

CHAPTER 5

Reproducing Rurality Through Shifting Farmers' Identity

In the previous chapter, I presented on how agritourism made farmers' roles as entrepreneurs much more visible. As entrepreneurs, farmers proved their ability to become agricultural educators and build connections with tourists, which highlighted their self-reliance in managing agritourism and other major actors of the market. In this chapter, I will use the principles of sustainable tourism to demonstrate the sustainability of farmers as rural entrepreneurs. I also employ this concept of shifting roles to analyze just how farmers change their roles as agricultural producers and entrepreneurs in agritourism; a practice which directly sheds light on sustainable tourism. Firstly, I will analyze how farmers indirectly improved their social welfare. Secondly, I will show that by utilizing agritourism as a boost for farmers' alternative livelihoods, farmers were able to supplement their incomes. Lastly, I will show how playing both roles — rural entrepreneurs and producers — preserved farmers' identities and practices.

5.1 Reproducing Rurality in an Alternative Livelihood

In this section, I will analyze how farmers used agritourism as a tool for alternative incomes. Agritourism projects simultaneously improved their awareness of their environments, and provided new knowledge — through training and interaction — with tourists and outsiders. This new business encouraged farmers to cultivate active roles as agricultural producers.

Agriterra proposed agritourism as a solution for farmers to problems of accessing credit and markets. The project indirectly improved the quality of farmers' lives through their household investments. Dao The Tuan (1995: 149) found that,

“[the] main constraint of self-sufficient farmers is access to credit. Poor farmers have great difficulties getting credit. The major constraint of more commercially-oriented farmers is the lack of markets. Credit and market institutions in the country are not yet sufficiently formed to support the development of the household economy.”

Agriterra, as an agri-agency, tried to promote farmers' self-reliance by proposing agritourism projects as a solution for farmers in the process of seeking more alternative income sources according to the “safety-first” principles (Popkin 1979:8). Farmers engaged in the project will contribute 80% the amount of investment to upgrade their houses. The project will support the remaining 20% of funding needs. Mr. Tùng is responsible for assessing their houses to conclude that what needs upgrading — most often, the toilets. According to Mr. Tùng, toilets are very important for rural households to ensure their personal hygiene (Interview Mr. Tùng 2015). Each household has many family gatherings all year long. Toilets are useful for each household's family, relatives, and guests. Most interviewees admitted at the beginning that they have received financial support due to participating as members in the agritourism project (Interview farmers in 2015). The financial support is also for buying beds and bedclothes, cabinets, and occasionally, some relevant house decorations.

According to Mr. Tùng, Agriterra aims to increase social welfare for poor farmers (Interview Mr. Tùng 2015). However, Mr. Tùng said that farmers are not only who use hoes in the field, but who understand farmers' life and it was not necessary to explicitly choose the poorest among communities to engage in this project. As I mentioned before, farmers have to bear 80% of investments made in the project, so they had to have their own capital to begin with. Moreover, the poorest within communities also can benefit indirectly from project subsidies by working with or for farmers engaged in the project. Farmers in Vàm Nao and Ô Lâu also received support in facilities needed in agritourism, such as boats, life jackets, and musical equipment. In Vàm Nao, boats are used for river transportation, as well as for carrying tourists. The Ô Lâu commune is advertised as a Khmer village, where tourists can enjoy Khmer culture and performance. Upgrading the villages' musical equipment and instruments directly affects that experience, as well as morale among performers.

The project raised farmers' awareness in regards to keeping a clean environment. By directly consorting with tourists, farmers became aware of the importance of creating a clean, hygienic space and experience to accommodate tourists. There was a community-wide raising awareness regarding the importance of clean environments and the importance of keeping the space surrounding farmers' houses and tourism sites neat and clean. The project supplied some dustbins along the streets to promote local people's awareness of environmental issues. Mr. Nguyễn in Mỹ Hòa Hưng spoke to me on this topic,

“Foreigners are very careful of the hygiene especially the toilets. Once, I was given some tips because of the clean toilets. Another time, when my family was serving meals for a group of foreigners, they asked me about a stain of paint outside the bottom of bowls if it could be eaten. You know that in rural areas we usually have family anniversaries, so we use paint to mark our kitchen utensils when we gather to cook. They are very careful” (Interview Mr. Nguyễn in 2015).

