A2.2 – Collection of the Agritourism Competences Definition Models from Europe

R1 – Handbook of Agritainment: preliminary research · English

Green Agritainment – VET strategies for Edutainment in European Agritourism
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Collection of the Agritourism Competences Definition Models from Europe

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1. Executive Summary

The Green Agritainment: VET Strategies for Edutainment in European Agritourism-Agritainment project is framed within the Erasmus+ and has as its main objective the upgrading of VET in the Agritourism sector. The present report is one of the major outputs of this project, offering a critical overview of agritourism worker competencies across Europe. This would provide desk research for the synthesis of findings, a structured mapping of skills, SWOT analysis of the existing competence models, technical evaluations, and qualitative content analysis for at least 24 identified competencies.

Agritourism, a sector combining agriculture, rural heritage, and tourism, requires professionals to possess diverse competencies, including sustainable farming practices, marketing, digital literacy, customer service, and regulatory compliance. The research reveals regional variations in how these competencies are defined and implemented, with some countries excelling in heritage preservation and experiential tourism, while others emphasize regulatory adherence and digital transformation. Despite the sector's potential, gaps remain in training standardization, digital competence, and access to structured learning programs.

The most relevant contribution in this report is the SWOT analysis, which lists the key strengths: this sector is related to sustainability goals, has rich cultural heritage, and has access to EU funding; weaknesses being fragmented certification systems, low levels of digitalization, and uneven levels of quality and training. Finally, this report points to great opportunities: global demand for eco-tourism, new technology, and rising funding for rural development. Nevertheless, economic instability, climate change, and workforce shortage are some of the threats that confront the growth of the sector.

The key challenges emerging from the technical analysis include a unified competence framework, better experiential learning opportunities, and stakeholder cooperation. Most of the current training models are missing both digital integration and practical hands-on learning; hence, VET strategies need modernization. These include the development of a standardized European agritourism competence framework, more investment in digital and sustainability training, and financial and policy support for rural agritourism enterprises.

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This report provides a core input for policymakers, educators, and industry stakeholders who are looking to professionalize agritourism through targeted VET strategies. The sector will be more resilient, innovative, and economically viable in Europe if competency gaps are addressed and opportunities for sustainable growth can be seized.

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2. Introduction

This report represents one of the main outcomes of the Erasmus+ project 'Green Agritainment: VET Strategies for Edutainment in European Agritourism' focused on the upgrading of vocational education and training within the Agritourism sector. The study follows a systematic mapping of agritourism worker competencies based on substantial desk research in Europe. It scrutinizes the main agritourism competencies that professionals in this sector need to possess, considering their importance to sustainable rural development, tourism management, and the conservation of cultural heritage.

Agritourism is among those sectors that connect agriculture and tourism, and it requires a very wide range of multidisciplinary skills, from sustainable farming practices and rural hospitality to marketing strategies, digital engagement, and regulatory compliance. The report collects a set of agritourism competence definition models and carries out a detailed analysis of how these competencies are developed and applied across different European countries. This determines how effective the existing training programs are and ascertains any shortcomings with regard to meeting industry needs.

A central characteristic of the research is the fact that it covers a SWOT analysis of existing competence models with regards to strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats with respect to workforce development in agritourism. Also, the report discusses technical comments related to the existing frameworks' applicability, adaptability, and standardization. The following report qualitatively analyzes at least 24 agritourism competencies.

These are key findings that could provide a real foundation for the work of policy makers, educational institutions, and industry players who want to further develop effective VET strategies for agritourism. The identification of best practices and challenges should lead to recommending the development of structured training activities in ways that would provide workers in agritourism with relevant, transferable

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skills for the furtherance of professionalism, competitiveness, and sustainability within this agritourism sector throughout Europe.

The study gives valuable inputs on how agritourism can further be included in rural development strategies, using education and skills development as driving factors for growth. The conclusions will give a lead on strengthening vocational training, promoting sustainability, and increasing the economic potentials of agritourism in Europe.

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3. Mapping of Agritourism Workers Competences

3.1. Greece

3.1.1. Competence 1: Understanding organic farming

Description: Agritourism workers must understand the basic principles of organic agriculture, as well as the means available to produce agricultural products without the use of chemical preparations and inorganic fertilizers. They must also be aware of the necessity, meaning and importance of the organic production of agricultural products, as well as the methods and permitted materials and farming tools used when organic production is applied in practice, in order to be able to select and apply means and techniques that ensure the protection of crops while respecting the environment and the consumer (Alexiou, M. et all, 2021).

Context: In Greece, the knowledge of agritourism workers about organic farming varies considerably. There are many who have become interested in organic farming due to the growing demand for organic products and the ecological benefits it offers, however, their knowledge may be limited, especially on issues such as soil management, organic pest control and selection of appropriate seeds. There is also a perceived deficit regarding the certification process for organic farming which can be complex and many agritourism workers are not aware of the requirements. Finally, information on the organic market, prices and marketing strategy is needed.

3.1.2. Competence 2: Marketing of Rural Tourism Products

Description: This skill covers practical aspects of agritourism marketing, such as methods of collecting, processing and utilizing information from the intended market segment, designing and writing questionnaires, sampling techniques, market segmentation techniques and writing integrated marketing plans. Agritourism workers must be able to decode the factors influencing consumer behavior, present their services and products at fairs promoting local products, applying the marketing plan

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they have drawn up. They must also be able to interpret the specificities and limitations of marketing for the agritourism sector, measure, with reliable models, the quality and degree of satisfaction of their customers and accept the specificities of the rural product and tourism services in terms of the implementation of marketing programs (Alexiou, M. et all, 2021; Kotler, P. et all 2021).

Context: The marketing of agritourism products in Greece has emerged as an important sector as visitors seek authentic and experiential experiences. Agritourism workers must be able to promote local products such as wines, olive oil and traditional foods and create experiences that combine agriculture with culture, such as cooking classes or traditional festivals. In Greece, efforts are being made to develop a strong online strategy through social networks, websites and blogs to promote agritourism destinations, as well as the use of digital advertising to reach targeted audiences. Many agritourism businesses offer experiential activities such as harvesting, animal care or participation in local festivals, as well as educational programs for schools and interested groups.

3.1.3. Competence 3: Rural Tradition and Folk Art

Description: This competency is essential for workers in the agritourism sector as they should have built a broad theoretical background on the history and evolution of folk art and rural tradition in Greece. The theoretical part of this skill emphasizes those elements of popular cultural heritage that are related to the countryside and the rural way of life, such as traditional architecture, traditional music, traditional products and recipes. At the same time, they should be aware of the evolution of the business dimension of rural activities, with an emphasis on traditional products per region. The practical component focuses on the experiential understanding of the elements that make up local traditional heritage, through field activities, educational visits, observation of the manufacture of traditional products, etc. (Alexiou, M. et all, 2021).

Context: Agricultural tradition and folk art in Greece are inextricably linked to the history and culture of the country. The Greek countryside preserves rich traditions that reflect the way of life of the farmers and their interaction with nature. Agricultural traditions in Greece include farming techniques, festivals related to the cycle of the seasons, and the habits and customs of farmers. Agritourism workers are expected to guide tourists through traditional festivals, such as the harvest festivals, which are important social events that bring communities together. Folk art, on the other hand, is expressed through crafts, painting, music and dance. In Greece, agritourism workers demonstrate this competence by guiding tourists to ceramics workshops where they

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create ceramic objects, such as plates and vases, often bearing traditional designs and motifs, or to textile workshops where they admire textiles decorated with colorful patterns.

3.1.4. Competence 4: Communication and interpersonal skills

Description: This competence is related to person-to-person or person-to-group interactions. It requires the agritourism worker to be able to build a framework of cooperation and trust, make use of contacts and connections, have the ability to persuade, communicate as well as interpersonal skills. The agritourism worker should have a clear communication to explain agricultural operations, safety guidelines and tour activities. This skill also includes the ability to work effectively with other farm staff, seasonal workers or volunteers, and the ability to work with local tourism operators, restaurants or craft groups to enhance the agritourism experience (Alexiou, M. et all, 2021).

Context: In agritourism in Greece, most employees have a set of communication and interpersonal skills, as they come into contact with visitors who are interested in learning about the local culture, nature, and traditional life of each region. Most are able to provide clear information about agritourism activities, local products and traditions, information that is essential for a better visitor experience. They also understand the importance of creating a positive image and a friendly atmosphere, as visitors need to feel welcome and comfortable.

3.2. Italy

3.2.1 Competence 1: Regulatory Compliance and Safety Standards Knowledge for Agritourism in Lazio

Description: Agritourism operators in Lazio are required to master compliance with specific health, safety, and operational standards as set out by Regolamento Regionale No. 29 of December 1, 2017. This regulation is an enactment under Law No. 14 of November 2, 2006 on agritourism and rural tourism. It defines strict criteria for the quality and authenticity of food, safety of accommodations, and structural hygiene. The regulation mandates that agritourism establishments primarily serve food sourced from the operator's own farm or from local producers. Moreover, the regulation emphasizes the use of certified local products, including those designated DOP, IGP, and DOC, underscoring the importance of local agriculture in Lazio's rural tourism model. For food preparation, Article 12 stipulates that kitchens must align with EU hygiene standards, especially under Regulation (EC) No 852/2004 on the hygiene of foodstuffs, ensuring that the storage, preparation, and serving areas are equipped with

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non-manual sinks, washable surfaces, and insect and pest barriers. These standards apply to facilities that serve over 15 guests and require specifically designated areas for food preparation and serving

Context: The law requires operators to use authentic ingredients and certified products, enhancing the guest experience by promoting regional traditions. Compliant operations must provide detailed documentation, including food sourcing agreements and certifications for using traditional products, which are inspected regularly by health authorities. Furthermore, operators are obligated to manage any guest accommodations with thorough adherence to rural sanitation standards, especially in multi-functional spaces used for dining or open-air lodging, ensuring that the authentic rural setting is maintained without compromising modern sanitation.

In practice, this competence is applied widely in Lazio's agritourism operations to ensure health and safety standards align with both local and EU-wide regulations. Moreover, the EU's Regulation (EC) No 852/2004 on food hygiene is foundational across Europe, setting standards for kitchen hygiene and food handling that Lazio's regulations have further specified to fit rural tourism. Operators in Lazio often complete certification or training courses provided by local agricultural or tourism associations to understand and meet these requirements. Such compliance is seen as essential for sustainable rural tourism, aligning with Lazio's goals of showcasing high-quality local products and providing a secure experience for visitors

3.2.2. Competence 2: Local product promotion and sustainable hospitality practices for agritourism in Lombardia

Description: In Lombardia, agritourism operators are encouraged to develop strong competencies in promoting local products and integrating sustainable hospitality practices. According to Regolamento Regionale No. 5 of July 24, 2020, the region emphasizes a clear connection between agritourism services and local agricultural production, underscoring the need for operators to effectively market and serve regional products as part of the guest experience. Operators are encouraged to source products like wine, olive oil, and cheese from their own farms or local producers, ensuring that visitors are offered an authentic taste of Lombardia.

