

AGRITOURISM DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF SRI LANKA

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The purpose of this research was to analyze the present status of agritourism development in Sri Lanka including issues and challenges of the sector. The study was based on a survey of agritourism operators in the country. Results revealed that only fifteen agritourism places are functioning currently with general services and facilities. Many destinations are operated by private companies and outside investors. Number of visitors and length of stay are at lower in many destinations. Further, there are several issues and challenges of the sector. Small size of the farm lands, lack of necessary skills, poor level of product development, poor publicity and promotion are important factors. While low numbers of visitors, environmental pollution, infrastructure development, are the common challenges for all the operators, monopoly of tour operators and political influence are the challenges for some operators including farmers those who conduct agritourism. Government intervention is essential to promote agritourism sector among the farming community of the country.

Agritourism, farm diversification, agritourism operators, visitors, Sri Lanka.

INTRODUCTION TO AGRITOURISM

Many countries have identified and accepted agritourism as an important strategy for marketing agricultural products as well as promoting tourism in rural areas by farm diversification and making greater community cohesion (Ilbery *et.al.*, 1998). More specially, it has been widely promoted as an effective source of income and employment particularly in rural areas where traditional agrarian industries have declined. Though there are large number of synonyms and definitions for the term agritourism under different contexts, the general meaning of agritourism is the practice of attracting travellers or visitors to an area or areas used primarily for agricultural purposes. Also Fogarty and Renkow in 2005 have described agritourism as a farm enterprise organized for the enjoyment, education and recreation for the public. It is also generate additional income for the farm by marketing farm products, activities and services. According to Brumfield and Mafoua (2002) Agritourism is a direct marketing activity that may provide special opportunities to growers, to reduce risks via diversification in a competing and urbanizing economic environment, which may share quasi-fixed inputs (e.g. information, machinery, labour etc) with other enterprises and enhance business efficiency and profitability.

Activities involving in agritourism vary from simple farm visit to complex situations like educational, recreational or entertainment programs including bed & breakfasts and farm stay. It provides opportunities to visitor to participate in farmers' daily lives, culture and religious activities. Also, there may be 'things to see', 'activities to do' and 'farm products to buy' (Adam, 2004). Many agritourism activities require only a small farm crew in order to be successful. For instance, farm tours, bed and breakfasts, tractor / bullock cart rides, picking of grapes, mangoes, and other horticulture items and by products, farm zoos, cottage industries of making jam, chutney, curd, yoghurt etc, and many other activities may be operated with little additional investment in labour (Agri Tourism Development Organization in India, 2008).

Although a certain amount of research has been carried out on different aspects of agritourism in many countries, there is a limited number of investigations on the issues and challenges of agritourism development. For example, Colton and Bissix in 2005 have studied on issues and challenges in developing agritourism in Nova Scotia and have revealed that issues related to marketing, product development, government support, education and training, and partnership and communication as the prominent ones. According to the study of Georgia agritourism overview by Wolfe and Hammock in 2006 in USA, issues have been divided in to two groups as major obstacles and common problems. Findings of employees, taxation, start-up cost, liability, marketing and signature are the major obstacles and also marketing, start-up cost, finding employees, liability insurance and taxation are the most common problems. Finding of the investigation of Sharply in 2002, on rural tourism and the challenge of tourism diversification in Cyprus reported that high development costs but low returns, low demand, a lack of essential skills and the dominance of mass tourism operators as major challenges.

According to the study on Bed and breakfast market of Buffalo City, South Africa: Present status, constraints and success factors in 2004 by Nuntsu *et.al*, have experienced problems in agritourism as crime, lack of sector focus, lack of entrepreneurial creativity and skills, limited support from local authorities, lack of access to finance and competition. Results of the research on "the contradictions of agritourism development in Greece using three case studies by Kizos and Iosifides in 2007 had discovered the divergence between official objectives of agritourism and basic characteristics of the sector's development trajectory in Greece.