He added that two days before tourists come, he and his wife typically clean the whole house. It was quite hard for two people to welcome a group of tourists just for several days. Traditionally, Vietnamese have a hard cleaning day before the lunar new year when family members gather to clean up every house corner. He said that the cleaning day for tourists was akin to the new year's cleaning. Similar to Mr. Chao Thu Hà in Ô Lâm, he added that “we can learn from tourists as well. For example, they use separate bowls of sauces to avoid bacteria transmission. It is good. But, we think that mutual use shows our close relationship” (Interview Mr. Chao Thu Hà 2015).

Another important benefit was about training workshops, which provided farmers new knowledge and helped them to establish useful professional relationships with farmers from other communities. Most farmers appreciated agritourism project for the opportunities for them to learn from experts about cooking, food safety and hygiene, house decoration, communication skills, and tourism knowledge (Interview farmers in 2015). Mr. Chao Châu San in Ô Lâm said “I have awareness of doing tourism business. Farmers can do tourism business” (Interview Mr. Chao Châu San 2015). Moreover, the training workshops endowed participants with crucial areas of knowledge for the

tourism business, such as discussions on fire safety, food safety, security, and driving licenses for river transportation. Farmers engaged in agritourism projects must organize together and then register officially as a company. They must have tax statements, business licenses, and so on. Farmers who drive boats must have boating licenses. Mr. Tùng had to equip them with the legal knowledge necessary to obtain such bureaucratic measures. Having those licenses helped them to extend their jobs not only in agritourism, but in other sectors as well.

Farmers in each commune had opportunities to meet and share their experiences in the trainings. They also travelled to other provinces such as Can Tho, Vinh Long, Dong Thap, Tien Giang and so on to learn about other models. Mr. Tran Anh Chau, the leader of farmers' union in Ô Lôm, said that he and some farmers were going to Holland to study about the Dutch farmers' agritourism. The agritourism project provided them with financial support for them to embark on this trip, a new knowledge of the tourism trade, and raised their awareness of the need for a clean environment to best promote the social welfare of farmers. Farmers learned from outsiders about new business practices. Agriterra facilitated farmers to contact the outside world, and learn about a new business, to prove that farmers can do more than simple agriculture.

After showing that agritourism indirectly improved farmers' social welfare, I will demonstrate that, though agritourism did not prove high economic efficiency, it did contribute to generating high supplemental income and jobs. Valdivia & Barbieri (2014), in the study of agritourism in the Andean Altiplano, found that agritourism supplemented incomes and sustained rural livelihoods. Their findings mainly proved the economic efficiency in agritourism to create additional income and supplemented livelihoods. They additionally emphasized agritourism's strategy "to increase household's revenues, reduce risks associated with agricultural production, and decrease the depletion of natural resources (soils, water, biodiversity) for the long-term sustainability of Andean agriculture-based livelihoods" (Valdivia & Barbieri 2014) . This is similar to my findings in terms of the economic benefits and agritourism's motives in ensuring the security of agricultural production. Thus, my findings do not show any effects on ecological conservation, but instead show that farmers have higher

awareness of and place a higher value on keeping environments clean to accommodate tourists.

The foremost benefit gained from agritourism is its income generation, though the boons were different between communes, and direct comparisons, difficult to draw. In Mỹ Hòa Hưng, the drive for higher income kept instigating farmers to shift their agriculture practices into homestays. Mr. Tùng-Táo invested in a local restaurant. His wife is also helping him. He was famous for growing apples. Since he joined the agritourism project, his business has been steadily growing. Mr. Tùng stopped taking care of his apple gardens and shifted completely to managing his new business. Mr. Ba Đính, famous for growing mangos, is in a similar position. He also cultivated rice. Later, he leased a part of his land to participate in the homestays. Mr. Ba Đính said that “if there are many tourists coming, I will stop growing mango” (Interview Mr. Ba Đính) even though he can be considered as a very successful mango grower. He told me that he had not any failure in growing mango, just success because he had his own technique to produce a very high-value variety for the market. According to Mr. Tran Anh Chau, the revenue from his local restaurant is about \$454.55 - \$909.09 per month, while the income from his homestay programs ranged within \$227.27-\$318.18 per month.

