

Farm tourism experiences in rural Australia: a continent-wide study of geographical distribution and socio-economic characteristics of farm tourism operators

Claudia Ollenburg, Ralf Buckley

Abstract — Worldwide changes in agricultural commodity prices and production systems, coupled with increasing demand for rural tourism in urbanized developed nations, have lead many farm landholders to turn to tourism operations as an alternative or additional source of income. The proportions of farmers and rural landholders who have made this move, however, differ considerably from one country to another, and between different areas in the same country. There is a great demand side interest to visit farms, but only some farm landholders provide a tourism experience. For the purpose of this paper tourism experiences on farms include accommodation and activities. A revealed preference approach was applied, at a continent-wide scale examining the geographical distribution and socio-economic characteristic of Australian farm tourism operators. Using multiple data sources, we inventoried, mapped and characterized all known Australian farm tourism enterprises, and examined patterns using both size-based and multi-criterion classifications. Results from revealed-preference analyses are congruent with stated-preference studies but yield considerable additional information and insights. There are clusters of farm tourism enterprises close to cities and gateways, and isolated operations in more remote areas. We identified four groups of farm tourism providers: full-time, part-time, retirement and lifestyle operators. Characteristics of the farm property and business, the farming family, and the farm tourism business differ significantly between groups. Most (88%) of these farm tourism operators offer nature-based as well as farm-based activities; and in aggregate, they use only four fifths of their land for farming, with the remaining fifth, presumably, potentially available for other recreational activities or conservation.

Index Terms — Nature tourism, rural tourism and experiences in recreational and protected areas.



Claudia Ollenburg is with the International Centre for Ecotourism Research, Griffith University, Gold Coast campus, Queensland, Qld 4222, Australia, Email: c.ollenburg@griffith.edu.au

Ralf Buckley is a professor in International Centre for Ecotourism Research, Griffith University, Gold Coast campus, Queensland, Qld 4222, Australia, Email: r.buckley@griffith.edu.au.