In South Asia, India is the leading country conducting agritourism. Study in India on Agritourism industry: challenges and strategies by Taware in 2010, has discovered that the recognition to the industry, supportive policies and regulations to the industry, supportive financing, effective training programs, products and service quality control, partnership development, marketing programs, and conflict management programs as major challenges and they have propose strategies to overcome these challenges. Although most of the Asian countries are agricultural countries with a developed tourism industry, it is hard to find evidence from other Asian countries for such kind of studies.

Agriculture in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka being a developing country in South Asia, agriculture is a very important component of its economy. Out of the total population of 19.8 million, nearly 68% of the population of the country, especially in rural areas is engaged in agriculture and allied activities (Department of Census and statistics, 2006). Agriculture constitutes a larger share of the national economy contributing about 12.8% of the GDP in 2010, and 32.7% of the total employment of the population (World Factbook, 2011). An estimated 1.8 million families engage in farming. In Sri Lanka, agriculture is dominated by smallholders as over 64% of the farming families cultivate holdings of less than 0.8 hectares. Around 40% of the cultivated area is occupied by plantation crops, tea, rubber and coconut (International Trade Center, 2008). Out of the total land area of

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6.5 million hectares 1.5 million (24 %) are recognized as agricultural land; 13.96% of the land is arable, 15.24% is used for permanent crops and 70.80% for other uses (Department of Census & Statistics, 2006).

However, parallel to the world agricultural market, a high level of uncertainty has for many years characterized the agricultural sector in the country. Forces such as globalization, industrialization and development encroachment are threatening small farms. Poor agricultural commodity price coupled with the rising cost of farming are slowly expelling the small family farm out of business. These changes compel farmers to seek for better avenues in farming. Since many countries have practiced agritourism as a good alternative for supplementing farm income, its time for Sri Lanka to study on it in detail.

Objectives of the Research

The main objective of this research was to study the present status of agritourism sector in the country. Specific objectives were:

- (1) To analyse general information of agritourism such as types, ownership, characteristics, their locations, scale of operations etc;
- (2) To study the important information on visitors like carrying capacity, number of visitors, length of stay etc; and
- (3) To find out the important issues and challenges of the sector.

Research Design

Study locations

Based on high potential for agriculture as well as tourism, ten districts were selected out of 25 districts of the entire country (Figure 1). Agro-climatically, these ten districts have very good potential for diversification of farming activities. They are suitable for cultivating different crops and livestock. Further, these districts and their main cities are very much important for the tourism industry of the country.

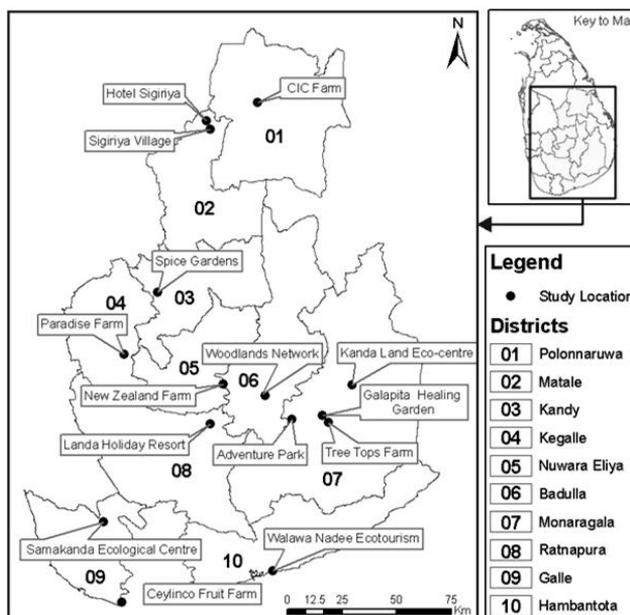


Figure 1. Map of Study Locations

They are situated in main tourist routes of the country. After that, a list of agritourism destinations in the selected districts was made with the help of respective local governments. Since the total number of destinations is only 15, all the destinations were selected for the study.