The income in agritourism is more stable than in agriculture, depending on the tourist seasons. However, most farmers perceived that agritourism is an idle tourism industry that utilizes farmers' free time to generate more income. Homestay prices typically included \$1.82/ breakfast, \$2.73/lunch, \$2.73/dinner, and \$2.86/night. Farmers in Mỹ Hòa Hưng can receive tourists through company and Mr. Tùng with the fixed price. Differently from homestay groups in Mỹ Hòa Hưng, Vàm Nao is organized into a group of activities including driving boats, hospitality, and guided tours. These jobs have fixed prices. It was about \$4.55-\$9.09/person/ tour. For driving boats, drivers could earn \$6.82/ day. Farmers usually gather and divide work. They are paid later, after the tourists leave.

However, compared to agriculture, the price is not competitive enough. Mr. Đáng Anh and Mr. Đáng Em said that the income is not very high; they prefer to cultivate their

crop (Interview Mr. Đàng Anh 2015). Mr. Tùng sets the price according to the income gained in agriculture. They are approximately similar. Besides, Mr. Đàng Anh and Mr. Đàng Em had their cultivating land with many kinds of subsidiary crops, including taro, cucumber, chili, corn, and so on. Attending the agritourism activities interrupts their agricultural practices. Mr. Giang had no complaint of the income as he is working as a laborer. He is also a fisherman, and sometimes helps his wife with their small business. Agritourism produces more income for him. Similar to Mr. Tám Hồ, he and his wife are now retired, but he is still working as a fisherman and his wife is a fish seller. As his children did not want to follow his footsteps in agriculture, he leased his land. Agritourism happened to offer jobs for him in his free time.

Ô Lâm is also organized into a group of activities, including Kinh culinary demonstrations, Khmer culinary demonstrations, and Khmer cultural performances. The payment is dependent on tours. It gets divided out to members according to their contribution. Farmers in Ô Lâm said that agritourism gave them additional income, but there were not many tourists to prove its high economic efficiency (Interview farmers 2015). They hoped that in the future they would have more tourists visit to improve this income source. Agritourism in An Giang created more jobs and generated additional income for farmers even though the income is not equal to different commune. It depends on the amount of tourists and the set prices of the tours.

5.2 Articulating Farmers' Identity in the Practices of Networking

There have been a wide range studies on farmers' identity, based on sustainability practices (Gray & Gibson 2013, Sulemana & James Jr. 2014). Allan (2005) employed the concept of "communities of practices" to find that farmers played their learners' roles in "committed participation" in the sociocultural interaction. In my study, I also used this concept to examine how farmers' perspectives of agritourism are integrated into their own practices, to observe their identities presented in their interactions among themselves, and with other people in their daily lives. I will point out farmers' boundaries, their ways of information transmission and how they contact inside and outside institutions. Most farmers belonged to farmers' unions, which is under the

control of local authorities. The leader of the farmers' union is responsible for raising awareness of legal issues, introducing new techniques, engaging farmers in agricultural production, and monitoring and supporting member farmers (Interview Leaders of farmer union in 2015). Farmers' unions often organize seminars and workshops to introduce farmers to new plant protection products, and agricultural techniques. They also provide financial support for member farmers. Most interviewees are active members in farmers' unions. They attend those seminars and workshops to learn about how to cut input and increase output in agricultural production; for example the program of three decreases and three increases (Interview Mr. Đàng Anh 2015). Mr. Đàng Anh said that even though the cost increases, they still have more surplus in production. However, farmers engaged in agritourism are under control of Mr. Tùng, who used to be a representative of the provincial leader of the farmers' union. Mr. Tùng shifted his role to a new one, and became the manager of a agritourism cooperative . Thus, the communal leader of farmers' union still monitors and supports farmers, if necessary.