Context: In practice, this competency is applied through Lombardia's "Certificato di Connessione dell'Attività Agrituristica," which certifies that the food and hospitality services offered are directly tied to the operator's agricultural activities. This certification process ensures that operators are not only promoting local products but also adhering to sustainable practices, reducing transportation emissions, and

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supporting local farmers and artisans. Training and certification programs help operators refine their marketing skills, enabling them to showcase the uniqueness of local products effectively. This competency is critical as it aligns with Lombardia's goals of preserving rural heritage while adapting to sustainable and economically viable tourism trends (Agricoltori Italiani Lombardia, 2019).

3.2.3 Competence 3: Agricultural education and cultural tourism integration for agritourism in Toscana

Description: Toscana's agritourism model places a significant emphasis on the competency of integrating educational and cultural activities with traditional agritourism. According to Law No. 30 of June 23, 2003, agritourism operators in Toscana are encouraged to incorporate "fattorie didattiche" (educational farms) and cultural tourism into their offerings. This competency enables operators to provide experiences that go beyond hospitality, allowing visitors to engage with local agricultural practices, learn about Tuscany's rural traditions, and participate in activities such as olive oil or wine production. By educating guests about local traditions and rural practices, operators enhance the value of the agritourism experience, aligning it closely with Tuscany's identity and the region's focus on preserving agricultural heritage.

Also, this law also supports enotourism, enabling agritourism facilities to conduct guided tastings and educational activities that showcase Tuscan products like wine, cheese, and olive oil. Operators must comply with standards for hosting such educational and tasting events, which are detailed in the accompanying Regolamento di Attuazione No. 46/2004. These requirements aim to ensure that all educational and cultural activities are authentic, informative, and safely managed, thus preserving the integrity of the agritourism experience in Toscana (Regione Toscana, 2004).

Context: This competency is actively applied across Toscana, where many agritourism facilities are adopting the educational farm model (Tuscany People, 2022). Operators often partner with local schools, tourist groups, and organizations to conduct educational workshops that highlight sustainable farming practices, local biodiversity, and the history of Tuscan agriculture. Through the "Marchio Agriturismo Italia" certification, operators can align their offerings with nationally recognized standards, ensuring both compliance and quality. Additionally, recent regulations, such as those covering "agricampeggi" (agricultural camping), have expanded options for cultural tourism in outdoor spaces, allowing operators to offer educational experiences in various settings on their land.

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This integration of cultural tourism and educational initiatives supports the broader objectives of Toscana's rural development strategy, fostering sustainable tourism that respects and promotes local heritage while meeting modern tourism expectations.

3.2.4. Competence 4: Quality control practices for agritourism in Puglia

Description: In Puglia, agritourism is highly regulated under the amended Regional Law No. 4 of 2024, which expands and specifies requirements set forth in Regional Law No. 42 of 2013. This updated regulation emphasizes two main competencies for agritourism operators: first, compliance with strict quality standards in local food sourcing and environmental sustainability; and second, certification through the local *Elenco Regionale degli Operatori Agrituristici* (EROA). Operators must connect their activities closely with agriculture, maintaining a high percentage of locally sourced, high-quality ingredients, including those designated DOP and IGP. This helps ensure that all food offered to guests is regionally authentic and supports the local agricultural economy (Agricultura, 2024; Studio Anchora).

Also, to qualify, agritourism operators must submit a *Relazione Tecnico-Agronomica*, a detailed report that documents the facilities' capacity for hosting guests, along with a sustainable plan for managing resources. This includes requirements for hygiene and environmental compliance, with a focus on using existing rural structures in harmony with the surrounding landscape. Additionally, operators are encouraged to integrate *agricampeggio* (agricultural camping) as a way to offer more immersive and eco-friendly rural experiences (Studio Bramato; Puglia Verde).

Context: Puglia's agritourism model actively supports sustainable tourism and agricultural integration. The region encourages operators to engage in training programs that highlight environmental stewardship and the promotion of Puglia's cultural heritage. Additionally, recent provisions in Law No. 4 of 2024 make it easier for operators to acquire certification, streamlining access to tourism grants and providing financial incentives for eco-sustainable facility upgrades. This competency framework aligns agritourism with Puglia's broader goals of rural economic development, environmental preservation, and cultural education (Confagricoltura Puglia, Studio Anchora).

This updated legal framework reinforces Puglia's commitment to maintaining high standards in agritourism, making it a model for quality, sustainability, and authenticity in Italy's tourism sector.

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3.3. Ireland

3.3.1. Competence 1. Marketing

Description: Research focused on farm/agritourism in the United Kingdom reveals that understanding the principles of marketing was essential to running a successful and profitable agritourism enterprise. Tourism becomes a significant source of income for local businesses and a prime mover in local development when visitors come and stay in the region. However, whereas it is important to provide facilities, activities, events etc. that will permit the visitor to discover and enjoy rural life, the whole region must be promoted with a marketing policy to give a visibility that will make its attractiveness become reality. For this reason, the discipline of marketing is an essential need to know business skill for any agritourism worker.

Context: In Ireland, there are two main state organisations who are tasked with marketing and promoting Ireland, Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland. Fáilte Ireland is the national tourism development authority and Tourism Ireland is responsible for marketing the Island of Ireland. Each agency has a distinct role and remit, and each complements the work of the other to expand the island of Ireland's valuable tourism market. Fáilte Ireland supports small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the tourism space with some tool kits that are accessible online. However, more work could be done in this area, especially in developing content specific to agritourism.

3.3.2. Competence 2. Creativity and Innovation

Description: Teagasc is the Irish Agriculture and Food Development Authority. They state that "Creativity and innovation are very important when considering a new enterprise to generate income on the farm. Farmers should not view diversification as a threat to farming but more as a guarantee that the farm will survive and attract a successor". (Teagasc, 2016: 13). The most successful agritourism enterprises are those that are developed using outside the box thinking. It is not surprising therefore, that when asked what skills are necessary to be a successful agritourism worker, being creative and thinking innovatively emerge as being essential.

Context: Research shows that whilst possessing sound business and management competencies are key to successfully managing agritourism enterprises, success is about much more than simply 'managing'; it is increasingly dependent on innovation and identification and exploitation of opportunities. Ireland continues to make great strides in the food sector and has taken example from other European nations such as France, in terms of leveraging its district terroir. Many farmers in Ireland have pivoted into the specialised food sector such as charcuterie, yoghurt, ice cream to name but a

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few. Many more could benefit from training and mentoring in product innovation to enable them to add value to their produce, as opposed to handing their raw products onto some third party to do so.

3.3.3. Competence 3. Customer Service

Description: "The Guest of today is not the same Guest of 20 years ago and therefore the secret is to keep doing the things that work well but also to continuously change the customer service offer" (Rural Enterprise Skillsnet, 2021). Having a competence in customer service is essential to the experience economy and, therefore, an important skill for agritourism workers to master. Tourists attracted to agritourism, seek authentic, curated experiences that are delivered to a high standard and with a unique and story to tell. The all-in-one Farm to Fork Platform, Local Line, which is based in London Ontario in Canada, states on their website that, as a rule of thumb, great customer service is centred around these four key elements:

- Empathy: Understanding and connecting with customers emotionally and relating to their needs and concerns.
- Adaptability: Flexibility in meeting customers' evolving circumstances and preferences.
- Commitment: Consistent efforts to meet and exceed customer expectations.
- Value: Providing a positive experience that encourages repeat business and referrals.

Understanding the theory behind good customer service is therefore an important basis from which any successful agritourism worker and succeed.

Context: Ireland has a long history of extending a warm welcome to tourists. Known as our "Cead Mile Fáilte" which translates as 100,000 welcomes, tourists relish any opportunity to get to know Irish people on a personal level. Agritourism and in particular, farm-based tourism enterprises, offer tourists a chance to meet rural Irish in their homes and get a behind-the-scenes look at a working Irish farm. Indeed, some tour operator's contract with Irish farming families to welcome groups of tourists to have dinner in their home. This is an opportunity to eat locally grown produce, cooked by the farmer and experience traditional Irish hospitality. In the time pressured environment of a farm, having access to training on customer service that centres around empathy, adaptability, commitment and value, will prove to be the lynchpin for future agritourism success in Ireland and further afield.

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3.3.4. Competence 4. Managing Finances

Description: Central to any successful enterprise is sound financial management. This competence is orientated around developing the financial management skills of agritourism workers. Agritourism businesses are by their nature complex, and somewhat different from the financial management of a farm or other such enterprise. Agritourism businesses will sometimes require capital to get them started and access to seed funding until such time as cashflows become established. Knowing where such sources of finance can be accessed and how to apply for them is a key skill for agritourism entrepreneurs.

Context: The agritourism sector in Ireland is increasingly populated by second generation farmers and food producers. Upon inheriting the farm/food business, they are faced with trying to supplement the income from farming with value adding activities such as tourism, food tourism and edutainment. Successfully navigating the financing of such enterprises provides a steep learning curve for most of these second generation farmers.

3.4. Cyprus

3.4.1. Competence 1: Understanding of Local Agricultural Practices

Description: Agritourism workers must possess a deep understanding of the local agricultural practices, including farming techniques, crop cycles, and livestock management. This competence is essential for offering authentic agritourism experiences, such as farm tours, hands-on farming activities, and local produce education. It allows workers to communicate the intricacies of sustainable agriculture to tourists, thereby enhancing their engagement and appreciation for rural life (Boukas, 2019; Orphanidou et al, 2023).

Context: In Cyprus, agritourism workers demonstrate this competence by guiding tourists through olive groves, citrus orchards, and vineyards. They often involve visitors in activities like grape picking, olive harvesting, wine-making, and traditional farming methods, giving them an immersive experience of Cypriot agricultural life. Agritourism workers are expected to possess both the skills and the ability to educate tourists about these activities (Boukas, 2019; Orphanidou et al, 2023).

3.4.2. Competence 2: Cultural and Heritage Knowledge

Description: This competence involves a deep understanding of local culture, history, and heritage. Agritourism workers must be able to convey the significance of cultural

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and historical landmarks, traditions, and local customs to visitors. This competence enriches the tourist experience, helping visitors engage more meaningfully with the local environment and culture. It is also key in promoting cultural sustainability by preserving and sharing local heritage (Boukas, 2019; Neofytou, 2017).

Context: In Cyprus, cultural and religious tourism plays a major role in rural tourism development. Agritourism workers are expected to guide tourists through various historical and cultural experiences, such as visits to monasteries, traditional villages, and local festivals. This competence is increasingly emphasized to promote Cyprus's rich cultural heritage, particularly in rural areas like the Troodos Mountains (Boukas, 2019). Cyprus has a rich cultural heritage, and agritourism workers often showcase local traditions, such as olive harvesting and citrus farming. By interpreting these practices to visitors, workers help preserve and promote the island's cultural identity, while also educating tourists about its historical significance (Cetin, 2015; Orphanidou et al, 2023).