Conceptual framework

Conceptual framework of the study is shown in the Figure 2. It explains the relationship between different aspects of agritourism which I was studied. They are the two main stakeholders of the sector. The scope of this research was to study only on these two stakeholders namely operators (supply) and visitors (demand) of the agritourism sector in Sri Lanka.

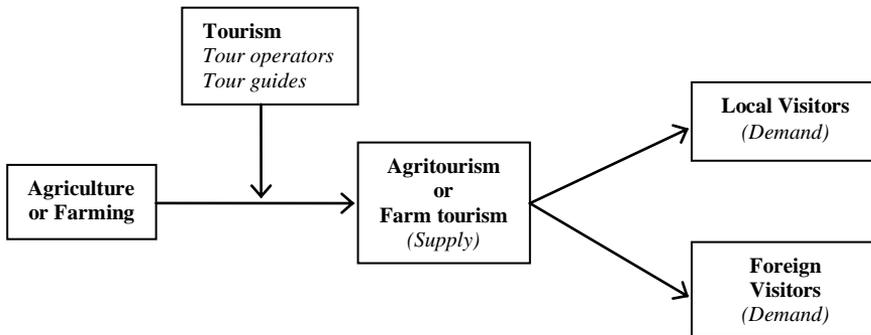


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of The Study

Research methodology

The research was based on a questionnaire survey of all the agritourism operators in the ten districts of the country, using pre-tested questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed after doing a thorough literature review about similar types of studies. It was consisting of three sections; firstly general information of operators, secondly relevant information of visitors using both close and open-ended inquiries. The third section was for few open-ended inquiries related to issues, challenges, problems, difficulties of developing their agritourism destinations. The survey was conducted for the 15 agritourism operators and it was supported by five group discussions with 20 key officials of these operations and some participatory observations by the researcher. Most of the operators agreed to provide necessary information for the study (except financial information). The field data collection was done during December 2007-April 2008 in Sri Lanka.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to best of the authors’ knowledge, this research is the first of its kind in Sri Lanka. Other than some online information, there was no systematically collected information about agritourism destinations in the country at present. Further, no government or private institute which was responsible for maintaining these information. Since the study is exploratory in nature, the analysis was restricted to simple descriptive techniques.

General Information of The Destinations

Current situation of agritourism sector

Identification of agritourism operations and their locations (district and nearest town), established year, size of the total land, farm land and availability of online facility etc were done at the initial stage. The results revealed that the fifteen agritourism destinations functioning at present have been stated recently (Table 1).

Table 1. Basic Information on Different Agritourism Destinations Available at Present in The Country

Destination	District	Nearest town	Established year of agritourism activities	Total land Size of the destination (Acres)	Size of the farm land in the destination (Acres)	% of the farm land in the destination	Online information & booking facility
CIC Farm	Pononnaruwa	Hingurakgoda	2002	1300.0	1300.0	100%	Available
New Zealand Farm	Nuwara Eliya	Ambewela	1990	568.0	568.0	100%	Not available
Paradise Farm	Kegalle	Kitulgala	1998	55.0	55.0	100%	Available
Ceylinco Fruit Farm	Galle	Midigama	2001	15.0	15.0	100%	Available
Spice Garden	Kandy	Kadugannawa	1997	2.0	2.0	100%	Not available
Sigiriya Village	Matale	Sigiriya	2000	20.0	3.0	15%	Available
Hotel Sigiriya	Matale	Sigiriya	2001	25.0	5.0*	20%	Available
Galapita Healing Garden	Moneragala	Buttala	2002	31.0	4.0	13%	Available
Landa Holiday Resort	Ratnapura	Belihuloya	1999	5.0	1.0	20%	Not available
Adventure Park	Moneragala	Wellavaya	2001	150.0	20.0	13%	Available
Kanda Land Eco-centre	Moneragala	Moneragala	2000	4.0	1.0	25%	Not available
Tree Tops Farm	Moneragala	Buttala	1997	100.0	3.0	03%	Available
Woodlands Network	Badulla	Bandarawela	1980	8.0	3.5	44%	Not available
Walawa Nadee Ecotourism Organization	Hambantota	Wanduruppa	2003	10.0	1.0	10%	Not available
Samakanda Ecological & Ecotourism Centre	Galle	Hiniduma	2001	60.0	30.0	50%	Available