The relationship between family members in home stays and farmers and neighbors was still kept the same in accordance with the family hierarchy and hidden social norms. The house architecture allows farmer to contact and talk directly with each other, allowing them to easily share information about their work and activities. Local market food and drink shops became a space in which farmers gathered to discuss updates in their lives, and agricultural practices and production. Sometimes, they asked for outside help with their personal problems or agricultural practices. Farmers get to know each other very well regarding their work, family status, and cultivating methods. Agricultural products are used as a gift exchange to strengthen their relationships. Personal relationships could facilitate their work due to mutual help. When I said that I wanted to interview the leader of the farmers' union, Mrs. Fifth (in Mrs. Mai' family) found that he was her friend's husband. Then she helped me contact him. Usually, farmers are eager to help when someone is introduced by an acquaintance or friend.

Besides agritourism, farmers still kept their spaces to gather and share work in the community. Mrs. Mai is the main laborer in homestay services. She used to help and

support her husband with rice cultivation. But she now saves her time working in the homestays. Rice cultivation can save a lot of her husband's time. He had to visit his field about 4 times per month. Most of his time, he and his acquaintances gathered to do volunteer work including making coffins, and delivering rice for the poor. He also connects with local authorities for his donation because his father, who just passed away last year, was very famous in Mỹ Hòa Hưng for his contribution to local development projects. Mrs. Mai's family is an example for farmers, who specialize in mono-crops due to their large land holdings.

Farmers engaged in the project gathered periodically to meet. They solved the problems themselves with the group leader. The local leader of farmers' union also monitored and supported their activities. Mr. Tran Anh Chau also monitors and supports farmers engaged in agritourism project in terms of legal documentation and other administrative procedures because tourism is on the provincial plan for future development in Mỹ Hòa Hưng (Interview Mr. Trần Anh Châu in 2015). When farmers have conflicts, they solve by themselves, or inform Mr. Trần Anh Châu. Then, they have meetings to solve the problem under the direct control of Mr. Tùng. According to Mr. Trần Anh Châu, they have not had any conflicts so far. In this way, farmers are able to work together, connect with farmers who do not engage in the project, and connect with local authorities.

Currently, the number of tourists was not high enough to show any impacts on agricultural life. Farmers' connectivity still remained. In Vàm Nao, farmers connect with each other in a similar way, but they have a different form of connection due to their different agricultural practices and status. Farmers here specialize in subsidiary crops, including cucumber, chili, taro, watermelon, sugar cane and so on in the dry season. During the flooding season from July to September, they became fishermen. Depending on the acreage of cultivating land and diversified crops, they will have a certain amount of idle time. Mr. Tran Thu Trang said that “farmers are the most disorganized. They can go to the field whenever they want. If they are lazy, they can spend some time drinking coffee and talking with others. Farmers have a lot of free time. They usually work for about 3-4 hours/ a day” (Interview Mr. Trần Thu Trang 2015). He emphasized farmers' self-management in their own agriculture. Mr. Đáng

Anh added that depending on the seasons, if they are on harvesting season, it takes about over 8 hours per day (Interview Mr. Đàng Anh 2015).

Their gathering places are their own fields, drinking coffee shops, family anniversaries, and public holidays. I used to stay in Mr. Tám HỒ's house in the small island surrounded by water. His house surroundings are fields of watermelon, sugar cane, and taro. It was also a place for his neighbors to take a rest when they were working on their fields. They usually shared their agricultural practices and prices, crop situation, and the information while at the drinking tables. The leader of farmer union in Vàm Nao is not actively in contact farmers to compare to Mỹ Hòa Hưng. It was possible because the welcoming site is on the island. It was not convenient for him to move. Farmers still employed their relationships and connections in agritourism to look for more labor if necessary and outside support to organize the activities. Agritourism is also included in their next discussions with their neighbors, which is about who they meet, how tourists are, and what they learn from the tourists. Moreover, drinking and eating tables are also spaces for farmers to expand their network and relationships with government officials, as they are one kind of tourists. Those practices are employed based on farmers' practices that Popkin (1979:94) called "the art of eating and speaking".