3.4.3. Competence 3: Customer Service and Hospitality

Description: Strong customer service and hospitality skills are essential in agritourism. Workers must be able to provide excellent service, from hosting guests to addressing their needs and ensuring they have an enjoyable experience. Hospitality skills are vital in creating a welcoming environment that encourages repeat visits and positive reviews (Boukas, 2019; Cetin, 2015; Neofytou, 2017). Agritourism workers must handle inquiries, address concerns, and guide visitors through various activities like farm tours, wine tastings, and hands-on farming activities. This competence is crucial in establishing rapport with guests, enhancing satisfaction, and ensuring a positive overall experience (Neofytou, 2017).

Context: In Cyprus, many rural accommodations and agrotourism enterprises focus on offering personalized hospitality. Agritourism workers tend to engage with visitors on a personal level, making them feel part of the local community and enhancing the overall tourist experience. Agritourism workers frequently interact with tourists during meals, tours, and activities, ensuring their comfort and satisfaction. These hospitality efforts are particularly important in small, family-run agrotourism businesses that emphasize traditional Cypriot warmth and hospitality (Boukas, 2019; Cetin, 2015; Orphanidou et al, 2023).

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3.4.4. Competence 4: Sustainable Tourism and Environmental Stewardship

Description: This competence is centered on promoting and practicing sustainable tourism by managing resources responsibly. Agritourism workers need to ensure that their activities do not harm the environment, while also educating visitors about sustainability. This includes utilizing eco-friendly practices in farming, energy use, and waste management, as well as protecting the natural landscapes that form part of the agritourism offering (Cetin, 2015; “Fostering Sustainable Framing”, 2022; Neofytou, 2017; “Petros Xenophontos”, 2023).

Context: Sustainability is a key element of agritourism in Cyprus, with workers often involved in initiatives that protect the rural environment. Programs emphasize local ownership, the preservation of cultural landscapes, and the promotion of eco-friendly farming methods (Cetin, 2015; “Fostering Sustainable Framing”, 2022; Neofytou, 2017; “Petros Xenophontos”, 2023). In Cyprus, many agritourism establishments have adopted eco-friendly practices, such as using solar energy, promoting organic farming, and minimizing waste (Orphanidou et al, 2023).

3.5. Romania

3.5.1. Competence 1: Sustainable Agritourism and Environmental Stewardship

Description: Developing advanced skills and methodologies to implement and promote sustainable farming practices, with a robust focus on environmental preservation, resource management, and aligning operations with long-term ecological objectives.

Context: Drawing on Ireland’s comprehensive eco-tourism framework, this competence emphasizes actionable strategies, such as composting systems integrated with visitor education, renewable energy technologies tailored for small agritourism operations, and biodiversity conservation programs incorporating local and migratory species habitats. Advanced practices include sustainable irrigation systems, climate-responsive farming, and creating educational eco-trails to engage visitors.

3.5.2. Competence 2: Cultural Heritage and Local Identity Promotion

Description: Leveraging and integrating Romania’s intricate tapestry of cultural heritage into agritourism to create authentic, immersive experiences that encompass crafts, folklore, gastronomy, and community history.

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Context: Inspired by Greece's successful culinary tourism models and Bulgaria's focused heritage strategies, this competence explores innovative storytelling techniques, immersive workshops (e.g., traditional weaving, pottery), and cultural narratives that align with EU priorities for preserving intangible heritage. Activities include organizing themed festivals that celebrate regional folklore and developing culinary trails that highlight local food traditions.

3.5.3. Competence 3: Agritainment and Visitor Engagement

Description: Designing and delivering multifaceted, interactive, and educational experiences tailored to diverse audiences, including families, school groups, and specialized eco-tourists.

Context: Emulating Cyprus's inclusive agritourism approach and Italy's focus on diversified visitor experiences, this competence incorporates accessibility solutions (e.g., sensory-friendly tours, wheelchair-accessible farm trails) and adaptable activities that range from farm-to-table cooking workshops and eco-games to biodiversity monitoring programs for visitors. Seasonal programming and innovative digital tools enhance engagement, ensuring personalized and memorable experiences.

3.5.4. Competence 4: Green Hospitality and Customer Service

Description: Delivering exemplary hospitality that intertwines sustainable practices with high standards of customer service, ensuring eco-friendly principles are seamlessly integrated into the guest experience.

Context: Modeled after Italy's exemplary hospitality frameworks, this competence underscores the importance of renewable energy-powered accommodations, the use of biodegradable materials in service, and locally sourced cuisine aligned with slow food principles. Guests are engaged through sustainability briefings, interactive workshops on green practices, and opportunities to participate in farm operations, fostering an eco-conscious mindset while enhancing customer satisfaction.

3.6. Bulgaria

3.6.1. Competence 1: Business planning and management

Description: This competency includes strategic planning, financial management and operational control to ensure sustainable business growth. Key aspects are budget planning, risk management and compliance with national regulations.

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Context: In Bulgaria, agritourism businesses must comply with the Tourism Act and local municipal regulations. Training programs funded by the EU through the Rural Development Program often focus on management skills for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Agritourism in Bulgaria is regulated by several basic laws and regulations that determine the conditions for its development. The main legislative acts related to agritourism include:

1. Tourism Law - This law is the main normative act that regulates tourism activity in Bulgaria. It determines what activities are considered tourist and what the requirements are for registration of tourist sites and services. The law is published in the State Gazette and can be found on the website of the Ministry of Tourism.

2. Law on the Protection of Agricultural Land- Regulates the conditions for the use of agricultural land, which is important for agritourism activities.

3. Law on Organic Production - Refers to the production and trade of organic products that can be offered within the framework of agritourism.

4. Food Legislation - Regulates food safety, which is critical when offering food in agritourism sites.

Regulations:

1. Regulation on the conditions and procedure for carrying out agritourism - This regulation specifies the requirements for registration and operation of agritourism facilities.

2. Regulation on the requirements for categorized accommodation facilities - Sets the standards and conditions for categorization of accommodation facilities, including agritourism facilities.

3. Regulation No. 16-1399/11.10.2013 - Regulates the requirements for the location and equipment of premises where tourist activities are carried out. These laws and regulations provide the legal framework necessary for the development of agritourism in Bulgaria, while protecting the interests of tourists and local producers.

Steps to starting a agritourism business:

Choosing a location;

Regulating the business;

Regulatory compliance: Ensuring compliance with regulations related to agriculture,

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ecology, and food safety. Applying for subsidies through the Rural Development Program, which offers grants for start-up farms.

Permits: Obtaining all necessary permits related to the business;

A business plan that includes production, marketing, and financing strategies.

Bulgaria offers a number of programs to support new farmers, but the process often requires complex administrative coordination. Cooperation with local experts and consultants can greatly facilitate the start-up.

In Bulgaria, agritourism is not distinguished as a separate sector with specific tax benefits. However, depending on the legal form of organization and the nature of the activity, various tax benefits provided for in Bulgarian legislation may apply. For individuals registered as farmers: Reduced expense norms: When taxing income from the activity, legally recognized expenses of 60% for the production of unprocessed agricultural products are applied.

Tax Benefits

Tax Relief for Farmers in Bulgaria

1. Reduced Tax Rate for Registered Farmers

Farmers registered under the special taxation regime benefit from lower income tax rates.

2. VAT Exemptions for Specific Agricultural Activities and Products

The sale of raw milk, unpackaged fruits, and vegetables produced by registered farmers is not subject to VAT.

Renting agricultural land from individuals who are not commercial entities is VAT-exempt.

Services related to soil cultivation and crop harvesting, provided by cooperatives and agricultural associations, qualify for VAT exemption.

3. Tax-Free Subsidies and Grants

Funding under the Rural Development Program (RDP) for organic farming and farm modernization is not subject to taxation.

EU direct payments per hectare granted to registered farmers are tax-exempt.

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Compensation for damaged crops due to natural disasters is provided without tax obligations.

Main Challenges:

Complex administrative procedures when applying for tax relief and subsidies.

Frequent legislative changes require up-to-date information to ensure eligibility for tax exemptions.

3.6.2. Competence 2: Sustainable agriculture and environmental practices

Description: Knowledge and application of ecological agricultural practices, biodiversity conservation and integration of renewable energy sources.

Sustainable agriculture and ecological practices in Bulgaria are important for ensuring long-term productivity and environmental protection. In the context of global climate change and the need for sustainable resource management, the country is undertaking various initiatives and strategies. Sustainable agriculture aims to minimize the negative impact on nature. Investments in new technologies and innovations that improve productivity are essential.

Sustainable agriculture must ensure good working conditions and fair incomes for workers in the sector. It is important to encourage the participation of local communities in decision-making processes.

GAEC 6 and GAEC 7 standards have a significant impact on agritourism in Bulgaria. GAEC 6 requires the maintenance of a minimum soil cover, which improves the environmental sustainability of agricultural practices, attractive to tourists seeking authentic and sustainable experiences. GAEC 7 encourages crop rotation, which increases biodiversity and improves the quality of products offered to tourists. These standards not only improve the sustainability of farms, but also increase interest in agritourism.

The National Plan for the Development of Organic Production by 2030 is a key instrument for achieving sustainable agriculture in Bulgaria. It aims to:

Stimulate demand and strengthen trust in organic food.

Encourage farmers to switch from conventional to organic farming.

Development of the organic sector as a tool for addressing climate change

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Context: Bulgarian agritourism activities benefit from the EU Green Deal initiatives and national incentives for organic farming. In December 2024, the Council of Ministers adopted the "National Action Program for Contributing to the Goals of the Farm to Fork Strategy by 2030," which aims to modernize production processes by introducing innovative technologies and digital solutions in agricultural enterprises. The program encourages targeted investments in sustainable food production practices, environmental protection, organic farming expansion, and climate adaptation. However, there are gaps in the implementation of innovative sustainable practices. A 2022 study highlights that the introduction of innovative technologies in the agricultural sector across Europe and Central Asia creates opportunities for attracting additional investments while helping maintain ecological balance, aligning with the principles of sustainable development.

Sustainable agriculture in Bulgaria is a key aspect of the agricultural sector's development, requiring an integrated approach that balances production, environmental conservation, and social responsibility. By adopting ecological practices and national strategies, the country can achieve long-term sustainability and competitiveness. Examples of such practices include using natural predators to control pests. For instance, birds and bats can be encouraged to nest near farms, while ladybugs, beetles, and lacewing larvae feed on aphids and mites and can be purchased from agricultural suppliers.

Despite these efforts, Bulgaria lacks official statistics on agritourism, making it difficult to analyze market trends, develop policies, and support its growth. This highlights the need for a comprehensive data collection system on agritourism farms, tourist demand, and agritourism products, as well as improved collaboration between the government, businesses, academic institutions, and NGOs.

By implementing ecological practices and national strategies, Bulgaria has the potential to achieve long-term sustainability and competitiveness in the agricultural sector.

3.6.3. Competence 3: Customer Service and Cultural Awareness

Description:

Customer service skills, hospitality and cultural storytelling to create memorable experiences play an important role in attracting and retaining tourists.

Personalized service, which includes attention to the individual needs and preferences of tourists, is essential. For example, offering traditional meals or participating in

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agricultural activities can increase customer satisfaction. Specialized customer service training is important for workers in agritourism facilities. Studies show that there is a need to improve the foreign language skills and adaptability of staff so that they can communicate effectively with international tourists. Maintaining active communication with customers before, during and after their stay is important to build trust and loyalty. Collecting feedback after a visit can help improve services. Multilingual skills are becoming increasingly important.