Source: Field survey, 2008

* Use nearby farmer's farm land as the agritourism destination

It was found that except two destinations (“Ceylinco Fruit Farm” and “Walawa Nadee Ecotourism Organization”), all the other agritourism destinations were situated in rural areas of the country. All of these areas were important for different types of crops, agricultural activities and livestock farming. Majority of the people of these areas were farmers. Since agritourism

activities have been started in the recent past in the country, the sector has a limited experience. Unlike economically advanced countries in the world like Australia, Canada, United Kingdom, establishment of most of the agritourism destinations in Sri Lanka had been taken place during late 90's and early 20's. Also, compared to European countries, size of Sri Lankan farms are very small. Mean farm size ranges from less than 1 hectare in the poorest countries (including Sri Lanka) to above 1000 hectares in the richest countries. For example, 50% of the farms in the U.S. go beyond 50 hectares in size (Cai, 2011).

Moreover, some of the destinations were not known by the local citizens and some destinations were mainly emphasized on foreign visitors. There were online information and booking facility in some destinations (60%). It made easy for the visitors to find destinations and get pre-visit information. Some suppliers of agritourism services of the country preferred foreign visitors over local visitors, due to high profit margin from foreign visitors.

Important characteristics of agritourism operations

The characteristics of the agritourism operations can be analyzed in terms of types of ownership, initiator/s of destinations, possibility of participation in agritourism activities of these destinations by local community, the factors of suppliers' motivation for supply of the service and means of advertising (Table 2).

It was revealed that the majority of agritourism operations were owned by; private sector, companies (27%) and outside investors (40%). Only three operations were belonging to the farmers (20%). Moreover, there was only one community-based agritourism destination (1%). It has been initiated with the support of non-government organization (NGO) named Sewa Lanka, instead of the local community itself. So that, Sri Lankan situation is totally different from the agritourism operations in European countries where the destinations are belong to the farmers. While initiators of private destinations were respective owners, initiators of the destinations those were having community participation, were the combination of some social organizations and the local community. Except limited employment opportunities for the local community, only three destinations (20%) had given an opportunity to participate in tourism activities by the local community with them to get some benefit. Private sector operators have mainly emphasized on profit margin than the local community's welfare. The main motivation factor of 87 % of the operators was the additional income. Highly used means of advertising were; internet (60%), brochures (73%), word of mouth (80%) and link with tour operators (40%). Here the important finding was that, most of the destinations preferred foreign visitors. They didn't wish to popularize their destinations among local visitors which result low profit margins.

Other important features of agritourism destinations

Among the other features, connections or links with other organizations, seasonality of operations, availability of activities for different age groups, scale of operation and availability of accommodation facility were important. Findings of these aspects are presented in the (Table 3).

One significant feature of the several destinations which were operated by private companies or outside investors (40%) was the connection of them with tour operators in the country. Due to different facilities and opportunities of these destinations, they have made links with main tour operators of the country and attract visitors to their destinations. But, this is difficult for the local farmers due to lack of facilities and interaction. Another important finding was that, the ability of agritourism operations to operate the business throughout the year. Since Sri Lanka is a tropical country without having clear seasonal variations, crops can be cultivated at any time. Another important point was that the available tourism events of these destinations varied in

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between four and eight. Except four special destinations (“Adventure Park”, “Kanda Land Eco-centre”, “Tree Tops Farm” and “Spice Gardens”), activities were available for all the categories of visitors namely; adults, youth and children. However, compare to Sri Lanka, the number of tourism activities, (entertainment, educational and recreational programs) is much higher in agritourism destinations of western countries (Wicks and Merrett, 2003).