After showing that farmers still kept their interactions and relationships among themselves and with outsiders in agritourism, I will point out that farmers increasingly presented their identity as agricultural producers, who live on the environment, to outsiders through their farmers' image, consuming local food and organizing agritourism. Beginning with Agriterra, as an agricultural agency, farmers were encouraged to raise their voices. Farmers' practices and perspectives are mostly impacted on Agriterra and Mr. Tùng. Agriterra provided training workshops to build farmers' capacities in agritourism. Farmers engaged in the project are responsible for their own profit. This is a transformation of Agriterra's hidden ideology to empower farmers and work for themselves. By commoditizing farmers' daily life including their environment and practices, farmers managed and organized agritourism activities. Agriterra wanted to raise farmers' voices to negotiate with other actors in the market. This hidden ideology was transmitted through training workshops and their contacts

with farmers during the implementation of project. According to Mr. Vo Thanh Trang in Vàm Nao, agritourism were “introduced by The Dutch director. She shared the story that she grew cabbage, then did agritourism business with high income. More tourists came, agricultural products were consumed with high prices and broadly advertised. Farmers learnt to be sincere, which does not follow ridiculous prices with extremely high. Sometimes, they love their guests and give presents to them” (Interview Mr. Vo Thanh Trang 2015).

As one of the leaders of farmer union and as a marketing manager, Mr. Nguyễn showed his identity as a farmer, who made a living on agricultural activities. He is the important person who worked and managed directly with farmers, which possibly influences farmers’ perspectives of the concept agritourism. Though he used to be a representative of local authorities, a provincial leader of farmer union, his roles were shifted to marketing manager of the tourist center. Afterwards, he is responsible for his own business with farmers in the project. He usually works as a tour guide in agritourism and goes along on the tours with the tourists. It can be seen when he introduces and invites tourists to participate in some activities such as searching for river mussels and cutting sugar canes. As I pointed out in the previous section, at that time, he immediately took off his formal dress and jumped into the river. He joined the drinking tables as if they were governmental officials. He introduced food and specialties to both governmental officials and tourists. When discussing food, he usually began with “if you should combine this to this...”, “it is a must-eaten dish”, “if you go to..., you have to try...”. He ate, talked, and discussed with them about food as local specialties.

Connectively attached to the environment, farmers’ identity were presented through spaces of consuming local food. Something else he promoted was the fresh food, as it had just been made by the farmers. He told his stories several times at the drinking and eating tables. It was about a dish made of snails offered in the restaurants, which is very expensive and given an elegant name. When he asked farmers about that name, they did not know for sure because they do not go to the restaurant often. But then they discovered that it was the snails they usually eat, which is much fresher and cheaper than in the restaurants. The guests usually laughed when he told them the story. They

admitted farmers were experts in eating the freshest and most delicious foods. A similar story was the one where the farmer went to a seminar and had a meal. It was about the vegetables that he ate every day which was very expensive. He complained that “why I have to go to the restaurant and eat those stuffs when I am really fed up with it. There are many in my fields that people really don’t want to eat anymore” (Field Research 2015). Through these stories, Mr. Tùng tried to promote the rural environmental, culture, and the economic value of the farmers’ daily food.

On the Internet, agritourism has been advertised as “farmers doing tourism business” in order to emphasize farmers’ roles. Once, Mr. Tùng read an An Giang newspaper and complained that “the information is old and not updated. The Vàm Nao River is not that depth”. As a knowledgeable farmer, Mr. Tùng clearly knows about the history and development of the rural landscape, historical and cultural events. When I went to Châu Đốc, he introduced “the seven mountains” to me in detail. He also confided that “we are farmers, we cannot do similarly like other travel companies. Doing agritourism needs patience” (Interview Mr. Tùng 2015). Sometimes, he felt bad when he wasn’t able to support the farmers with their business because some farmers did not follow him. In reality, farmers engaged in agritourism are working for themselves. Mr. Tùng only manages and monitors the activities.