Cultural awareness is crucial for success in agritourism. Tourists often seek authentic experiences related to local traditions, customs and cuisine. Providing training for staff on local traditions and customs is important to improve interaction with tourists. Creating authentic experiences: Involving tourists in local activities, such as harvesting or preparing traditional dishes, not only enriches their experience, but also helps preserve and promote local culture

Context: Bulgaria's rich cultural heritage offers significant opportunities, but many operators lack formal training in customer service. Investing in training and development in these areas can significantly improve the customer experience and increase loyalty to agritourism properties. Successful integration of these practices will contribute to the sustainable development of agritourism in the country. Organizations such as BASET (Bulgarian Association for Alternative Tourism) offer limited but relevant training.

3.6.4. Competence 4: Digital competencies and marketing

Description: Mastery of digital tools for marketing, booking management and engagement through social media.

Digital competencies and marketing in agritourism in Bulgaria play a key role in the development of the sector, especially in the context of increasing competition and changing consumer preferences. In agritourism, staff need to have basic digital skills to manage online platforms, social media and e-commerce tools. According to a survey conducted among professionals in the tourism sector, there are gaps in advanced digital technologies such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality.

Various digital skills training programs are offered in Bulgaria, targeting farmers and workers in the agricultural sector. The programs include basic digital literacy modules and specialized advanced courses. Digital marketing is essential for attracting tourists to agritourism.

The use of social media, SEO (search engine optimization) and online advertising

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helps farmers reach a wider audience. Creating authentic digital content that reflects the uniqueness of agritourism offerings is key. Integrating online booking platforms is important to facilitate the booking process for tourists. Many agritourism properties already use platforms like Airbnb or Booking.com, but they can also build their own websites with booking functionalities.

Context: Many agritourism operators use platforms like Airbnb and Booking.com, but lack advanced skills in SEO, online advertising and data analysis. Investing in digital skills training and developing innovative marketing strategies will help the sector adapt to new trends and attract more tourists.

3.7. Overall competencies

Agritourism workers across different regions demonstrate a wide array of competencies critical for fostering sustainable, culturally rich, and economically viable rural tourism experiences. These competencies, while regionally tailored, collectively contribute to the global agritourism sector's growth by integrating agriculture, culture, and sustainable tourism.

1. Understanding Agricultural Practices and Sustainability

Agritourism workers must possess comprehensive knowledge of organic farming, local agricultural techniques, and sustainable practices. This includes soil management, organic pest control, and the use of eco-friendly farming methods. Workers are expected to educate visitors about these practices, showcasing their role in environmental stewardship and promoting sustainable tourism. These skills are pivotal in regions like Greece, Cyprus, and Bulgaria, where sustainable practices align with ecological conservation goals.

2. Marketing and Digital Competence

Effective marketing strategies, including digital tools and social media, are essential for agritourism businesses. Workers must develop skills in market segmentation, customer behavior analysis, and creating integrated marketing plans to attract targeted audiences. Digital competencies, such as SEO, online advertising, and managing booking platforms, are particularly critical in regions like Bulgaria and Ireland, where digital transformation is seen as a pathway to competitiveness in the tourism market.

3. Cultural and Heritage Knowledge

Promoting local culture and heritage is a cornerstone of agritourism. Workers must have deep knowledge of regional traditions, folk art, gastronomy, and cultural

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landmarks. This knowledge enables them to create authentic, immersive experiences for visitors, such as guided tours, workshops, and festivals. For example, in Romania, storytelling and themed events enhance the agritourism experience, while Cyprus emphasizes its rich cultural traditions through activities like olive harvesting and wine-making.

4. Customer Service and Interpersonal Skills

Strong communication and hospitality skills are crucial for creating positive visitor experiences. Agritourism workers must engage with guests, address their needs, and ensure their satisfaction. Personalized service, empathy, adaptability, and cultural awareness are key elements of customer service across regions like Ireland and Bulgaria. These skills foster trust, loyalty, and repeat visits, enhancing the overall quality of agritourism services.

5. Regulatory and Quality Standards Compliance

Adherence to local and EU regulations regarding health, safety, and quality standards is vital for agritourism operators. Knowledge of certifications, food safety standards, and hygiene regulations ensures a secure and authentic guest experience. For instance, in Italy, regions like Lazio and Puglia emphasize regulatory compliance to uphold high standards in food sourcing and environmental sustainability.

6. Innovation and Creativity

Innovation drives the diversification and competitiveness of agritourism enterprises. Workers are encouraged to develop creative solutions, such as unique agritourism activities, product innovation, and eco-friendly practices. Ireland's emphasis on value-added food production and Romania's interactive agritainment initiatives highlight the importance of thinking outside the box to meet evolving tourist demands.

7. Financial and Business Management

Sound financial management is a foundation for sustainable agritourism enterprises. Workers must plan budgets, manage risks, and navigate funding opportunities effectively. Training in business planning and access to resources, such as grants and subsidies, is particularly relevant in countries like Bulgaria and Ireland, where agritourism is often integrated with traditional farming operations.

8. Sustainable Tourism and Environmental Stewardship

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Sustainability is a central theme in agritourism, with workers promoting eco-friendly practices, renewable energy, and biodiversity conservation. Educating visitors on these initiatives enhances their understanding of the environmental impact of tourism and agriculture. Regions like Cyprus and Romania have integrated these principles into their agritourism frameworks, ensuring alignment with global sustainability goals.

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4. Technical Comments

4.1. Greece

4.1.1. Basic deficiencies in certification

In Greece, there is no comprehensive and clear framework of professional standards that fully covers all disciplines and levels of specialization. This makes it difficult to clearly define the skills and knowledge required for each profession. The standards that have been set are often not fully aligned with international standards such as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), with the result that skills are not fully comparable or recognizable in other countries. Furthermore, the process of certifying vocational skills is often not objective or transparent, and there are cases where assessment is carried out without up-to-date tools or international standards. The independence and credibility of certification bodies is often lacking, which reduces employers' confidence in the value of certification. Recommendation: To address the above problems, Greece can consider adopting certain strategies, such as:

- Harmonization of certification standards with international ones, e.g., the European Qualifications Framework.
- Establishing continuous learning and skills upgrading systems.
- Strengthening cooperation between educational institutions and enterprises.
- Improving funding and infrastructure for the use of new technologies in certification

4.1.2. Limited adaptation to the needs of the local market

Often programs on training for agritourism workers are not designed to meet the specific needs of the local market, making it more difficult for trainees to find practical and applied knowledge. Local needs and agritourism opportunities vary considerably between regions, but the training content is often generalized and not adapted to these differences (Anthopoulou, T., 2000).

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Recommendation: Cooperation between educational structures and local actors such as agritourism enterprises, rural associations or chambers of commerce can result in a convergence between the skills provided and the real needs of the market. The continuous evolution of the agritourism sector requires flexible adjustments to course content and training programs. When training is not updated, it becomes outdated and of no use to future professionals.

4.1.3. Lack of practical training and experience

Although agritourism requires practical knowledge (e.g. organization of activities, management of local product production), there is often insufficient practical training in agricultural or tourism processes in the training programs offered for the training of agritourism workers in Greece. The lack of practical training and experience in vocational training in agritourism is an important issue for the sector, especially in Greece. Agrotourism combines agricultural activities with tourism, giving visitors the opportunity to experience local culture and rural life. However, to achieve this successfully, specialized knowledge and experience is required, mainly through practical training (Kotler, P. et all 2021).

Recommendation: To address this phenomenon of the gap in practical training and experience we can have the development of partnerships between educational institutions and agritourism enterprises for internship programs. There can also be training in real working conditions through programs involving seasonal farm work and guest hospitality. Finally, the creation of educational farms that serve as learning and practice spaces for students and young professionals. Improving practical training in agritourism is essential for the sustainability of the sector and the development of quality services that meet the modern needs of the market and visitors.

4.1.4. Financial and support problems

Funding for vocational training programs for agritourism professionals is often limited, leading to a lack of resources for renewing equipment, setting up workshops or hiring specialized trainers. The lack of support from the state and local government for the development and promotion of agritourism also hampers the development of training programs. In addition, the vocational training in agritourism requires specialized teachers, who are often not available due to limited demand and the need for experience in the agritourism sector. Existing training infrastructure, such as workshops and equipment, is often inadequate, requiring maintenance and

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modernization. This hampers practical training and discourages interested parties from attending the programs (Burns, P., 2020).

Recommendation: The difficulty to finance and support training to acquire necessary skills for agritourism workers can be overcome by seeking European projects and support programs, as participation in cross-border or European programs (such as Horizon Europe) can enhance the possibilities of vocational training with support, training and resources from Community funds. Also, the creation of strategic alliances, with cooperation between local and regional bodies, chambers and agritourism businesses can enhance support for courses, workshops and practices related to agritourism.

4.2. Italy

The regional models for agritourism competences in Lazio, Lombardia, Toscana, and Puglia highlight diverse yet related frameworks for managing agritourism. However, each model encounters distinct technical challenges in defining and applying competencies for operators.

Indeed, first of all, each region sets specific standards based on local cultural and agricultural contexts, leading to highly customized frameworks. This diversity can make it **challenging to establish a unified competence model for agritourism in Italy**, potentially causing **inconsistencies for operators working across regional borders** or **engaging in interregional collaborations**.

Also, while regions like Toscana emphasize educational and cultural integration, others focus more heavily on sustainable hospitality (Lombardia) or quality control (Puglia). The lack of a cohesive national training curriculum limits operators' abilities to access consistent training across Italy. For example, Lazio mandates rigorous hygiene and safety standards but lacks broader training on local product marketing, which is emphasized in Lombardia's model.

The certification processes, such as the *Certificato di Connessione* in Lombardia or the EROA registration in Puglia, require detailed compliance with agricultural integration, which can be resource-intensive. Smaller agritourism operators may struggle with meeting documentation requirements and managing ongoing audits, presenting a barrier to entry for potential new operators.

Finally, while regions like Toscana and Puglia encourage sustainable and eco-friendly tourism (e.g., agricultural camping in Puglia), aligning these practices with

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technological advancements remains limited. Opportunities to integrate modern technology, such as digital marketing tools or energy-efficient solutions, are not widely emphasized in the existing frameworks.

In this sense, our general recommendation is to develop a **national competence framework**. A national framework, which includes core training modules applicable across regions, could **improve consistency** and allow for greater cross-regional tourism initiatives. Adding modules or courses focused on digital marketing, environmental management, and modern sustainable practices would provide operators with essential skills for evolving tourism demands.

4.3. Ireland

4.3.1. Too Many Providers of Training

In an Irish context, there are multiple providers of various levels of certification in training for staff working in the tourism sector. This can lead to confusion in the market, whereby prospective learners do not know what to access or where.

Recommendation: Development of an open-source training platform at EU level that is accessible to all workers in the agritourism sector, in multiple languages and that are focused on the specific needs of the agritourism entrepreneur

4.3.2. Lack of Joined up Thinking between National and Local Agencies

There is an over reliance in terms of development in urban, as opposed, to rural areas of the country. This makes it more difficult for young people to access high paying jobs in their rural towns and villages, leading to them moving away from home and indeed from Ireland.