The author’s classification of agritourism destinations in Sri Lanka situation was based on the scale of operation, namely Large (>10 visitors/time), Medium (6-10 visitors/time) and small (<6 visitors/time). Thus, 47% of the agritourism operations were medium-scale, 33% was small-scale and only 20% was large-scale. Large tour operators for example “Sirigiya village”, “Hotel Sigiriya” had made links with tour operators. So that, they have received more visitors often. However, the number of visitors in each destination was very low compared to industrialized countries which are having very large size farms. Further, only 73% of the destinations have accommodation facilities for the visitors.

Table 2. Important Characteristics of Agritourism Operations

Destination	Types of ownership	Initiator/s of destination	Participation of Local People	Motivation behind agritourism supply	Means of advertising
CIC Farm	Private local company	Owner	No	Extra income	Internet, Brochures, Word of mouth
New Zealand Farm	Private local company	Owner	No	Extra income	Brochures, Word of mouth
Paradise Farm	Private foreign investor	Owner	No	Extra income	Internet, Word of mouth
Ceylinco Fruit Farm	Private local company + local farmers	Owner + Local farmers	Yes	Community service	Internet, Broaches, Word of mouth
Spice Gardens	Local farmers (Spice growers)	Owner	No	Extra income	Leaflets, Word of mouth
Sigiriya Village	Multinational company	Owner	No	Extra income	Internet, Broaches, Tour operators
Hotel Sigiriya	Private outside investor	Owner	No	Extra income	Internet, Broaches, Tour operators
Galapita Healing Garden	Private outside investor	Owner	No	Extra income	Internet, Broaches, Tour operators
Landa Holiday Resort	Private foreign investor	Owner	No	Extra income	Broaches, Word of mouth
Adventure Park	Private outside investor	Owner	No	Extra income	Internet, Broaches, Word of mouth, Tour operators
Kanda Land Eco-centre	A local farm family	Family members	No	Extra income	Broaches, Word of mouth
Tree Tops Farm	Private outside investor	Owner	No	Extra income	Internet, Word of mouth, Tour operators
Woodlands Network	Network of local farmers	Rev. Father Harry Hass+ Local people	Yes	Community service	Broaches, Word of mouth
Walawanadee Ecotourism	Community-based operation	Provincial council + Local people + NGO	Yes	Community service	Broaches, Word of mouth
Samakanda Ecological Centre	Private outside investor	Owner	No	Extra income	Internet, Word of mouth, Tour operators

Source: Field survey, 2008

Table 3. Other Important Features of Agritourism Destinations

Destination	Connectivity with other organizations	Periodicity of operation	Facilities available for			Scale of Operation *	Acomodation Facility
			Adults	Young	Children		
CIC Farm	Not available	Whole year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Medium	Available
New Zealand farm	Not available	Whole year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Medium	Not available
Paradise farm	Not available	Whole year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Small	Available
Ceylinco Fruit farm	Local farmers	Whole year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Medium	Not available
Perakum Spice Garden	Not available	Whole year	Yes	Yes	No	Small	Not available
Sigiriya Village	Tour operators	Whole year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Large	Available
Hotel Sigiriya	Tour operators	Whole year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Large	Available
Galapita Haling garden	Tour operators	Whole year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Medium	Available
Landa Holiday resort	Not available	Whole year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Small	Available
Adventure park	Tour operators	Whole year	Yes	Yes	No	Medium	Available
Kanda Land Eco-centre	Not available	Whole year	Yes	Yes	No	Small	Available
Tree Tops farm	Tour operators	Whole year	Yes	Yes	No	Medium	Available
Woodlands net work	Local people	Whole year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Small	Available
Walawa nadee Ecotourism	Local people	Whole year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Medium	No available
Samakanda Ecological centre	Tour operators	Whole year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Large	Available

Source: Field survey, 2008

*According to the maximum number of visitors allowed at a time; Small-scale = <6 people, Medium-scale = 6-10 people and Large-scale = >10 people.