Figure 5.1 Photos of Mr. Tùng as a Tour Guide in Vàm Nao, taken in 2015

The reason I analyzed Mr. Tùng is because he played an important role in shaping farmers' perspectives of agritourism. He was a big influence on farmers' identity and how they conducted their tours. In Vàm Nao, farmers work in agritourism as boat drivers, food servers, and tour guides. The activities are not as well organized as the travel companies. Farmers had to balance taking on a new role as host and accommodating tourists with their identity as farmers. Farmers incorporated tourists into their daily routines quite naturally. When tourists or guests visited the field, they were able to participate if they wanted. Once another time, Mr. Tám Hổ and other farmers were serving around. Then, Mr. Tùng suggested that they went to spread a net to catch fish like Mr. Tám Hổ's daily activities. Both of them just took off their clothes and went on small canoes together with other students. Unfortunately, he could not catch any fish because of the water change on that day.



Figure 5.2 Photos of Mr. Tám Hổ and Mr. Giang were serving the students in Vàm Nao, taken in 2015

Sometimes, tourists could do whatever they found interesting. Farmers were hospitable and treated them like guests. When I played the role of tourguide, Mr. Tùng and Mr. Tám Hổ were very flexible with the schedule and gave me the freedom to engage with tourists in various activities. I asked them to join me on a boat trip, bake corn, and to assist with cleaning up. Sometimes, Mr. Tùng reminded me that I should not ask them to do a lot because they would not like it. However, I kept insisting on it with the Australian students who were on their study tours of agritourism in the Mekong Delta

because I knew they actually enjoyed helping out. Farmers sometimes just went about their daily routines despite the presence of tourists and guests. Once, Mr. Tùng welcomed his acquaintance to Mr. Tám Hồ's house. He was a specialist in tourism planning who just received a contract for tourism development in An Giang. They were drinking, eating and discussing about the local specialties and sharing their experiences in tourism. Mr. Tám Hồ was sitting around but he did not want to join in because he felt unhealthy. Then, he observed the water movement so he called his son. They both went to spread a net to catch the fish according his observation.

5.3 Farmers' Multiple Roles in Shifting Identity

In this section, I will analyze farmers' participation in agritourism and their engagement in educating tourists. Moreover, farmers flexibly shifted their roles to become agriculture educators in agritourism in order to improve their dignity, which equalized their position and raised their image. Due to the limited number of tourists and new establishments (in 2007 in Mỹ Hòa Hưng, 2010 in Vàm Nao and 2012 in Ô Lân), agritourism signaled new sustainable tourism through community participation and educational opportunities for farmers as well as tourists. My findings demonstrated that farmers have their own voices in tourism management despite Mr. Tùng's role as the monitor.. Meanwhile provincial plans for tourism development supported farmers in administrative and legal documents and encouraged them to participate in agritourism instead of intervening. While farmers are also the decision-makers, there are still a number of disagreements that occur when they collaborate with Mr. Tùng to set up the tourism activities. Implementation becomes a point of contention as well as compensation. The similarities were found that (Aree 2009: 103) "community participation was high with regard to developing ideas for tourism management, in planning locations for tourists attractions and use of natural resources, in budgeting for supporting and developing tourists attractions, and in viewing tourist attractions financially beneficial for the community." Aree (2009) also studied community participation in tourism management in Busai Village Homestay, Thailand. The author used the concept of community participation in detailed aspects of brainstorming, planning, decision, investment, income, planned operations, assessing results, tourism

information, and the attitude of the community to local tourism. Thus, farmers' participation in An Giang was only expanded to farmers engaged in the project. Its effects are not high enough at the community level to entice other farmers into agritourism.