Recommendation: Continued investment in small to medium enterprises such as food tourism, farm accommodation and micro-brewers will provide high value employment to young people in rural areas, thereby allowing them to remain in their communities and break the cycle of migration overseas.

4.3.3. Funding and Taxation

Despite a reduction in interest rates, sources of funding for entrepreneurs in food tourism and agritourism remains a challenge, this together with the taxes applied to these services in the form of Value Added Tax (VAT) at the current rate of 13.5%, are crippling small business and pushing young people away. Added to this is the high entry costs, and a perception by sources of finance, that the sector is high risk.

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Recommendation: Improve sources of finance for agritourism enterprises and reduce the rate of VAT tax in line with other EU countries.

4.4. Cyprus

4.4.1. Challenges in Defining and Applying Competences

4.4.1.1. Lack of Training and Professional Development

There is a noticeable gap in the formal training available to agritourism workers, particularly regarding the integration of hospitality, agriculture, and sustainable practices. Agritourism workers are often self-trained or rely on traditional knowledge, which leads to inconsistency in service quality and a lack of professional growth opportunities (Boukas, 2019; Neofytou, 2017;Orphanidou et al, 2023).

Recommendation: Investing in formal training and educational programs that teach essential competences such as customer service, sustainable tourism practices, and entrepreneurship would help build a more professional and capable workforce in the agritourism sector.

4.4.1.2. Lack of Collaboration and Communication Among Local Stakeholders

A major challenge is the lack of collaboration between local authorities, residents, and tourism stakeholders. This fragmentation limits the ability to define competences that meet the needs of all involved parties. The fragmented nature of the stakeholders involved makes it difficult to create a cohesive framework for competence development in agritourism (Boukas, 2019; Neofytou, 2017).

Recommendation: To overcome this, fostering communication and collaboration among local stakeholders is crucial. This would allow for the coordinated development of rural tourism, enhancing the competences needed to support it successfully.

4.4.2. Gaps in the Current Competence Framework

4.4.2.1. Insufficient Focus on Digital Skills

There is a significant gap in digital literacy among agritourism workers. This affects the ability of workers to effectively manage online booking systems, market their services, and engage with digital tools, which are increasingly important for rural tourism (Neofytou, 2017; Orphanidou et al, 2023).

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Recommendation: Digital literacy training should be integrated into the competence framework to enable workers to capitalize on digital marketing and online guest management tools.

4.4.2.2. Inconsistent Application of Sustainable Practices

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of sustainability in tourism, the application of sustainable practices across rural tourism enterprises remains inconsistent. Not all businesses are equipped to adopt eco-friendly measures such as waste management, energy conservation, or sustainable farming techniques (Neofytou, 2017; Boukas, 2019).

Recommendation: Sustainable tourism practices should be included as core competences for agritourism workers. Training in sustainability could help businesses meet the increasing demand for environmentally responsible tourism options.

4.4.3. Limitations in Existing Models

4.4.3.1. Overemphasis on Mass Tourism

Cyprus' tourism policy has historically focused on mass tourism, particularly along coastal areas, leaving rural and mountainous regions underdeveloped. This imbalance limits the resources and attention available for developing competences in rural tourism (Boukas, 2019; Neofytou, 2017).

Recommendation: A shift in policy focus is needed to promote rural tourism as a viable alternative to mass tourism. Supporting niche markets like agritourism would diversify the country's tourism offerings and allow for a more equitable distribution of resources and development opportunities.

4.4.3.2. Inadequate Access to Resources

Many rural tourism businesses struggle with limited access to resources such as training, funding, and technology, which hinders the application of modern competence frameworks (Boukas, 2019; Orphanidou et al, 2023).

Recommendation: Governments and industry bodies should work together to increase access to resources for rural agritourism businesses, including subsidies for training and infrastructure improvements.

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4.5. Romania

Romania faces several technical challenges in enhancing its agritourism sector, primarily due to fragmented frameworks and the lack of formalized, standardized training programs tailored specifically to the unique requirements of agritourism operators. Existing competence models often lack alignment with international best practices and EU standards, leading to disparities in skill levels across regions. This fragmentation is further compounded by insufficient infrastructure for delivering competency-based education and limited access to resources in rural areas where agritourism is most prevalent.

To address these challenges, it is imperative to adopt a unified approach that integrates the GreenComp principles into a cohesive competency framework. This framework should incorporate progressive learning pathways to cater to diverse skill levels, from entry-level operators to advanced practitioners. Establishing micro-credentialing systems will be a cornerstone in this strategy, as they provide a scalable and flexible means of validating and recognizing skills. These credentials should be aligned with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) to ensure portability and recognition across EU member states.

Digital credentialing platforms will play a critical role in this ecosystem. Such platforms should enable transparent credential issuance, storage, and sharing, equipped with features like digital badges and QR codes for instant verification. Integrating these systems with EUROPASS will further enhance their utility and adoption. Partnerships with Vocational Education and Training (VET) centers and local universities are also essential for delivering high-quality training programs. These institutions can act as hubs for capacity building, offering workshops, hands-on training, and online courses to bridge the current gaps in competence development.

Additionally, the incorporation of technology-driven solutions, such as virtual simulations and e-learning modules, can expand the reach and efficacy of training programs. These tools can provide immersive learning experiences, allowing participants to practice skills in realistic scenarios without the constraints of physical resources. The emphasis on green and sustainable practices in these training modules will ensure alignment with EU's broader goals for environmental stewardship and rural development.

In conclusion, the combination of a unified competency framework, micro-credentialing systems, strategic partnerships, and digital innovations presents a robust approach to overcoming the technical challenges in Romania's agritourism sector. These

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measures will not only enhance the accessibility and recognition of skills but also drive the sector towards greater competitiveness and sustainability.

4.6. Bulgaria

Challenges: Fragmented training resources: Limited access to structured training programs specific to agritourism.

Complexity of regulations: Difficulties in navigating the regulatory framework for small operators.

Insufficient digitalization: Lack of platforms for sharing good practices and information among farmers.

Limited access to financial resources: Some farmers experience difficulties in applying for subsidies due to lack of administrative capacity.

Recommendations: Develop localized training modules targeted at Bulgarian agritourism. Create a digital platform for knowledge and experience exchange between agritourism operators. Raise awareness of available funding programs through targeted seminars and training. Introduce standardized guidelines for regulatory compliance that are accessible to small businesses. Moreover, cross-sector partnerships with agricultural and environmental experts can bolster the authenticity and depth of farm-based experiences offered to guests. For instance, involving local agronomists or ecologists in the training process can ensure that the information shared with visitors is accurate and impactful.

Lastly, there is a need for more innovative approaches to agritourism, such as incorporating technology into the visitor experience. Virtual reality tours of farms, interactive mobile applications, or AI-driven personalized recommendations could greatly enhance the appeal of agritourism destinations. Encouraging innovation through competitions or grants could spur creativity in this sector.

4.7. Overall technical comments

The technical challenges in agritourism competency development across the analysed regions reveal common issues and region-specific nuances. The following overall technical comments highlight key barriers and recommendations for advancing competency frameworks in the sector.

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4.7.1. Fragmentation in Certification and Standards

A recurring issue is the lack of unified certification standards across regions and countries. In Greece, certifications often lack alignment with international frameworks like the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), reducing their recognition across borders. Similarly, Italy faces challenges in harmonizing region-specific standards, creating inconsistencies for operators engaging in interregional collaborations.

Recommendation: Developing an EU-wide agritourism competency framework could standardize certification processes while respecting regional variations. Incorporating micro-credentialing systems, aligned with EQF and EUROPASS, would facilitate portability and recognition of skills.

4.7.2. Limited Practical Training Opportunities

Practical, hands-on training is insufficient across many regions. In Greece, there is a noted gap in integrating real-world agritourism experiences into training programs. In Romania and Bulgaria, limited infrastructure and resources for practical training exacerbate this issue.

Recommendation: Encourage partnerships between educational institutions and agritourism enterprises to provide internships, apprenticeships, and field-based learning opportunities. Establishing educational farms or using virtual simulations can bridge the gap between theoretical and practical knowledge.

4.7.3. Gaps in Digital Competence and Technology Integration

Digital skills are increasingly critical for managing marketing, booking systems, and guest engagement. However, regions such as Cyprus and Bulgaria show significant deficiencies in digital literacy among agritourism workers. Similarly, modern technologies like virtual reality (VR) and artificial intelligence (AI) remain underutilized.

Recommendation: Incorporate digital literacy training into all agritourism competency frameworks. Training modules should cover SEO, social media marketing, e-commerce, and the use of emerging technologies such as VR tours and AI-driven visitor engagement.

4.7.4. Underemphasis on Sustainable Practices

Although sustainability is a core principle of agritourism, its practical application varies widely. Many regions, including Cyprus and Bulgaria, struggle with inconsistent adoption of sustainable farming and tourism practices.

Recommendation: Include sustainable practices as a mandatory component of competency frameworks. Training programs should cover topics like eco-friendly

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waste management, renewable energy integration, and biodiversity conservation, supported by incentives for adopting sustainable practices.

4.7.5. Inadequate Collaboration Among Stakeholders

Stakeholder fragmentation limits the development of cohesive frameworks. For instance, in Cyprus, a lack of communication between local authorities, businesses, and residents impedes coordinated rural tourism development. This challenge is echoed in Ireland, where national and local agencies often work in silos.

Recommendation: Establish multi-stakeholder committees to coordinate efforts in defining and implementing agritourism competencies. These committees should involve local governments, educational institutions, tourism associations, and agritourism operators.

4.7.6. Funding and Infrastructure Deficiencies

Regions like Greece and Ireland face funding challenges, hindering the development of updated training resources and infrastructure. Limited access to financial support also affects the ability of small operators to comply with certification requirements and adopt modern practices.

Recommendation: Leverage European funding programs like Horizon Europe to support the development of training infrastructure and resources. Targeted subsidies for agritourism operators could reduce financial barriers to participation in training programs.

4.7.7. Overemphasis on Urban-Centric Tourism

In many cases, rural and agritourism opportunities are overshadowed by urban-focused tourism strategies. This disparity limits investments in rural development and competencies, particularly in countries like Cyprus and Ireland.

Recommendation: Shift national tourism strategies to prioritize rural tourism as a complement to urban tourism. Promoting agritourism as a niche market can help diversify offerings and distribute tourism benefits more equitably.

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5. SWOT Analysis of Competence Models

5.1. Greece

5.1.1. Strengths

5.1.1.1. Specialised Training

Several training models focus on the specific needs of the agritourism industry in Greece, such as knowledge of local products, traditional methods and sustainable practices. Training in local varieties, farming and winemaking techniques, as well as in product processing enhances the authenticity and diversification of agritourism.

5.1.1.2. Cultural Emphasis

Agrotourism is based on the authenticity and preservation of Greece's cultural heritage, and existing models reinforce this aspect in the skills of the employees.