Information of Visitors

Important basic calculations such as target and actual number of visitors, visitor percentage, and length of stay have been conducted and presented in (Table 4).

According to available facilities, target numbers of visitors of these destinations were calculated with the help of owners. Almost all the operations have lower number of visitors than the targeted level. Other than the second destination;, the average number of visitor was about 31%. This may be mainly due to two reasons; lack of publicity and promotion for destinations and the insecure condition existed throughout the last few years in the country due to the ethnic conflict. The second destination (“New Zealand farm”) was an exceptional case (59%), because it is a very famous place for livestock farming for about three decades. It is one of the few places where pure European breeds can be reared in the country. “CIC farm” was a newly established destination. Thus, it might not famous among local visitors yet. At that time, “Paradise farm” had faced a severe shortage of visitors. Therefore, they were hoping to do a marketing promotion soon. “Ceylinco fruit farm” had a very special situation because it was the only

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horticultural farm situated in a coastal area of the country. So that, it was in a position to attract comparatively large number of local and foreign visitors and school children for training programs. Though business activities were quite profitable in the past, some “Spice Gardens” were facing problems due to political influence and the monopoly of tour operators and tour guides. This was a common problem for most of the small-scale spice gardens in that area. In order to get the registration at the local government, they had to pay regular tax as well as bribery to the authorities of the local government and higher levels of commission to tour operators and tour guides. Although the area where spice gardens are located was getting sufficient numbers of local and foreign visitors, due to the elephant orphanage at Pinnawala, only the powerful spice garden operators attracted most of the visitors, leaving the small-scale agritourism farmers in a vulnerable situation.

Table 4. Information of Agritourism Visitors

Destination	Target number of visitors/year	Actual number of visitors/year*	Percentage of actual visitors out of target number of visitors	Length of stay
CIC Farm	1,865	310	17 %	0.5 day
New Zealand Farm	4,800	2,841	59 %	0.5 day
Paradise Farm	1,200	151	13 %	0.5 day
Ceylinco Fruit Farm	1,680	498	30 %	0.5 day
Spice Garden	2,400	443	19 %	0.5 day
Sigiriya Village	3,600	1,417	39 %	1.0 day
Hotel Sigiriya	4,080	1,628	40 %	1.5 days
Galapita Healing Garden	1,680	584	35 %	1.5 days
Landa Holiday Resort	1,200	391	33 %	0.5 day
Adventure Park	2,880	1,247	43 %	1.0 day
Kanda Land Eco-center	1,080	385	36 %	0.5 day
Tree Tops Farm	1,440	552	38 %	1.5 days
Woodlands Network	960	360	38 %	1.5 days
Walawanadee Ecotourism	2,400	788	33 %	0.5 day
Samakanda Ecological Centre	2,880	1,216	42 %	1.5 days

Source: Field survey, 2008

*Average value of last four years (2004 -2007)