By utilizing farmers' daily activities, agritourism helps to preserve farmers' practices and to promote farmers' participation. The first case was shown in Mrs. Mai's family. In Mỹ Hòa Hưng, it is useful to analyze family labor and time spent on agritourism activities in order to examine how agritourism preserved farmers' family activities through their direct contact with tourists and conversations during the homestay. Specifically in Mrs. Mai's house, she is the main laborer for homestay services including meals and family activities with tourists. She also helps her husband with rice cultivating and financial management. Her two daughters support her sometimes. Other members can contact tourists, talk with them, and engage them in family activities. Her husband is the main worker in their rice fields. They have about 1,5 hectares land in Thoại Sơn. He has to visit their rice field about 3-4 times per month. Most of the time, he stays at home and does volunteer work. Sometimes, he talked with tourists during mealtimes and discussed with them about their work. Tourist season is spread out from July till February. It peaks in October, November, December, and February (Interview farmers in Mỹ Hòa Hưng). There are usually about 1-2 tours per month. There was no contact of tourists with agricultural practices. However, they could exchange their agricultural knowledge with tourists through conversations. This is similar to what I observed regarding farmers' relationships and activities in Mỹ Hòa Hưng during my stay in Mrs. Mai's house. For examples, local people gathered to have breakfast at about 6AM in local coffee shops and food shops. Some of them might go to harvest their vegetables earlier. The conversations showed that they exchanged agricultural produces as gifts in order to improve and maintain their relationships.

The second case was Mr. Đính's family. Mr. Đính is an expert in mango cultivation. He is also good at diversifying his land in rice. His family used to raise pigs. But, according to his wife, pigs did not earn much profit due to the high risk associated with taking care of them. When he joined agritourism, he saved his agricultural time for providing

homestay services together with his wife and daughter-in-law. He lent a part of his land and deemed that “tourism is less risky. It ensures farmers’ life. Agritourism is farmers’ tourism. Farmers make tourism and engage tourists in agricultural activities” (Interview Mr. Dinh 2015). He added that for retail tourists, depending on their specific requirements such as fishing in a garden or picking fruits, he would provide accordingly. Sometimes, tourists asked him about growing mangoes. He also answered in the way he worked. Therefore, there were not any changes in his agriculture except that he saved his time and lent his land. Mr. Đính also learned the tourists’ culture as outsiders. Knowledge exchange was not mentioned and identified clearly. But, it was included through the interaction and conversion between farmers and tourists.

Agricultural activities organized in Vàm Nao and Ô Lâm offered more hands on experience with field work. In Vàm Nao, before the tourists came, Mr. Tùng would work with Mr. Tám Hổ to set up the activities. I had an opportunity to attend their discussions. Mr. Tùng would ask Mr. Tám Hổ about the potential activities for tourists to participate in. Mr. Tám Hổ would list some activities. Then they would discuss the logistics and security concerns. In one instance, Mr. Tám Hổ suggested taro picking. It was raining season then so it offered the perfect opportunity to pick taro. However, timing became an issue and when the tourists finally arrived, the taros were overripe and unsuitable for consumption. The surrounding fields of taros, sugar canes, and watermelon did not belong to Mr. Tám Hổ’s neighbors. If tourists visited and joined some activities in their field, Mr. Tám Hổ had to contact his neighbors to ask for their permission. They made an agreement that Mr. Tám Hổ had to pay for all the tourists harvested according to higher market prices, but they were still accepted by the tourists. Even farmers, who were not engaged in the project, could participate indirectly in agritourism to sell their agricultural products at higher prices.

When farmers became tour guides, they needed to be ready to answer tourists’ questions about the floras, fauna, the environment, and local people’s life. They also needed to guide the tourists through the various activities. Mr. Tùng always invited tourists to search for river mussels in the nearby river with him. During this activity, he always took off his clothes and jumped into the river. The tourists joined with him and looked

for mussels under Mr. Tùng's guidance. When I was at the kitchen, doing my job as the host, a man came in after he finished harvesting mussels. While waiting for his bath, he asked me about the water level in flooding seasons because at that time all the fields were flooded and farmers became fishermen. They went fishing in their boats with small lights at night, which created a great picture of a "Milky Way", said by a local policeman, when he introduced foreigners about Vàm Nao hamlet. Tourist season coincided with flooding. During this time, farmers could not work in the fields, but had to find work as fishermen. Agritourism gave them another opportunity to increase their income sources by utilizing what they had.