5.1.1.3. Development of Holistic Skills

Agritourism workers are often trained in multiple areas, such as hospitality, agriculture and customer service, which offers flexibility and adaptability.

5.1.2. Weakness

5.1.2.1 Limited access to training

Training programs are often limited in rural areas, making it difficult for workers to access them. While online training could help bridge this gap, limited internet access and digital literacy in some rural areas can prevent workers from fully leveraging these resources.

5.1.2.2 Lack of qualified trainers

There is a shortage of qualified trainers with experience in agritourism, which can limit the quality of training. Without skilled trainers, the training programs may lack depth, focusing too much on either agricultural or tourism aspects rather than a balanced integration.

5.1.2.3 Poor Technology Training

Models often lack digital technology skills, which is essential for modern tourism and service promotion. Digital technology skills are critical for models today, especially as tourism and service industries increasingly rely on digital platforms for promotion and engagement.

5.1.3. Opportunities

5.1.3.1 Increasing Demand for Agrotourism

With the rise of sustainable tourism, agrotourism workers can improve their skills to meet the growing demand. Also, agrotourism workers can enhance their skills to align

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with sustainable tourism trends, offering richer, more eco-friendly experiences that attract conscientious travelers.

5.1.3.2 EU Funding Programmes

The European Union offers funding programs for capacity building in agritourism, which can help upgrade the skills of workers. These funds are designed to support rural development, sustainable tourism, and skills upgrading for workers in the agricultural and tourism sectors.

5.1.3.3 Promoting Technology and Digitalisation

The use of new technologies and digitalization can enhance the training of agritourism workers and make services more accessible. Incorporating these digital tools into training programs, agritourism businesses can empower workers, making them more adept at engaging with guests, solving problems efficiently, and ultimately providing a richer, more accessible experience.

5.1.4 Threats

5.1.4.1 Instability in tourism due to economic crises

Economic uncertainty or changes in tourism demand due to crises (such as pandemics) can negatively affect the industry and reduce the attractiveness of agritourism. During periods of crisis, people tend to limit discretionary spending, including leisure travel, which directly impacts tourism-related businesses, including agritourism.

5.1.4.2 Competition with other tourism sectors

Agritourism competes with other forms of tourism, and without adequate training, workers may not be able to provide competitive services. Without proper training, agritourism workers may struggle to meet visitor expectations, particularly in areas like customer service, tour management, and facility maintenance.

5.1.4.3 Climate Change

Environmental changes and constraints on the availability of natural resources can affect agricultural activities and, by extension, agritourism services. Environmental changes directly shape what farms can offer in both products and experiences, affecting the appeal, operational capacity, and long-term viability of agritourism activities.

5.2. Italy

5.2.1. Strengths

Each region’s model is closely aligned with local cultural, agricultural, and tourism goals, offering visitors an authentic experience tailored to regional strengths. For

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instance, Toscana's emphasis on educational farms reflects the region's heritage, while Puglia's focus on quality control reinforces its agricultural identity.

Also, regions like Lazio have implemented standards that ensure guest safety and product authenticity. The adherence to EU hygiene regulations further strengthens Italy's agritourism credibility on an international level.

5.2.2. Weaknesses

The lack of a unified national competence model can lead to operational inconsistencies. Operators moving between regions must adapt to different regulations and certification processes, adding complexity and potential costs.

Regions with unique competencies, such as cultural tourism in Toscana, lack standardized training resources accessible to all operators across Italy. This gap in formal training can lead to inconsistent service quality, especially in rural areas with limited access to educational resources.

5.2.3. Opportunities

Digital tools could enhance marketing, booking, and communication efforts, enabling operators to promote local products more effectively. Additionally, incorporating eco-friendly technologies could support the sustainable tourism goals emphasized by regions like Lombardia and Puglia.

Increasing interest in sustainable and immersive tourism experiences aligns with many regions' focus areas. Expanded offerings, such as eco-camping and educational workshops, can attract a broader demographic of environmentally conscious visitors.

5.2.4. Threats

Financial barriers may limit the ability of smaller operators to achieve certification or meet rigorous standards, such as those in Puglia for quality assurance or in Lazio for food safety. Without financial support, some operators may struggle to maintain compliance.

In addition, as already mentioned, differences in regional policies may hinder the growth of a cohesive national agritourism market, affecting Italy's ability to market itself as a unified agritourism destination. Without greater alignment, regions may miss out on cross-regional tourism initiatives that could enhance their offerings and support economic resilience in rural areas.

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5.3. Ireland

5.3.1. Strengths

5.3.1.1 Access to Online Training is Growing

There are a few sources of training available to existing and prospective agritourism workers online and in person.

5.3.1.2 Supports from Irish Tourism Organisations is Available

Fáilte Ireland provides some online tool kits to help with devising a marketing plan.

5.3.1.3 Ireland's Food Sector is World Class

The Irish Food Board, Bord Bia, offers food entrepreneurs mentoring and help with product innovation.

5.3.2. Weaknesses

5.3.2.1 Agritourism Entrepreneurs are Time Poor

Due to the time demands that running an agritourism enterprise present, getting access to training off site, or time to take part in online training, continues to pose a challenge in terms of educating and training agritourism entrepreneurs.

5.3.2.2 Access and Transport

Ireland is not served well by public transport, or indeed electrically powered transport. This makes it difficult for environmentally conscious tourists to access agritourism businesses.

5.3.2.3 Planning

Planning laws in Ireland can be quite restrictive, thereby stifling creativity in terms of bringing old buildings back into use.

5.3.3. Opportunities

5.3.3.1 Growth in Socially and Environmentally Conscious Travellers

Ireland has seen an increase in demand for echo-friendly tourism products, such as agritourism. This has resulted in a demand in skilled workers to work in these enterprises.

5.3.3.2 Increase in Sources of Funding

The Irish Government and the European Union offer funding to support the development of small medium enterprises in the tourism sector, such as agritourism. These funds are designed to support rural development, with sustainability at its core.

5.3.3.3 Investment in Infrastructure and Transport

The Irish government is committed to developing public transport including electrically powered buses, that will allow a wider access by tourists to locations where agritourism

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businesses are clustered. This will improve footfall for these businesses while also aligning with the sustainability value for the sector.

5.3.4 Threats

5.3.4.1 Rising Costs

Rising costs due to increases in fuel are impacting on small to medium enterprises where margins are already tight, leaving very little capital for further investment. Equally, rising costs are making it harder for people to justify the higher costs of artisan foods.

5.3.4.2 Climate Change

With the re-election of Donald Trump, a growing concern regarding climate change and its impact on agriculture and food security, as outlined at the recent COP 29 in Baku Azerbaijan. Also, for an island nation like Ireland, the carbon associated with aviation is an ongoing negative associated with travel and tourism.

5.3.4.3 Migration

Many young Irish continue to travel overseas for several years after finishing school. This makes it harder for established agritourism business owners to retire and in some cases are forced to close or sell up, in the absence of being able to leave it to their children.

5.4. Cyprus

5.4.1 Strengths

5.4.1.1. Relevance and Connection to Local Practices

The current competence models are highly relevant to the local context, focusing on agricultural knowledge, hospitality, and sustainability, which are key elements of agritourism in Cyprus. These competences are directly applicable in the field, allowing agritourism workers to offer authentic experiences based on the island's cultural and natural heritage.

5.4.1.2. Focus on Cultural and Heritage Knowledge

A notable strength is the emphasis on cultural and heritage knowledge, which helps workers enhance the tourist experience by interpreting local traditions, historical landmarks, and agricultural practices. This competence enriches the agritourism offering and promotes cultural sustainability, helping to preserve Cyprus's rural identity.

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5.4.1.3. Integration of Hospitality Skills

The competence models recognize the importance of hospitality and customer service. In Cyprus, where family-run businesses are prevalent, these skills are critical for creating a welcoming environment that fosters repeat visits and positive reviews.

5.4.2. Weaknesses

5.4.2.1. Lack of Formal Training and Professional Development

A major weakness is the absence of structured training programs for agritourism workers, leading to inconsistencies in the quality of services. Most workers rely on informal knowledge, which limits their professional growth and the overall standard of agritourism offerings.

5.4.2.2. Insufficient Focus on Digital Competences

The current models do not sufficiently address the growing importance of digital skills, such as managing online booking systems and digital marketing. As technology plays an increasingly important role in tourism, this gap hinders the ability of agritourism businesses to compete and engage with modern tourists effectively.

5.4.2.3. Fragmentation Among Stakeholders

There is a lack of collaboration between local authorities, residents, and tourism stakeholders, which prevents the creation of a cohesive framework for competence development. This fragmentation limits the effectiveness of the current models in addressing the broader needs of the agritourism sector.

5.4.3. Opportunities

5.4.3.1. Alignment with New Sustainability Trends

There is an increasing global trend toward sustainable and eco-friendly tourism, which presents a significant opportunity for the development of competences focused on environmental stewardship. Cyprus's natural landscapes and traditional farming practices provide an excellent foundation for promoting eco-tourism, and training in sustainability could help agritourism workers capitalize on this trend.

5.4.3.2. Technological Advances and Digital Marketing

The rise of digital platforms and social media offers opportunities to integrate digital competences into the existing models. Training agritourism workers in digital literacy

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and marketing could enhance their ability to promote rural tourism businesses, reach a wider audience, and manage customer relationships more effectively.

5.4.3.3. Shift Towards Niche Markets

As mass tourism in coastal areas declines, there is a growing opportunity for Cyprus to diversify its tourism offerings by promoting niche markets like agritourism. By expanding the current models to include entrepreneurship and marketing skills, agritourism businesses can tap into this shift and attract tourists seeking authentic, rural experiences.

5.4.4 Threats

5.4.4.1. Economic Challenges

Economic instability, both locally and globally, poses a significant threat to the successful implementation of competence models. Agritourism businesses, particularly small, family-run enterprises, may struggle to invest in training and development if resources are scarce.

5.4.4.2. Lack of Policy Support for Rural Tourism

Although there is some government support for agritourism, the focus of tourism policy in Cyprus has traditionally been on mass tourism, particularly in coastal regions. This lack of attention to rural tourism development threatens the long-term viability of agritourism as a sector and limits the resources available for training and infrastructure improvements.

5.4.4.3. Inconsistent Application of Sustainable Practices

While sustainability is increasingly recognized as important, its inconsistent application across rural tourism enterprises could undermine the attractiveness of agritourism in Cyprus. Businesses that do not adopt eco-friendly measures may face negative perceptions from eco-conscious tourists, which could hurt the sector's growth.

5.5. Romania

5.5.1. Strengths

- Rich cultural heritage and biodiversity.
- Increasing demand for sustainable tourism.
- Community-based tourism fostering collaboration.

5.5.2. Weaknesses

- Lack of standardized frameworks and formal training.
- Regional disparities in resources and infrastructure.
- Low adoption of green practices.

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5.5.3. Opportunities

- EU funding for sustainability and VET programs.
- Micro-credentialing to validate and standardize skills.
- Integration of digital tools for training and marketing.

5.5.4. Threats

- Financial constraints for rural operators.
- Competition from advanced agritourism markets.
- Environmental risks such as climate change.