“Sigiriya village” and “Hotel Sigiriya” were three star hotels in Anurathdhapura near Sigiriya rock (8th wonder in the World). Recently these two hotels had included agritourism as one item of their package. They were getting comparatively higher number of visitors. “Galapita Healing Garden” was a unique place. Main practices of this destination were indigenous medicine, Yoga and Meditation. Also, they were doing organic farming and traditional paddy cultivation as agritourism activities. Certain level of demand was there for this destination. “Landa holiday Resort” was mainly a tourist hotel. Also they were maintaining an orchard, vegetable farm and traditional paddy cultivation. But, due to poor level of publicity, number of visitors for this destination was low. “Adventure park” was mainly promoting adventure activities. Also, they maintain large vegetable farm and paddy field as agritourism activities. Visitors of this destination can engage in both types of activities. This destination had received higher number of visitors. Links with tour operators and attractive web site of the destination might be the main reasons for this. “Kanda land Eco-centre” was an ecotourism centre. Furthermore, they had five acre rubber plantation, demonstrating cultivation and processing of rubber. But, due to less facilities and publicity, visitors for this destination were also lower. “Tree tops farm” was an ecotourism operation, situated in the middle of a jungle. Also, they had done chenna cultivation as the agritourism activity. Since they had links with tour operators and an attractive web site, they were getting comparatively large number of visitors. “Woodland networks” was a community tourism network, functioning among few member of the area. They were doing

agritourism as a part of their tourism activity. However, a low number of visitors was there. "Walawa Nadee Ecotourism" was conducting number of ecotourism activities. They were doing traditional paddy cultivation and curd production at small scale. Low number of visitors was observed there too. Main reason may be the poor level of publicity for the destination. "Samakanda Ecological Centre" was an abundant tea land. The land was integrated with fruit crops and vegetables. Also, they were doing some ecotourism activities. Comparatively higher number of visitors was could be seen there. When the average length of stay was calculated for all the destinations, it was less than a day (0.9 day). It was a very low level. Small size farms, less number of tourism activities, use of budget tourist packages by the visitors may be the possible reasons behind it.

Issues and Challenges of Agritourism Sector

Operators had mentioned present barriers and opportunities related to economic, cultural, infrastructural, environmental and political aspects as responses for the Open-ended inquires of the questionnaire related to agritourism sector. These factors are seriously affecting their tourism operations negative manner.

- (1) **Small size farm lands**
Size of the farm land is one of the decisive factors for the establishment of an agritourism destination. Farms having large land/s can include various aspects for its' agritourism operations. Compare to industrialized countries, almost all the farms in Sri Lanka are very small in size. Average farm size of the country is 0.81 hectare. It limits the variety in agricultural and agritourism activities of the farms when compare to other countries.
- (2) **Poor level of awareness of operators on agritourism opportunities**
Awareness on important aspects of agritourism is crucial to have a successful agritourism business. Though Sri Lankan operators had certain level of knowledge on agriculture, they had poor level of understanding about the deferent aspects of agritourism. Proper initiation, management, development, marketing and promotion of an agritourism destination need better knowledge about the concept. But, poor level of knowledge on critical aspects of the agritourism can be seen with the operators.
- (3) **Lack of basic skills**
Though normal educational level of the people of the country is higher, there are problems regarding English knowledge, landscape skills, management skills, communication and interpersonal skills etc with rural farmers. However, these factors are essential to operate agritourism destinations successfully. Therefore with out these skills, agritourism operators face many difficulties.
- (4) **Poor level of processing of farm products and limited scope for direct sales**
Processing or value addition of farm products as well as direct selling of them enhance the attractiveness for agritourism destinations. But, in most of the agritourism destinations in the country is doing these things at a lower level. This is due to lack of necessary finance, knowledge, technology and storage facilities for the rural people. Also, the demand for those products is still quite low as the numbers of visitors are still not sufficient.
- (5) **Low level of uniqueness among destinations**
Uniqueness or speciality is urgent for a destination to get popular among visitors. But in Sri Lanka, most of the destinations have similar type of natural and agricultural landscape. This makes competition among destinations and less attractive for the visitors.