When a group of students visited the surrounding fields, Mr. Giang and Mr. Đáng Anh also led the tourists through various activities such as digging for taros, cutting sugarcanes, and picking corn. Mr. Tùng also followed us. When the tourists passed by some ripe papayas, Mr. Tùng asked them to pick them up if they wanted. He also guided them to break the watermelons and eat them immediately similarly to what farmers usually do in their fields. Sometimes, the students felt afraid of it, he did it as example and encouraged them to join. The students also asked Mr. Giang about the taro market. When he answered that taro would be sold to China, the students laughed and discussed among themselves. According to the students, they wanted to learn more about working in the fields. Mr. Tùng also wanted to include field study in agritourism. When I first met him, he was asking people around for accommodation for a group of Cambodian farmers, who wanted to study about Vietnam irrigation system. Agritourism in Vàm Nao was categorized by activities. Farmers were responsible for certain works. They collaborated together to provide the services. So, their income would depend on the amount of coming tours meanwhile farmers in Mỹ Hòa Hưng relies on the amount of tourists coming in each house.

Similarly, Ô Lâm commune was advertised as a Khmer village where tourists can enjoy making "com dep", Khmer performance and culture as well as sightseeing. "Com dep" is a kind of Khmer cereal made of glutinous rice. Rice is roasted, pounded, and screened to leave off rice husks. "Cốm dep" can be sold to tourists and other provinces through traders. "Cốm dep" is usually made for Ok Om Bok festivals, praying for a good crop

season and showing their gratefulness to the moon. When tourists come, farmers gather to make local foods. Neighboring farmers also participate in cooking and introducing their products to tourists. Tourists can go through the process of making “com dep” with farmers and eat it after finishing. Food becomes integrated into the space for cultural and agricultural practices. Tourists can also learn how to make the food and discover its historical and cultural meaning.

In conclusion, agritourism made farmers’ roles shifts into the realm of entrepreneurship viable at different scales, depending on how they actively sought to make a shift in their livelihoods. Farmers still kept their practices of networking in rural space and expanded their relationships with outsiders. Being entrepreneurs, they had the ability to produce new knowledge to become agricultural educators. Agritourism gave them an opportunity to introduce their knowledge to outsiders through networking. Farmers considered agritourism as an alternative livelihood to generate a supplemental income and to improve social welfare. Their practices in building their connectivity and presenting farmers’ identity as agricultural producers shifted their roles of educators to articulate farmers’ multiple roles in rural space.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I pointed out that farmers engaged in agritourism as an alternative livelihood to argue that their roles as entrepreneurs played an active role in reproducing rurality. Being entrepreneurs empowered farmers to shift their different roles flexibly from producers in agriculture to educators in agritourism and connectivity builders in tourism business to equalize their position. Farmers were the main decision-makers in both agritourism and agriculture to balance their own calculations of rationalities by livelihood strategies when they are searching for security in agriculture. Agritourism projects engaged farmers in tourism by building farmers’ capacity to educate tourists and build their own networks. It also improved farmers’ social welfare. Farmers who were engaged in the projects could access capital, investment, and the tourism market. Farmers determined agritourism was “farmers’ tourism”, which highlighted farmers roles in organizing and managing tourism business. The activities engaged in

agritourism kept farmers' relationships and interactions among themselves and with outsiders. Authentication of farmers' identity also defined their approach to agritourism, which is different to travel agencies.

Agritourism project in An Giang was similarly implemented in Eastern German Rural regions (Neumeier & Pollermann 2014), which was considered as a "rural tourism". Neumeier & Pollermann employed Lanes' definition of rural tourism (1994:273) as connectivity between rural world's features and the destination. It is a combination of farm, cultural, wilderness, and wellness tourism. The study examined whether rural tourism could play a function as "a vehicle for rural development" (1994: 273) to investigate the endogenous potential at the region. The authors concluded that tourism could cause important non-economic implications despite of small economic impacts (Neumeier & Pollermann 2014: 273). Lastly, the research also found the project promoted the participants' self-reliance, which did not rely on outsiders' help, and mutual participation to promote rural development. Thus, An Giang agritourism focused on farmers as capable entrepreneurs to bypass the market to firstly gain economic efficiency and secondly achieve social welfare.



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