promoting rural areas in general, especially within the area of the Local Action Group Dunajec Biała.

In June 2010 three farms started their “the parcel from the farmer” activity. At present, the group consists of 22 farms from the Małopolska and Świętokrzyskie provinces. 60% of them are certified organic farms. The average area of crops grown using the organic method is 1 up to 4 ha per farm. They produce vegetables, herbs and fruits and sell fresh or dried products.

Within the framework of the project, a modern Local Product Centre was build, which functions as a cultural and tourism centre. It includes a conference and training room for 60 people, and two smaller rooms for 30 and 15 people respectively. The Centre has been designed for the organisation of different exhibitions, tastings, workshops, lectures multimedia presentations, film screenings, conferences, festivals, thematic meetings, healthy cooking classes and many more. One of the rooms features a kitchen studio for the promotion of local products in culinary TV shows. Apart from that, the LPC deals with the promotion of local products, takes care of the image of local products and their producers, supports and coordinates the promotional activities of entities dealing with the production and distribution of local products, informs of the local products’ values, participates in the processes of submission, registration and control, issues expert opinions and certificates for local products. The LPC also assures consulting in the field of local products promotion, in the wide meaning of the term. On the ground floor there is also a shop with local produce, such as fresh and organic fruit and vegetables from local producers. The shop is managed by local farmers who can directly sell their fruits and vegetables.

The promotional and informational, as well as educational activities implemented by the Centre, aim at building a strong brand of local products from the region and strengthen the position of local producers and manufacturers on the national market.

In order to understand the phenomenon of that multifunctional activity including: products directly from the farmer, rural tourism offer, promotion of local foods and many other initiatives undertaken by agricultural producers and rural inhabitants, one should meet their main organiser, Mr. Czaja, as well as other members of the team. All of them are very active. They are distinguished by ingenuity, ambition, activity, diligence, willingness to learn and ability to cooperate, that is, the key characteristics of entrepreneurial persons. And, at the same time, and perhaps above all, optimism and constant smile. They all want to promote their areas, organic farming and natural and cultural heritage by offering their agricultural produce or tourism packages.

Summing up, the case study presented above proves that tourism activity in rural areas is inseparably linked with regional cuisine. One should also underline that agrotourism in such areas is developed mainly thanks to the introduction of a rich offer of tourism packages, which assure not only leisure but also educational aspects, more and more searched for by tourists. Projects such as „odRolnika“ or the Local Product Center are, in turn, a perfect example of multifunctional development of rural areas, while maintaining sustainable development.

The combination of agricultural direct and mail sale, as well as educational activities, allow to increase the number of customers, also obtained among guests, participants of educational programs implemented on the farm by members of the association. Educational programmes are directed to

- school children groups: presentations and workshops for school children, improving their
- knowledge on local agriculture, culinary traditions and local communities;
- families: offering presentations and workshops to all family members, for grandparents,
- parents and children, giving them an opportunity to spend time outside the city, and offer
- traditional, local and seasonal cuisine.

4 Conclusion

An increasing interest in rural tourism together with food offer based on local and traditional products can be observed not only in Poland, but also in other EU member states. The reasons for the development of rural tourism as a form of

small entrepreneurship can be searched for in a couple of phenomena. First of all, in the popularity of agrotourism and the contemporary trend for organic foods, having better and better marketing support, with particular emphasis on promotion as well as distribution, an example of which can be direct sales. Institutional support also plays an important role in this respect, especially, as described in the case study, thanks to various associations (Local Action Groups, agricultural producers groups) gathering local leaders, agricultural producers and small entrepreneurs.

To conclude, it is important to underline that rural tourism has become a particular, outstanding form of tourism in Poland, preserving the original cultural and natural character of the Polish countryside. The most important assets, being high tourist attractiveness of the rural areas and the EU membership, encourage new tourists. The presented case study, in turn, is a perfect example of how to promote one's region while maintaining the concept of sustainable development and the multifunctional character of rural areas.

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