5.6. Bulgaria

5.6.1. Strengths

- Cultural Heritage Integration: Clear alignment with Bulgaria's rich cultural traditions and natural landscapes, which form the backbone of its agritourism appeal.
- Compliance with EU frameworks (e.g. ESCO, Green Deal)
- Policy Support: Growing governmental and EU funding support for sustainable rural tourism initiatives.
- Agricultural Expertise: Bulgaria's strong agricultural tradition provides a reliable foundation for creating authentic and educational agritourism experiences.
- Local Community Engagement: Active participation of local communities in agritourism enhances authenticity and supports rural economies.

5.6.2. Weaknesses

- Awareness Gaps: Limited awareness among rural operators about the advantages of competency-based training programs, leading to inconsistent service quality.
- Training Accessibility: Many rural areas lack access to structured training facilities or programs, particularly for digital and marketing skills.
- Resource Limitations: Scarcity of financial resources for small operators to adopt innovative or sustainable practices.
- Language Barriers: Limited multilingual capabilities among workers may hinder interactions with international tourists.

5.6.3. Opportunities

- Rising Global Demand: Increasing demand for eco-friendly, authentic, and cultural tourism experiences provides a strong market incentive for growth.

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- Technology Integration: Advancements in digital tools, such as virtual tours and online booking platforms, open up new marketing and operational possibilities for agritourism providers.
- Educational Collaborations: Partnerships with universities and vocational schools can enhance training programs and introduce innovation into the sector.
- Policy and Funding Opportunities: Availability of EU grants and initiatives aimed at fostering sustainable rural development can drive significant progress in training and infrastructure.
- Diversification of Offerings: Developing niche experiences, such as wellness retreats, culinary workshops, and agro-adventure activities, can attract diverse visitor segments.

5.6.4. Threats

- Economic Constraints: Ongoing economic challenges in rural areas may limit investment in training, infrastructure, and technology upgrades.
- External Competition: Competing agritourism destinations in neighboring countries may pose challenges if Bulgarian offerings are not sufficiently differentiated.
- Environmental Risks: Poor implementation of sustainability practices could lead to environmental degradation, undermining the sector's long-term viability.
- Lack of Policy Enforcement: Inconsistent enforcement of standards and policies may result in uneven quality and harm the overall reputation of Bulgarian agritourism.
- Demographic Challenges: Aging rural populations and migration of young talent to urban areas could limit the availability of skilled workers in agritourism.

5.7. Overall SWOT analysis

5.7.1. Strengths

- Cultural Integration and Local Heritage Focus: Agritourism competence models often emphasize preserving and promoting local culture and traditions. Regions like Greece, Italy, and Cyprus highlight cultural and heritage knowledge as core skills, creating authentic experiences for visitors while supporting cultural sustainability.
- Alignment with EU Standards and Funding Opportunities: Many countries have integrated EU frameworks and funding initiatives into their agritourism strategies. Programs like Horizon Europe and the European Green Deal

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provide financial and policy support, particularly for sustainability and skill development.

- Community Engagement and Multifaceted Skills: Models in countries like Bulgaria and Romania encourage community-based tourism and holistic skill development. Workers are trained in hospitality, agriculture, and marketing, enhancing adaptability and flexibility in their roles.
- Rising Interest in Sustainable Tourism: Growing global demand for eco-friendly tourism has increased the importance of agritourism. Regions like Lombardia and Toscana in Italy leverage this trend by promoting sustainable hospitality and immersive cultural experiences.

5.7.2. Weaknesses

- Fragmentation of Training and Certification: Lack of unified national frameworks, as seen in Italy and Romania, leads to inconsistencies in training and certification. Regional disparities complicate cross-regional collaborations and recognition of skills.
- Limited Access to Training and Resources: Rural areas often lack structured training programs, modern infrastructure, and digital resources. This limitation is prominent in Greece, Bulgaria, and Cyprus, where workers rely heavily on informal knowledge.
- Inadequate Focus on Digital Competencies: Many models fail to incorporate digital literacy and marketing skills, critical for modern tourism management. This gap hinders the ability of agritourism workers to effectively engage with digital tools and platforms.
- Dependence on Informal Practices: In regions like Cyprus and Romania, training relies on traditional methods, resulting in inconsistent service quality and limited professional development opportunities for workers.

5.7.3. Opportunities

- Global Shift Towards Eco-Friendly Tourism: The increasing focus on sustainability offers a chance to integrate environmental stewardship into training models. Regions can capitalize on trends by offering eco-camping, renewable energy integration, and biodiversity-focused activities.
- Advancements in Technology: Digital tools such as online booking platforms, virtual tours, and AI-driven marketing provide significant growth potential. Training workers in these technologies can enhance outreach and operational efficiency.

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- EU Funding for Rural Development: European programs dedicated to rural and sustainable tourism development present opportunities to upgrade infrastructure, training resources, and competencies across all regions.
- Niche Market Diversification: Expanding agritourism offerings to include specialized experiences, such as wellness retreats, culinary workshops, or interactive educational programs, can attract diverse tourist demographics.

5.7.4. Threats

- Economic Instability and Rising Costs: Economic crises, high operational costs, and tight profit margins, especially in small businesses, threaten the sustainability of agritourism enterprises. This is a significant challenge in Greece, Ireland, and Bulgaria.
- Climate Change and Environmental Risks: Environmental challenges, such as resource constraints and climate variability, impact agricultural production and tourism activities, reducing the appeal of agritourism.
- Competition with Other Tourism Sectors: Agritourism faces competition from urban, coastal, and adventure tourism. Without sufficient training and innovation, agritourism workers may struggle to offer competitive services.
- Migration and Demographic Changes: Rural depopulation and migration of young talent to urban areas limit the availability of skilled workers, particularly in Ireland and Bulgaria. This trend threatens the sustainability of family-run agritourism businesses.

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6. Conclusion

6.1. Greece

Agritourism in Greece is seen as a sustainable form of tourism that allows visitors to engage with the local culture, traditions, and natural environments. Workers in this sector often participate in hands-on activities, such as harvesting olives, winemaking, and traditional cooking. These experiences enhance visitors' connections to the land and local customs. The competencies required for these roles include knowledge of agricultural practices, hospitality skills, and the ability to communicate effectively with tourists about local traditions and agricultural methods. Despite the positive aspects, many workers in agritourism lack formal training and understanding of effective promotional techniques and cooperative practices. Research indicates that there is a need for structured training programs to enhance skills not just in agriculture but also in marketing and customer engagement. This includes training in areas such as trust-

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building, best practices in tourism management, and effective collaboration with other agritourism stakeholders.

6.1.1. Key Insights from the Mapping

The mapping of agritourism workers' competencies in Greece highlights several key areas essential for fostering a successful agritourism sector. A solid foundation in organic farming practices is crucial. Workers must be knowledgeable about sustainable agricultural techniques, crop management, and environmental stewardship. Also, effective marketing skills are vital for promoting agritourism offerings. Workers need to be adept at leveraging digital marketing strategies, social media platforms, and local networks to attract visitors.

From the other side knowledge of local traditions, customs, and folk art is essential for creating authentic agritourism experiences. Workers who can share the rich cultural heritage of their regions enhance the visitor experience and contribute to the preservation of local identity. Finally, the mapping shows that Strong communication and interpersonal skills are fundamental for engaging with visitors, facilitating tours, and sharing knowledge about agritourism practices

6.1.2. Key Insights from the Technical Comments

The analysis of the competencies of agritourism workers in Greece reveals significant challenges that hinder the sector's growth and development.

Basic Deficiencies in Certification: The current system for certifying knowledge and professional skills lacks alignment with international standards and recognized best practices. This gap can lead to inconsistencies in service quality, ultimately affecting the overall competitiveness of Greece's agritourism offerings.

Limited Market Adaptation: Agritourism training programs show insufficient adaptability to the specific needs of the local market. This disconnect can result in a workforce that is ill-prepared to meet the unique demands and preferences of visitors, undermining the potential for agritourism to thrive in diverse regions.

Lack of Practical Training: A significant absence of practical training and hands-on experience further exacerbates these issues. Workers often find themselves illequipped to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world settings, which can diminish customer satisfaction and impede the development of essential skills

6.1.3. Key Insights from the SWOT Analysis

The SWOT analysis of the existing competency models in agritourism in Greece shows that, although the existing models cover many basic needs and promote culture and

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authenticity, there is significant room for improvement, especially in terms of digitisation, specialised know-how and access to quality training. Opportunities from growing demand and European funding, together with the need for environmentally and technologically oriented training, can provide the basis for developing more resilient and adapted skills in agritourism.

6.1.4. Overall State of Agritourism Workers' Competences

Agritourism has gained significant traction in Greece as a sustainable model that merges agriculture with tourism, providing economic benefits to rural areas and enhancing the visitor experience.

The state of agritourism workers' competences in Greece is evolving, with increased emphasis on education and practical training. While challenges remain, the potential for growth in this sector is significant, driven by the demand for sustainable tourism experiences. Continuous investment in worker training and collaboration among stakeholders will be crucial for the future success of agritourism in Greece.

6.2. Italy

This report has highlighted the competencies essential for agritourism workers across Italy, based on regional models in Lazio, Lombardia, Toscana, and Puglia. Each region's unique framework supports specific competencies: regulatory compliance, sustainable practices, cultural education, and quality control. While this diversity enriches Italy's agritourism offerings, regional differences in certification, training accessibility, and standards present operational challenges.

To enhance consistency, developing a national framework for competency training, with modules in digital tools and sustainable practices, would support professional growth. This unified approach could streamline certification, elevate service standards, and reinforce Italy's appeal as a leading agritourism destination.

6.3. Ireland

Agritourism in Ireland is a growing sector, embedded in the agricultural landscape. As a product, agritourism fits well with Irelands image for nature, landscape and the Irish people. Tourism is a people-based industry and in Ireland, 1 in every 10 people employed are working in tourism related businesses. Agriculture is another main source of employment in Ireland. However, it has become increasingly more difficult to make a living from agriculture alone. This has led to more and more farmers supplementing their income by getting involved in agritourism. Some farmers adapt existing buildings into accommodation, while others focus on using food tourism to

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entice tourists to visit their farms and purchase their products from farm shops. All these various business models bring tourists into close contact with Irish people and allow the tourists to experience authentic, Irish culture.

However, there are some challenges facing the sector. Retaining young people on the land continues to be difficult in the face of the brighter lights of the city. For those that do decide to become involved in agritourism, high entry costs and a shortage of skilled labour frustrate the process further. In this regard, there is a need to streamline training for agritourism workers focusing on the necessary skills to ensure success, such as marketing, creativity and innovation, customer service and financial management.

6.3.1 Key Insights from the Mapping

The mapping of agritourism workers' competencies in Ireland sheds new light on areas fundamental to continue nurturing the sector and allow it to grow. Ireland has a world-class reputation for agriculture, particularly in the areas of beef and dairy. This reputation has contributed to the development of agritourism enterprises by small farmers, to bolster their income. Many of these business owners would benefit from training in marketing and financial management.