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- (6) **Low level of publicity and promotion of destinations**
Publicity is very important strategy to attract visitors for tourism destinations. Since giving publicity is costly, only some destinations had advertising and business promotion measures such as leaflets, brochures, web sites, advertisements etc. Most of the operators have tried to use of word-of-mouth as common strategy of publicity. However, it is a simple method of giving publicity for the less number of people.
- (7) **Lack of sufficient number of visitors**
Sufficient number of visitors is one of the expectations of agritourism operators. But, in most of the situation, numbers of visitors were very low. This is the most serious problem of most of the agritourism destinations in the country. Possible reasons may be lack of safety and peace in the country by that time and high cost of travelling due to high fuel cost.
- (8) **Environment pollution**
Clean and green environment is a positive factor in the tourism industry. However, certain level of environment pollution was there in some destinations due to unplanned and uncontrolled tourism activities. High crowd, traffic congestion, litter accumulation etc. were the main reasons. Also, polluted environment badly affect for the demand for tourism destinations.
- (9) **Poor waste management in destinations**
This was one of the main problems in most of the destinations. Accumulation of polythene bags, plastic containers, tins, bottles, garbage had taken place. There were no proper waste management programs in most of the destinations. It may leads to environmental and health hazards.
- (10) **Insufficient government intervention**
Government support is essential for the success of tourism destinations. Though limited central and local government support was there, it was not covering some important aspects of agritourism development including suitable policies. Planning and implementation of quality control measures, poor coordination among the relevant institutions like local governments, banks and financial institutions, support for the publicity of destinations and unavailability of relevant government polices could be seen.
- (11) **Poor level of infrastructure facilities**
Infrastructure facilities are very important for tourism destinations. Most of the agritourism destinations were in the rural areas of the country. So, in many places the levels of the infrastructure facilities were not up to the standard. It is one of the reasons to reduce the demand for destinations.
- (12) **Monopoly of tour operator and tour guides**
Some tour operators and tour guides were sending visitors for selected agritourism destinations in order to get commissions. This is a main problem for powerless small destination owners. Thus, tour operators, guides, rich and powerful destination owners control the sector by attracting visitors for their destinations by making problems for poor destinations.
- (13) **Political influences for the operators**
Specially politicians of local governments had made several influences for some operators. This was very serious issue taking place in the sector and it has happened in different forms. To get the licence in each year, operators have to pay significant amount

of money to the politicians of local governments. Also, in some situations they have to spend money on various activities of the politicians such as election campaigns, festivals etc. This is an unbearable burden especially for small-scale operators.

CONCLUSIONS

Agritourism sector in Sri Lanka is at its' initial stage. Agritourism activities are carried out by limited number of agritourism operators at different scales. Most of the operations are conducted by non-farmers and the involvement of real farmers in the sector is relatively low. This may be due to lack of awareness, finance, other facilities and motivation of farmers. Moreover, community-based agritourism operations are very low and also it seems that, they have problems due to lack of proper management skills, guidance and facilities. Thus, the private companies and investors are dominating and getting the advantages of the agritourism sector at present. Though high potential is there for the agritourism sector, the situation is mainly favourable to the private sector operator and not to the real farmers.

Furthermore, low numbers of visitors could be seen in all the agritourism destinations. This may be due to lack of publicity of the destinations, the North-East war and unrest in the last few years in the country. However, with the ending of the civil war in the country and government plans for the enhancement of rural tourism, there will be a more demand for agritourism in future.

Issues and challenges that faced by the agritourism operators are small size farm lands, poor level of awareness on the concept of agritourism and destination development., lack of necessary skills such as English knowledge, business management, landscaping. Instead of processing of farm products, lack of publicity for their destinations due to high cost of advertisement, environment protection, waste management, less attention of the government, poor level of infrastructure facilities. Although most of these issues and challenges are common to other countries, monopoly of tour operators and influence of politicians are the two main problems in the Sri Lankan context, especially for the small-scale operators. So, intervention of the relevant government institutions is essential to help these operators. According to the information, it is clear that the basic requirements for the agritourism operations are these. However, most of the destinations are at the infant stage and less developed conditions. So, further development and improvement of these destinations are a must. Findings of the study are useful to plan the future development of these destinations.

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