Situated in the experience economy, agritourism has the potential to deliver high value tourists to the rural areas of Ireland. Agri-tourists seek authentic, curated experiences that place them at the centre of rural life. Therefore, the mapping of agritourism competencies also draws attention to the development of customer service skills in agritourism entrepreneurs.

Finally, for the sector to flourish and remain competitive, creativity and innovation need to be encouraged and supported in terms of product development and bringing them to fruition.

6.3.2. Key Insights from the Technical Comments.

The analysis of competencies for workers in agritourism in Ireland highlighted several challenges that are stifling creativity and holding back development.

Too many providers of training are causing confusion in terms of what course to take and at what level. This over supply is counter intuitive to the purpose of providing a skilled workforce for the sector.

The lack of a cohesive approach between national and local agencies in terms of development, has resulted in a regional imbalance in Ireland. This has contributed to migration from rural Ireland to its urban centres, as well as countries outside of Ireland like Australia, Canada and the United State of America.

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6.3.3. Key Insights from the SWOT Analysis

The SWOT analysis of the existing competency models in agritourism in Ireland suggests that, whereas the sector is growing, it would benefit from a more coordinated and flexible approach to training and development of workers for the industry. Due to the time demands of the sector, more online courses would allow users to access training at times that suited them and their business needs. The focus of this training should be in the areas of marketing, customer service and innovation as well as financial management.

6.3.4. The overall state of agritourism workers' competences in Ireland

Agritourism is a well-established sector in Ireland, which is allowing farms to remain profitable by supplementing farm income with tourism related revenues. Tourism brings much need economic benefits to regional areas of a country and agritourism attracts high value tourists who seek out people living in rural Ireland, so they can connect with them and experience what life in rural Ireland is like. These tourist interactions with their local hosts, require an understanding of customer expectations and how to deliver high quality experiences in a consistent manner. Therefore, continuous investment in training and development is needed to ensure the industry grows and innovates to meet consumer needs.

6.4. Cyprus

The analysis of agritourism workers' competences in Cyprus highlights several strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that impact the development and sustainability of this important sector. By mapping the key competences—such as understanding local agricultural practices, cultural and heritage knowledge, customer service, and sustainable tourism—the report identifies the critical skills required to provide authentic, enriching experiences for tourists while preserving the natural and cultural assets of rural communities.

6.4.1. Key Insights from the Mapping

Agritourism workers in Cyprus possess significant strengths in terms of local agricultural knowledge and the ability to convey the rich cultural heritage of the island. These competences are essential for creating immersive experiences that differentiate agritourism from mass tourism. Hospitality and customer service skills are also well-integrated into the sector, particularly in small, family-run businesses, which provide personalized and welcoming environments for visitors.

However, challenges persist, particularly in terms of formal training and the professional development of workers. The lack of structured training programs leads

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to inconsistencies in service quality, with many workers relying on informal knowledge. Additionally, the growing importance of digital skills and sustainability practices has yet to be fully addressed within the existing competence frameworks, leaving agritourism businesses less equipped to meet modern tourists' expectations.

6.4.2. Key Insights from the Technical Comments

The technical analysis identified two major challenges: a lack of collaboration between stakeholders and insufficient professional development opportunities. Fragmented communication between local authorities, residents, and tourism stakeholders has hindered the creation of a cohesive competence framework that benefits all involved parties. Furthermore, without formal training in customer service, hospitality, sustainability, and digital competences, agritourism workers struggle to deliver consistent, high-quality services.

6.4.3. Key Insights from the SWOT Analysis

The SWOT analysis reveals that Cyprus's natural landscapes, cultural heritage, and traditional farming practices offer strong foundations for developing sustainable and niche tourism markets. However, economic challenges, inadequate policy support, and a historic overemphasis on mass tourism threaten the sector's long-term viability. The lack of focus on digital competences and sustainable practices is a significant weakness in the current framework, while the increasing global trend toward sustainability and the rise of digital marketing offer clear opportunities for improvement.

6.4.4. Overall State of Agritourism Workers' Competences

In summary, while the foundational competences of agritourism workers in Cyprus are aligned with the local context and cultural practices, significant gaps remain. The sector requires more formal training in modern competences, particularly in the areas of sustainability, digital marketing, and entrepreneurship. Moreover, better collaboration among stakeholders is needed to create a unified competence framework that addresses the needs of all parties involved.

By addressing these gaps and building on the strengths identified in this report, Cyprus can develop a more robust and sustainable agritourism sector that benefits both the local economy and the broader tourism industry.

6.5. Romania

Romania's agritourism sector holds immense potential, serving as a bridge between the country's rich agricultural traditions and the growing global demand for sustainable and cultural tourism. However, this potential is constrained by systemic issues, such

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as fragmented frameworks, skill gaps among operators, and a lack of cohesive national strategies. Targeted efforts must address these barriers through a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach that combines policy reform, competency development, and technological innovation.

A unified competency framework, meticulously aligned with the GreenComp principles, would provide the foundational structure to harmonize skills across regions. This framework should not only outline core competencies—such as sustainable farming practices, cultural heritage promotion, visitor engagement, and green hospitality—but also include advanced learning pathways to foster innovation and leadership in agritourism. By integrating region-specific strengths, such as Transylvania's crafts or Maramureș's wooden architecture, the framework can preserve local identities while standardizing practices nationwide.

Leveraging micro-credentialing systems is another critical strategy for enhancing the sector. These systems can validate diverse skill sets—from storytelling and ecotourism to digital marketing—and align them with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), ensuring international recognition. Digital platforms for issuing and managing credentials, integrated with EUROPASS, will facilitate professional mobility and incentivize continuous learning among operators.

Furthermore, Romania must invest in capacity-building initiatives, such as specialized VET programs, to train the next generation of agritourism professionals. These programs should incorporate blended learning approaches, combining theoretical modules with practical, on-site training. Partnerships with EU institutions and neighboring countries like Greece and Bulgaria can also foster cross-border knowledge exchange and adaptation of best practices.

By implementing these measures, Romania can not only enhance its agritourism offerings but also position itself as a leader in sustainable and cultural tourism. This will attract eco-conscious travelers, stimulate rural economies, and ensure the long-term preservation of Romania's unique cultural and natural heritage.

6.6. Bulgaria

The agritourism sector in Bulgaria has significant growth potential, but its success depends on improving the competencies of those working in this field. By addressing gaps in training, digital literacy and cultural awareness, operators can unlock new opportunities and ensure long-term sustainability. Cooperation between stakeholders is essential to build a robust competency framework that is in line with both local and

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European standards. The competencies identified in this report represent a comprehensive framework for advancing agritourism in Bulgaria. These include customer service excellence, sustainable tourism practices, agricultural expertise, and digital marketing skills. By focusing on these areas, agritourism operators can enhance the quality of their offerings, provide authentic experiences, and meet the growing demand for sustainable travel options.

However, significant challenges remain, such as the lack of structured training programs, limited resources in rural areas, and gaps in digital literacy. Addressing these issues requires a collaborative effort among stakeholders, including government agencies, educational institutions, NGOs, and the private sector. Policies that encourage capacity-building, coupled with financial incentives and infrastructure development, can create a supportive environment for agritourism to thrive.

Furthermore, integrating innovative technologies and sustainability frameworks into agritourism operations can increase their competitiveness in the global market. This report emphasizes the need for continuous adaptation and investment in skills development to ensure that Bulgaria's agritourism sector remains dynamic and resilient. Ultimately, strengthening these competencies will not only boost rural economies but also contribute to the preservation of Bulgaria’s rich cultural and natural heritage.

The competences outlined in this report reflect the evolving landscape of agritourism in Bulgaria, emphasizing the sector’s potential for economic growth, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability. Addressing gaps in training and policy, alongside leveraging digital tools and sustainability practices, will ensure the long-term success of agritourism as a vital component of Bulgaria’s tourism industry.

6.7. Overall conclusion

The development of agritourism competencies at a pan-European level is necessary in view of increasing the sustainability, competitiveness, and cultural richness of rural tourism. These study results bring into light some strengths and challenges that different models of agritourism competencies have within varied countries, providing important insights about the status quo and the opportunities for the sector in the future.

6.7.1. Key Insights

Diverse Competency Frameworks with Regional Strengths

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Agritourism training and skill development are heavily influenced by regional agricultural practices, tourism policies, and cultural heritage. For example, Greek and Cypriot proposals tend to be oriented more towards farming knowledge and traditional or cultural heritage, while the interest lies in marketing, compliance with regulation, and innovation for Italians and Irish. Diversity ensures that development of competence is relevant locally but creates challenges where creating standardized frameworks is concerned.

Gaps in Certification and Standardization

Most countries have no national system of certification, hence making the quality and recognition of training programs very different, even across borders. Most of them also do not align to European frameworks such as the European Qualifications Framework, which reduces mobility and transferability of skills across regions.

Need for Practical Training and Experiential Learning

A widely spread weakness in all analysed regions refers to the limited on-job training for agritourism employees. Practical work provides substantial help in developing skills for services providing, sustainable farming, and receiving guests in rural areas. More close collaboration of educational institutions with agritourism businesses can help to fill this gap.

Competencies Digital and Marketing Are Poorly Developed

In tourism, despite increases in digital marketing and online booking systems, most agritourism workers lack basic digital literacy. Training in the use of digital tools and e-commerce social media strategies has to be developed to enhance market outreach in a sustainable manner.

Increasing Sustainability and Care for the Environment

The integration of sustainability in agritourism is becoming increasingly important as agritourism continues to show growing interest in eco-tourism, organic farming, and environmentally friendly practices. Nevertheless, most the training programs have not adequately equipped the workers with knowledge and skills relevant to the effective implementation of sustainable tourism practices.

Financial and Infrastructure Constraints

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Most agritourism businesses in rural areas have very limited financial resources and access to modern infrastructure. Public and private sectors can further support such businesses by offering funding opportunities, training incentives, and business development programs in an effort to improve agritourism services.

6.7.2. Recommendations for Future Development

Create One Competency Framework

Creation at the European level of an agritourism competency framework consistent with EQF and EUROPASS would lead to increased recognition of skills, harmonization of training provision, and greater mobility of workers across national borders.

Improve Practical Training Programs

Apprenticeship programs, educational farms, and case studies of practical problem-solving will further enhance the hands-on training of agritourism workers.

Develop Digital Literacy and Marketing Competencies

Digital marketing, search engine optimization, and online business management competencies are needed to give agritourism workers the wherewithal to attract and serve today's tourists.

Increase Education on Sustainability

It should also include training in waste reduction, renewable energy integration, and biodiversity conservation, among other elements of sustainable agritourism.

Increase Funding and Support Mechanisms

Governments and industry stakeholders need to come together to provide accessible funding, tax incentives, and training grants to support agritourism entrepreneurs and workers.

6.7.3. Conclusion

Agritourism also provides a serious contribution to the development of the economy in rural areas, cultural conservation, and sustainable tourism. Addressing these current competency gaps and embracing developments in technology would help agritourism prosper all over Europe as a competitive, sustainable sector. Standardization of training, increased funding, and improved coordination among education providers, governments, and business will be decisive in fully exploiting the potential that agritourism can promise, along with securing a decent future for those who earn their living by this sector.

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